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# **Countryside School: Relationship between Skills, Knowledge and Cultures**

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## **Abstract**

This article deals with the relationship between curriculum knowledge, the skills accumulated in work practices and the cultures of peasant communities in the teaching conducted at the Escola José de Lima Barros, in the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, MT, Brazil. It seeks to evidence how the diverse skills, cultures and knowledge interweave, considering the specifics of countryside education. It builds on the study conducted during a postdoctoral internship and uses the method of participant observation, directly involving six secondary education students and four teachers, including the school's pedagogical coordinator and principal. Observations conducted at the school were recorded in a field diary. As part of our observation of subjects, the recorded and transcribed interviews followed a semi-structured script of questions. Even considering the contradictions typical of capitalist society, we highlight that the education provided in this countryside school is able to relate the contents of areas of knowledge with the cultural background and life/work experiences in the communities where the subjects live. Belonging in a rural area evokes a world of work, religiousness and festivities/socializing between families, hence the need for countryside education to be articulated with these key aspects.

## **Keywords**

Teaching – Culture – Knowledge – Countryside school.

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# ***Escola do campo: relação entre conhecimentos, saberes e culturas***

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## **Resumo**

*Este artigo trata da relação entre os conhecimentos programáticos com os saberes acumulados nas práticas de trabalho e as culturas de comunidades camponesas, no ensino realizado pela Escola José de Lima Barros, no município de Nossa Senhora do Livramento/MT. Busca evidenciar a maneira como se dá o entrelaçamento dos diversos saberes, culturas e conhecimentos, considerando a especificidade da educação do campo. Tem por base a pesquisa realizada durante o desenvolvimento de estágio pós-doutoral e como metodologia adota a observação participante, envolvendo diretamente seis educandos do ensino médio e quatro docentes, entre estes, o coordenador pedagógico e a diretora. Observações efetuadas na escola foram registradas em diário de campo. Fazendo parte das observações dos sujeitos, as entrevistas gravadas e transcritas seguiram um roteiro semiestruturado de questões. Mesmo considerando as contradições próprias da sociedade capitalista, destaca-se que a educação efetuada nessa escola do campo consegue relacionar os conteúdos próprios das áreas de conhecimento com as culturas e as experiências de vida e de trabalho das comunidades onde vivem os sujeitos pesquisados. Pertencer ao campo remete ao universo de trabalho, de devoção religiosa e de festa/confraternização das famílias, daí a necessidade de a educação do campo estar articulada a essas referências.*

## **Palavras chave**

*Ensino – Culturas – Conhecimentos – Escola do campo.*

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## Introduction

In this article, by focusing on the Escola do Campo José de Lima Barros (JLB), we undertake a reflection on the relationship between school knowledge and the experiences acquired in agricultural work practices, understood as knowledge and skills which include the cultures of the subjects who participated in the study. We seek to understand the extent to which this school would correspond or not to the countryside education designation added to its name,<sup>1</sup> an education that social popular movements engaged in the peasant movement struggle for (RIBEIRO, 2010). Further, we intend to examine the relationship between the curriculum contents approached by the teachers, usually viewed as scientific knowledge, and the skills accumulated from work experiences, as well as the cultures of students' parents, which students internalize. Would these skills and cultures be considered in students' learning? And if they are, how would they be combined with the school knowledge or contents that teachers bring?

The JLB school, where the study was conducted, is situated in the Faval Community, seventy kilometers from the main town of the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, five kilometers from the MT/70 road, to the right hand side on the way from Cuiabá to Cáceres. Therefore, going to the main town on a regular basis to get the necessary school material, deal with bureaucratic matters, attend meetings, etc., is not easy, since there is no public transportation to carry teachers or employees. The community the school is situated in is considered a district, due to the number of families, around 38, forming a small village that is designated an *agrovila*. This community is formed by families who own small plots; their livelihood is based on land cultivation, working for farms or as public-

sector employees at the school. There are two *quilombo* villages in nearby communities whose students attend JLB. Hence emerges a second question: what is the meaning of countryside education for the children of peasants with no land or small plots?

Since its creation, the JLB school maintains an extremely close relationship with the community, which can be confirmed by reading its pedagogical-political plan (PPP), as well as the natural way in which families of students enter and leave the school premises at any time. A deep respect can be seen on the part of both students and their families for the school and the teachers. These cannot recall any serious conflicts between students and teachers.

