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## *Dialogue and Inclusive Education: The Experience of a Rural School in Brazil*

### ABSTRACT

This work examines the teaching method of Paulo Freire implemented in Jaguaquara Rural School, Escola Estadual Rural Taylor-Egídio (ERTE), Brazil. The school was the space where dialogical pedagogy has been analyzed and the dialogue between schools and rural households has been a positive and winning response in the children's literacy process. This research has shown that, before Freire, rural families had not had an education system able to meet their need; then the study has taken into account some factors responsible for this lack; finally, it has singled out the possibility for an effective implementation in the rural school, according to Freire's model of dialogic pedagogy. The results of this school experience are relevant from the point of view of socialization, for it fosters literacy in rural areas. We verified that the method proposed by Freire is of great social and cultural value and benefits from great appreciation.

*KEYWORDS: dialogic pedagogy; rural schools; pedagogy of alternation; differences; literacy.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This work aims to analyze one of the most important stages of the history of education in Brazil: the challenge launched by the great Brazilian educator of the twentieth century, Paulo Freire. His dialogic approach to learning places dialogue as a key feature of the pedagogical experience. This paper will highlight how Freire's pedagogy allowed an inclusive education in various fields, despite the fact that many scholars have tried to give a response to the educational emergency that arose in Brazil in recent years.

Being aware that many scholars have tried to give an answer to the educational emergency, in this paper we would like to welcome the particular challenge posed by Paulo Freire: the dialogic learning approach, which places "dialogue" as a fundamental experience of pedagogical dimension and, therefore, as a fundamental existential and social experience of each person. To be committed in the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable people means to uphold a culture of integration, inclusion and solidarity according to this dialogic perspective. Freire's undeniable contribution to pedagogy goes hand in hand with the pedagogical contributions offered by many others scholars, the Italian Lorenzo Milani, founder of the School of Barbiana, Enrique Dussel – the Latin American philosopher born in Argentina, – the Peruvian Alejandro Cussíanovich, Pestalozzi, Dewey and Buber. All these men have written works consistent with the subject and aims of this work, though in different contexts and through different activities.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, even Brazilian educational society began to be more conscious of the need to create new scenarios for teaching and learning methodologies which would be able to generate methodologies more attuned to the times. Consequently, the whole nation has had to review seriously its point of view on education.

Brazil boasts an enormous economic potential and is the fifth largest country in the world (exceeded only by China, the United States, Canada and Russia). This multifaceted country reveals very little of itself except for football, music, beaches, perhaps the favelas, the *Meninos de rua* and the Movement of peasants *Sem Terras*. Yet, a multitude of illiterate people and a handful of big landowners unevenly counterbalance this huge land extension. In addition to this, despite being an agricultural and industrial superpower, Brazil has many people who starve and who do not benefit from a basic education. Indeed, a third of the population is illiterate and among those literate, only a small part goes beyond a secondary education. The pedagogical innovation of the educational method of Freire proved to be strategic for launching programs and actions for the population's inclusion in the school context. It was a revolutionary pedagogy, which in Brazil and elsewhere revealed itself to be a new, valid and effective educational work paradigm, capable of facing and solving the real problems in various social contexts and educational scenes.

It considers citizenship as autonomy, freedom and conscience. These concepts are part of Freire's method which develops the principle of a dialogical and liberating education. He presents the respect for the autonomy and dignity of each person as an ethical imperative; a pedagogical proposal based on love. It paved the way for a theoretical and practical collective dream: new men and women who are neither oppressors nor oppressed, in a more beautiful and more fair world. The core of his approach is dialogic education, based on the holistic concept of human development. In Freire, the concept of education coincides with dialogue. There is no human progress without dialogue, and dialogue occurs when men and women meet to change society and make progress. It contributes to human development, in order to change for the better intercultural and social relations, even in a context non-specifically school related.

This educational experience takes places not only in several Brazilian cities but also in many countries all over the world. My research focuses primarily on the application and development of the project "Rural education and alternation pedagogy" in the city of Jaguaquara, which has allowed us to identify the strengths of Freire's approach. It is the evidence, confirmed from the results obtained in the various fields of application, of the effectiveness of Paulo Freire's method of and relevance and his