The JLB School has 17 annex classrooms with 25 classes, mostly of youth and adult education (EJA), with students coming from sixteen communities spread in a territory of approximately 100 kilometers. The annex classrooms are meant for regular JLB classes who are taught in different places due to distances between the communities and the main school. In some cases, secondary EJA classes are taught at municipal schools in town, at night. When it comes to distant communities, classes use former school facilities, resident associations, community centers or teachers' homes. According to the pedagogical coordinator, over 450 students are taught at the annex classrooms, whereas at the main school, the locus of the study, there are about a hundred primary and secondary education students. In secondary education, there are also multigrade classes, a contradiction, according to Perin (2015), with the *countryside school* designation of the institution studied.

Participant observation was the methodology adopted by the study, which required us to visit the school from once to twice a month in 2015 in order to conduct directed talks with teachers, employees, the principal and the pedagogical coordinator. The observations recorded in the field diary regarded: teachers and their activities at the teachers' room; secondary

**1-** Translator's Note: The authors refer to the denomination *Escola do Campo* (countryside school) as opposed to the broader denomination *Escola Rural* (rural school), a difference they will explain further below.

students, during breaks between classes; the infrastructure available; the didactic books used; and the presence of the local community in the school. We observed sociology, arts, Portuguese, English and agricultural sciences classes, as these last were taught by the teachers who participated in the study. Agricultural sciences was incorporated as a discipline into countryside schools in the state of Mato Grosso due to demands expressed since the 1<sup>st</sup> Seminar on Countryside Education in the State of Mato Grosso, in 2006, in Sinop, MT.<sup>2</sup>

After becoming familiar with teachers and employees, the researchers conducted interviews with six students, from October to November, 2015. These were five boys and a girl who freely agreed to participate. The questions, which followed a semi-structured script, were recorded together with the answers, and then transcribed for subsequent analysis. We kept our focus on questions related to skills learned from land cultivation experience and the families' cultural background, with a view to apprehending the relationship between these and school knowledge, which corresponds to the scientific knowledge established by the school curriculum. In addition to students, in this work, we present elements of talks and interviews with the schools' principal and pedagogical coordinator, as well as accounts by four teachers who participated in the study.<sup>3</sup> This article will emphasize what was said by students. The analysis process was detailed, combining information from the interviews, which were conducted in parallel with observing and experiencing the school environment, considering categories such as: school, countryside education, knowledge, skills and relationship with the community. At the end of data collection, the information was grouped around each category according

to field diary observation notes and the transcribed interviews.

To a great extent, reflecting on countryside education implies a connection with popular social movements, particularly the Landless Workers Movement (MST), due to the origin of the struggle for this education modality. This movement is responsible for the countryside education designation, as distinct from rural education (KOLLING; NERY; MOLINA, 1999). The institution studied is classified as a countryside school according to guidelines of the State Department of Education (Seduc/MT), but this particular school has no connection to social movements or popular/union organizations, which points to a second contradiction.

With regard to skills, it is noteworthy that we adopted Souza Santos' (2006) perspective, particularly his 'ecology of skills', since it allows maintaining the critique of what the author calls a monoculture of scientific rigor and knowledge, which separates valid knowledge – i.e., knowledge comprising the contents transmitted at school – from non-valid or invisible knowledge – i.e., knowledge that expresses lessons arising from life/work experiences. In dealing with the skills that students bring with them, which are connected to their practices, we make it explicit that we do not seek to hierarchize skills and knowledge, as has been seen over history, in a logic of a Western, Europeanized science, according to another approach by Souza Santos (2010).

We seek to work with skills because we consider that they arise from work practices and are not excluded from what can be understood as knowledge; in other words, since countryside education, the skills and cultures of communities need to be present in school education, as Arroyo (2004) argues. Thus, in our study, when we inquired about skills, we sought to evidence both the skills identified with knowledge and/or contents learned at school and the skills acquired in work and community experiences or those associated with the cultural background of students' families.

**2-** Information obtained at: <[www.seduc.mt.gov.br/.../Fórum-Permanente-entrega-proposta-para-a-Educação-do-C...](http://www.seduc.mt.gov.br/.../Fórum-Permanente-entrega-proposta-para-a-Educação-do-C...)>. Accessed on: March 21, 2016.

**3-** Both teachers and students signed a free, informed consent form. The students' forms were also signed by their guardians and are properly filed.

## **Countryside Education: Relationship between Knowledge, Skills and Cultures**

In dealing with the relationship between the knowledge, skills and cultures that pervade the lessons conducted at school, we highlight that knowledge corresponding to what is foreseen in school curriculums cannot be reduced to knowledge that is processed within the school (supposing this was possible), understood as something solely *within the school gates*, or, still, enclosed between four walls and transmitted by teachers to students. Indeed, specific knowledge is processed within the school, otherwise school's very existence would make no sense in society. But the relationship between knowledge, skills and cultures of and at the school is something broader than a simplified view of school education which would only serve to teach and/or transmit knowledge detached from the skills and cultures that students bring from their family and community experiences.

In our view, it concerns school as a living entity which lets itself be apprehended and instigated by the fact that teachers, employees and students alike possess knowledge, skills and cultures of their own, whether scientific or popular, or a mix of both, which sometimes harmonize, and sometimes collide, but also in this way what we understand by knowledge is built. Since countryside education was created, a countryside school is not simply a school situated in a rural area, and many theoreticians and/or activists have reflected and published about this theme for at least a decade and a half. According to Molina and Sá (2012, p. 324):

Countryside school is born and develops within the movement of COUNTRYSIDE EDUCATION, based on education experiences conducted in the context of peasant social movements' struggle for land and education. It is, therefore, a concept that emerges from the contradictions of social struggle and education practices of workers from and in the countryside.

One can see that, according to the authors' conception, the definition of countryside school refers to a context of struggles of the working class for land and education, i.e., the object school is not isolated and, thus, the meaning of education is expanded: school grows to encompass more than the role of pure and simple teaching. As Caldart (2008, p. 77) argues: "In Countryside Education, the debate of countryside precedes that of education or pedagogy, even though it relates to it all the time". And to complement this, the author affirms that:

The Countryside Education struggles and debate about public policies have been focusing on school, but this focus on the context of tensions treated earlier can leave us, from the viewpoint of pedagogical conception, tied to a school-centered view, which is precisely one of the features of the neoliberal vision of education (CALDART, 2008, p. 79).

In that same perspective, in another work (CALDART, 2001), she had already affirmed that school is more than a school in the context of the needs of countryside workers struggle, even though she was specifically referring to the MST. So, if school is to be more than a school, traditionally understood as a *place of learning*, in the case of students, and a place of teaching, in the case of teachers, it has an important role to fulfill in countryside education, which is to allow countryside subjects to (re)construct their culture and way of being from/in the countryside. This does not mean, however, an opposition to the city or to urban area schools.

As we noted in several occasions when we were at the Escola José de Lima Barros, the focus in terms of countryside education concept is not on workers struggle, as it is a different context. As we said earlier, there is no incidence of any rural popular/union organization or movement in relation to this school. But the affirmation of countryside education was nevertheless present

as appreciation of the countryside and, mainly, as respect for cultural diversity.

The main school referred to earlier, with its 25 annex classrooms, nearly all of which with multigrade classes, mostly in the EJA modality, considers, according to the accounts of its teachers, coordinator and principal, the sociocultural context of workers and students. This context, which we briefly explain here, regards the culture of Baixada Cuiabana, typical of a population that is mostly descendant of afro-Brazilians, due to the presence of quilombola lands in the region. This explains why students and their families have a peculiar way of speaking and showing devotion to saints, particularly Saint Gonsalo and Saint Benedict. Therefore, it would not be possible not to include the cultures associated with the skills. Thus, the school's attitude is one of embracing the diversity of small agriculturalists, traditional quilombola agriculturalists, as well as cattle farm workers and the sons and daughters of cattle farm workers.

At JLB, the question of diversity is valued in folklore and saints' festivals, as well as in food, particularly food prepared in agricultural science classes with secondary students. A folklore festival is held annually, and the community's saints festivals are prepared with a strong participation of the teachers who live there, which is the case of most of the teachers and their families. It seems that students feel nothing strange about the fact that some of them belong to quilombos, others are small agriculturalists, and others are children of cattle farm workers. The school studied is situated within the village and is surrounded by small farms, quilombo lands and cattle farms. Thus, the subjects who form it are public servants who live nearby, the children of small farmers, quilombola descendants, and the children of cattle farm workers.

It is worth noting that the children of larger farmers do not attend this school. Instead, they go to schools in town and, after secondary education, they can go to college,

as recorded in the students' accounts. One of the interviewees, the son of a cattle farm worker, visibly expressed that the children of bosses need only wish to study agronomy, while he would not even dare to say whether he would like to go to college or not. He also said that the closest public university, situated in Cáceres, MT, is attended by bosses' children, who get a pickup truck from their parents to outline their landowner status. As for himself, the interviewee had worked for over five farms until he "settled" to enter that school, JLB. When asked what he planned to do after secondary education, he said he still did not know.

This is a striking contradiction that looms around activities at JLB and, in turn, around the institution's very existence. Because it is public, it receives everybody, but it is not in its purview to be able to end the existing inequalities between bosses (farm owners) and cattle farm workers and landless agriculturalists. It may be a school's job to question the relationships established around it and even beyond, but no school has enough power to radically transform reality, even the reality it is situated in. Therefore, we can inquire: does this experience correspond to countryside education, or would it be just another rural education school?

To capture the reality of the countryside education offered by JLB and, particularly, the reality of its students, we established a dialogue with Charlot (2013, p. 180), who argues that "one must not forget, moreover, that education is not only humanization and subjectivation: it is also socialization. Therefore, the teaching-learning act depends equally on social structures and relationships". As we have said about the school in question, no effort seems to be spared on the part of workers to keep students in school, but some do quit, according to the principal and the pedagogical coordinator.

And why do they quit? Because their families migrate to where it is possible to find a job or better wages and, thus, they move from farm to farm, or, in cases where they are unable to find a job in rural areas, they are



compelled to migrate to the city. This is the main reason for the great student turnover each year, according to the principal's account. With this turnover, one cannot know if all who enter will continue studying to the end of the course. The great number of annex EJA classrooms points to the fact that there are many people in rural areas of the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento who are unable to continue studying. In addition to these, there is a significant number of illiterates who have never had access to schooling.

Still according to the principal's account, a great part of men seeks EJA in these annex classrooms in order to pass the driver's license test, as one of the employment criteria in farms is to have a driver's license. As to women seeking EJA, they have different reasons, particularly their wish to write their own names, help their grandchildren with reading, read the Bible, and even younger women want to learn to read so they can increase their chances of finding a job or overcome problems at work, or assist their children. In the accounts, we can see, or infer, one's necessity to avoid the embarrassment of being or saying that one is illiterate when dealing with some document, whether in a public or private establishment.

The underlying question we can see, based on the theoretical contributions of countryside education, is that there is a conflict that has been silenced and hardly shows within the school due to its naturalization: on the one hand, there are the farms with paid work, and, on the other, landless workers, all of them with scarce chances of studying. In this case, Fernandes (2008) would refer to the debate about peasant agriculture vs. agribusiness as opposed fields, as well as their incompatibility, also because of land dispute, which, from our point of view, is real. The so-called agribusiness:

[...] is a business articulation for producing/financing/trading/exporting agricultural products. It is an organization formed by: large land owners, as well as industry, trade

and services business owners in association with banks, and it employs machinery, agricultural production, industrialization, distribution and services sectors. Therefore, it associates agricultural and industrial production, as well as the trade, banking and services sectors, thereby generating few jobs for paid workers (RIBEIRO, 2011, p. 28).

The conflict, however is not dramatically manifested in the perception of the school studied, as people seem to coexist with this situation, although there is some nonconformity and, perhaps, revolt. However, while this conflictive reality is a fact, the refusal to accept it is restricted to individual cases, as there is no organization that agglutinates nonconformities. After all, if the state promotes laws like the ones that support countryside education on the one hand, on the other, contradictorily, the same state also develops policies that collide with those laws, as with the Active School Program, applied to rural multigrade classes from 1997 to 2007, funded by the World Bank and supported by the state until 2012 (RIBEIRO, 2013).

Moreover, as we could apprehend in our study on JLB, the saints festivals bring everybody together, thereby making it difficult for a political break to occur between people, who are the owners of means of production on one side, and, on the other, exploited workers. One must also consider the fact that, according to talks we had with teachers, students and their families, the farms were formed hundreds of years ago, and in some of them there was slavery. Because this is a centennial situation, change seems highly unlikely in the local collective imaginary.

However, it became obvious, whether on the side of students or teachers and employees, that otherwise there is hardly any prospect of hope on the side of the children of cattle farm workers. Working with cattle is hard, according to their own accounts, and it is not what they dream for the future. The way out, then, is to leave in search of jobs in the city. Some migrate



to Várzea Grande, MT, and a good part of them goes to São Paulo because of connections with friends and acquaintances who have already moved to other municipalities or even the capital of that state. On the part of teachers, what seemed remarkable to us was that they show a feeling of impotence about students' turnover and their leaving to São Paulo, particularly when some leave before finishing secondary education. In the words of a teacher: "They go when a job comes up, because if they wait until graduation, by then, the vacancy is gone. So, some go even before they finish secondary school, and these hardly ever finish it in the short term. Therefore, they lose the opportunity of a better job and wage a little further ahead".

In our view, there is no way of not treating questions of school education and even what occurs in the countryside, since, as Charlot (2013) argues, it would be a contradiction to think that the teaching-learning act is an isolated act. In the same direction, Freire (1987) had already argued that the teaching-learning act depends on the mediation with the world, with the experiences of and between subjects. From the point of view of skills, the children of cattle farm workers learn from the work routine the life of a cattle farm worker, but, to a good extent, they also reject it. Peasant's children also learn their families' activities in the context of traditional and family agriculture, and, according to the accounts, these are the ones who have shown they want to stay in the countryside. One of the youths interviewed, a 16-year-old, said to us: "leaving the countryside, only if a lot goes wrong here... if I leave, it'll be to attend some course in my area, what I already do, and then return here".

What is taught at JLB, after all? It would be pretentious to describe it fully, as we only saw a few of the participant teachers' classes and, for the rest, we relied on our general observations about the teaching, which we recorded on several visits to the institution. We could see the effort to teach something

always contextualized and directed to life in the countryside, treated as family agriculture. The discipline of agricultural sciences, which is taught in secondary education, is the articulator of skills related to peasant activities, so much so that it was mentioned by the six students interviewed. One of them, however, showed a negative vision about the discipline, as he interprets that it deals with sustainable plans and practices, and, compared to his work in his family's production unit, he is not in line with that perspective.

In our talk with this student, we realized that the activities he and his family carry out are not of the type that harshly harms nature, but, from his perspective, it seemed that clearing land for planting or cutting wood to make a fence would be unacceptable. There is no agriculture of any type without some intervention in the environment, even in agroecological processes; thus, this fact seems to be distorted or still not fully assimilated by the student. Is that a gap in countryside education? Could be, and there is nothing wrong with admitting it, as there are no schools without contradictions, nor countryside education experiences or others that can be considered perfect or conflict-free. The most important thing is for educators and students who participate in countryside education experiences to become aware of this conflictive questions or flaws in order to address them, as these are no romantic experiences.

From the point of view of the teachers, pedagogical coordinator and principal concerning teaching-learning practices, one of the limitations cited is the lack of specific countryside education pedagogical material for secondary school. They referred to didactic books for this specific education modality, which cannot be thought of as a standalone resource, but as a support, with options that allow thinking about the countryside in the country's Central-West region. Another question is that, due to the distance from most annex classrooms, the lack of pedagogical support from the main school concerning access to didactical resources has

been a problem, yet always solved by solidary actions of the community. In this respect, both material and food are transported by car by residents. Here, we can see the community's good will and commitment, on the one hand, and, on the other, the state's absence from its task regarding public education.

In order to bridge this lack of didactic material, the teachers seek to update their education in the annual countryside education meeting, which is held in a nearby municipality (Jangada, MT). In addition, they seek material available on the internet, exchange resources during the Educator's Room project, or search for them with the help of others, out of personal interest, as a teacher said in an interview. We found that, during the school's refurbishment in 2013, the teachers had no room to keep the computers, which were thus transferred to an annex shed. Therefore, both the school and the community are raising funds to reinstall sockets so the computers can be used again.

Teaching at JLB, with all the effort (including personal efforts) and considering the lack of material or systematic support from the Education Department (Seduc/MT) and the Teacher Education Center (Cefapro), consists of, according to the teachers, doing all they can. One of the challenges is to keep students' documents updated, as the turnover and precariousness in countryside schools regarding didactic materials and management training is reflected in the lack of documents or errors in filling up forms.

Many schools shut down (were nucleated) in the countryside and their documents were sent to the Seduc/MT files, which hinders the consultation of older data. According to Perin (2015), the nucleation process consisted of closing rural multigrade schools and clustering them into central schools identified as pole schools, which are located in towns and intended to receive students who previously attended the schools that were closed, pursuant to article 3, paragraph 1 of Resolution 2 of April 28, 2008, issued by the Basic Education

Chamber (CEB) of the National Education Council (CNE) of the Ministry of Education (MEC). It is important to highlight that the nucleation of rural and/or countryside schools emerges in a context where land expropriation processes have intensified, resulting in the migration of agriculturists to urban areas in search of work. At the launch of the National Campaign Against School Closing, in 2011, the MST denounced that 24,000 schools had been closed in the countryside since 2002. "The Campaign highlights a structural factor of Brazilian society, namely the existence of two projects for Brazil, one by agribusiness and another by the working class" (SOUZA, 2012, p. 751).

Because the school studied is the central unit to the annex classrooms, all documents pertaining to teachers, staff and students are issued there. It is the only unit with internet access and telephone, although the latter is not always working. Therefore, one can see primary limitations related to the search of information and class preparation. At a meeting attended by ourselves and the annex classroom teachers in the room identified as 'educators' room', we could see that, indeed, there is a great personal effort on the part of each of them to keep the classes going. In this respect, the educators' room has been a space for them to exchange experiences with a view to self-education so they can provide a better teaching. Not for no reason do they become strongly attached to religiousness/spirituality to overcome the challenges they are faced with.

As part of the educative process at JLB, a sizeable vegetable garden is kept in the premises, as well as laying hens and some fruit trees. In addition to students and teachers, the kitchen and cleaning staff, as well as the school's security guards engage in keeping the orchard, the vegetable garden and the hens. During recess and holiday periods, they all take turns in watering the vegetable garden and tending the animals, as in school periods. In general, the vegetable garden is

worked on in secondary education agricultural science classes. According to the coordinator, keeping fruit trees and the organically manured vegetable garden and raising chickens are part of the school's identity, although it is not restricted to that.

In one of the accounts, a teacher argued: "we do what we can when students are here with us, we try hard to make our best, but we know that not everyone stays in the countryside, because there's no work here, and young people think about their future". When youths leave the countryside, that is felt at the school, and there is no way of pretending it is not a reality. In this respect, based on what we captured in the interviews, when we asked about the future or work, with all interviewees, the answers showed it is not about wanting to leave, but, rather, an objective situation. Given these problematics, Castro (2012), a researcher of the theme of peasant youth in Brazil, argues that the problem is not the countryside youth, but family agriculture per se, given the policies carried out by our country and its development model, in which agribusiness occupies a prominent position.

As for education, it is pervaded by the context that involves JLB, therefore, the conditions and situation of students and their families must be considered, since, as Charlot (2013) emphasizes, school is one of the places of learning, but it is not the only one. From the point of view of the students interviewed, the following affirmations are worth mentioning: "I like it when the teacher teaches us by talking about her experiences, the things she does"; "I enjoy learning more when we leave the classroom, go to the kitchen and make traditional food from our community. Then we eat it, and sometimes we make some for other classes too".

In these accounts, we can see how students value the theory-practice relationship. This is largely in consonance with the conception held at JLB, which involves providing a space for students to work at the vegetable garden and in the institution's surroundings, even though not

all of them enjoy it or attribute a meaning to the work that is done in these places. According to the interviewees, most of their colleagues enjoy this modality of teaching/learning as they realize they can learn not only in a classroom setting, but also in these off-classroom learning modalities, which can bring work experiences related to what they do at home.

Also concerning the teaching-learning practices at the school, it is worth citing the following arguments: "about education here, I think everything is good, what I don't need today, I might need it one day, so it's good to know"; another student said, "I don't like history, because you don't use it for anything", and yet another, "I don't think we'd need to learn sociology... Why learn about peoples over there in Asia and Africa?". Generally, students said they liked mathematics classes better, and did not enjoy studying Portuguese. One interviewee emphasizes: "it's because I use mathematics all the time", and in this case, he refers to his buying and selling of cattle, pigs and free-range chicken. This 16-year-old student already engages in business as a person in charge of part of the work in his family's production unit. Once again, the connection between knowledge of mathematics and work experience in buying and selling animals (bovine, porcine, poultry) is referred to.

Among other remarks about the school's teaching, one student highlights: "one part of what I know, I learned in school, and another part, by myself". And he complements: "I'd like to know more about things that happen in the city". Others report that: "here we learn that we shouldn't be ashamed to say we live in the farm, because... after all, this is where the food in the city comes from"; "Research project, when the teacher gives us an assignment, I like it". Once again, we can see the relationship between what a student is unaware of, which would be occurring in the city, and knowledge from experience related to food production in farms.

They were also asked about knowledge coming from work practices in agriculture,

livestock and other activities not learned in school. In this respect, they mentioned: tending cattle; making fences; horse taming; knowledge of plants used for medicine and food; knowing how to make a baru confect (cubarú) or a banana confect; making baskets from buriti straw or bamboo; making cotton hammocks and carpets from cloth and buriti fiber; planting, blessing, branding cattle, slaughtering and making sun-dried meat; making manioc flour and tapioca. An expressive amount of skills, some of them internalized as culture. In this respect, they learn as they are progressively integrated into the activities. About some of these, which are culture-related, they say that their grandmothers or, in part, their mothers are the ones who know how to do it (concerning food, teas, blessing and weaving).

Santana and Sato (2010) are conducting a study about skills in one of the traditional (quilombola) communities near JLB, and they argue for the existence of scientifically acquired skills (one might call it knowledge) and empirically acquired skills (experience). However, they argue that there should be no hierarchization between both, but, rather, a dialogue. Brandão (2007) emphasizes that each person is an original, unrepeatable source of skills and, in this perspective, we argue for the valuing of all skills and knowledge. The so-called school knowledge and/or skills are important; however, by examining the reality of countryside schools based on the school in question, we can say that practical day-to-day skills are the ones that have ensured survival for people in that place.

This does not mean that reading/literacy would not have made those people's lives easier in many respects, nor that learning mathematics, agricultural science or even sociology or the Portuguese we read and write, among other modalities of knowledge that form the school curriculum, are not important. They are, and very much so, however, it would be key to articulate such knowledge with the skills accumulated from work experiences and

families' cultural background, as this might enrich these experiences even further. Therefore, education institutions in general cannot claim for themselves all forms of knowledge and skills.

In this perspective, Souza Santos (2006, p. 790) argues that:

The logic of the monoculture of scientific knowledge and rigor must be questioned by identifying other forms of knowledge and other rigor criteria that credibly operate in social contexts and practices declared non-existent by metonymic reason.

Still in the same line of argument, the author highlights the incompleteness of knowledge, and adds that by recognizing such incompleteness, the dialogue and epistemological dispute between forms of knowledge are made possible. Thus, he stresses that "what each type of knowledge contributes for this dialogue is the way it orients a given practice in overcoming a given ignorance" (SOUZA SANTOS, 2006, p. 790). And, in addition: "The confrontation and dialogue between types of knowledge is a confrontation and dialogue between different processes through which differently ignorant practices become differently knowledgeable" (SOUZA SANTOS, 2006, p. 790).

To better understand the relationship between skills resulting from both work practices and culture transmitted by parents and grandparents and the learning resulting from areas of knowledge offered by JLB, we asked students how they perceived the countryside school, and what they could say about it. One student says: "I'd like to know what study is like in a town school"; and another: "I'd like to learn about mechanics because we use it a lot back home, there's a lot of engines and I could use more knowledge about it". Another answer was: "the space for sports is precarious, the court has no roof and the sun is really hot"; while a third one says: "it is quieter here, so you can pay more attention to classes"; still

another affirms: “here, there’s space for us to go into the woods, learn from the woods”. “Some of the things I learn here I teach my dad, and others that he knows, he’ll teach me”, says the last student, referring to what he learns in agricultural science classes.

The description of what countryside school is and how students understand it is thus translated by them: “Here, there is quietude, safety, freedom, clean air and friends”; “There’s a large space and you don’t need walls. Everyone knows each other and each other’s families”; “Most people here are relations”; “The teachers know the family of each of us”. They all mentioned the saints’ festivals, which are held in the community and also in nearby communities. In this respect, Arroyo (2004, p. 84), a researcher of countryside education, underlines the fact that “it cannot occur within four walls, just in the classroom’s time and space” and, from this perspective, we complement that it is necessary to reinvent education proposals, because, apparently, in the countryside there is, at least, more space for that.

### **A Few Considerations Deriving from the Study**

Dealing with the questions of a public school today has not been easy due to the dilemmas surrounding it, especially considering a conjuncture in which, at least apparently, institutionalized education is being brought into discredit by the society, including with regard to the interest of a significant part of students. In Charlot’s (2013) words, it seems it has not been possible to mobilize students’ desire to learn, to which we would add teachers’ desire to teach. In this perspective, the author highlights that motivating is not enough; it is necessary to find pleasure in learning, although one cannot learn without effort. The same author underlines, further, that attending school means entering it, i.e., giving a meaning to remaining, and thus seeking and confronting knowledge and skills, much rather than the interest in the certificate or diploma.

In the case of JLB, we can say that not all students are able to attend the school regularly, due to their families’ unstable work conditions, but this responsibility cannot be solely attributed to the school. There is an unwilling migration to other farms and/or the city that occurs regardless of students’ will. We could see that to be in school, in the case of the youths attending secondary education, is to be able to build prospects of staying in the countryside or prepare to migrate to find work in the city. As for the two quilombola youths who participated in the study, their interest is to stay in the countryside, because they already know what to do, i.e., they already have a place working with their parents. They are 15 to 16 years old and help in the manufacture of products derived from banana. Other two youths already have a place working in agriculture with their parents, one of them being 16 years old and the other, 21, and they say they want to continue what they are already doing. Another two youths interviewed, a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old, said they are still thinking, since they do not have an activity with their parents or relatives.

By the end of our observations and interviews, we could clearly see that work does not start after 16 or 18 years old as in urban areas. The youths attending the school studied start working early, becoming integrated into activities they can perform according to their age, and talking about it does not seem to be a problem. One youth recognizes, when it comes to work, that: “Here in the farm, you either learn to work with your parents early on, or later you’re no good to stay in the farm... Some of my colleagues think I’m rugged because I work hard and have no internet”. And he adds: “The teachers here need to understand that we need to study, but we also need to work... But a boy like me, he needs to work, I was taught so, that I need to work”.

With regard to countryside education, other challenges emerge, since the existence and/or permanence of a school that offers this education modality, like JLB, implies



agriculturalists' permanence in the land. One of the challenges posed to the school studied is its maintenance/existence, as the number of students at the main school in the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, MT, where it is situated, has progressively decreased. What brings teachers some relief has been the number of students attending the annex classrooms. This shows us a very complex picture: on the one hand, the impending closing of countryside schools is a constant fact across Brazil and, on the other, the existence of over twenty annex classrooms, nearly all in the EJA modality, maintained in connection with JLB, which points to a scenario of illiteracy and semi-literacy.

Given this situation, some questions should be asked: why were so many people not able to finish basic education in the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, MT, to which JLB is connected? Or, why were so many people not able to attend school at their corresponding age, pursuant to the right ensured by the Federal Constitution itself? And still another question: for what reason were some people not able to attend school? Is it a fact that work skills and families' cultural background, which are internalized by students, have dialogued with knowledge considered scientific or, at least, school knowledge? Currently, as said earlier, the school studied makes an evident effort to promote a dialogue between knowledge arising from students' and teachers' lives and knowledge that is part of the school curriculum. But, logically, there are limitations, including from the perspective of teacher education.

The school in question was practically rebuilt in 2013, and today it has a good infrastructure and appearance, and is well maintained. However, it still lacks a computer room and a library. Therefore, the computers are idle and the books are still organized in an annex shed which was used during the refurbishment period. With regard to these questions, JLB plans to get funds by itself to at least put the computers back into operation.

As for the space and meaning of skills/cultures of, in and for countryside education, Arroyo (2004, p. 82-83) highlights the following:

[...] We will have to answer concrete questions and add to the countryside curriculum the knowledge that prepares for production and work, the knowledge that prepares for emancipation, for justice, the knowledge that prepares for the human being's full realization as a human being.

From the perspective presented by Arroyo (2004), we thought this could, or in fact should, be a horizon to be sought. However, in the teachers' accounts, we can see the existence of structural questions that escape the competence of both teachers and students. The study that involved our presence in the school, in addition to the observations and talks with teachers and students, allowed us to apprehend a strong link that keeps the skills, cultures and knowledge in/of JLB articulated. We refer to the learning arising from work, associated with cultural and community ties that are characteristic of Baixada Cuiabana with folklore and saints' festivals in this school. These same ties express, on the other hand and as a contradiction, an apparent harmony between family and quilombola agriculture and the agribusiness farms where many students' parents work during harvest periods.

The first question to be asked at the end of the study is whether the school we focused on, i.e., JLB, offers rural or countryside education? Although it is pervaded by innumerable contradictions indicated in the text, we consider that it is, indeed, countryside education. The dispute between different projects of society, education and countryside is not perceptible in the relationship between the experience-derived skills internalized by students in their work practice and cultural experiences and the scientific knowledge that is characteristic of school curriculum disciplines. However, and

contradictorily, even though it is not perceived in the school's day-to-day life, this dispute does pervade the countryside education offered therein as land is not guaranteed to students' families, and many parents earn their living from their temporary work at larger farms, which, as we have seen, does not ensure students' permanence in the school.

This explains the presence of illiterates and semi-literates, as well as the uncertainty concerning JLB's maintenance, considering that the number of youths who seek it is decreasing each year. For this particular

school, the countryside education policy was implemented by the Seduc/MT, and that is another contradiction, but still one could not say that it is a rural school. We must not forget that when countryside education was institutionalized – and this was a hard struggle of popular social movements participating in the peasant movement –, it came to be directed by government managers, whether we like it or not. Finally, this means that, considering the capitalist society we live in, which is pervaded by the contradiction of capital vs. labor, it could not be otherwise.

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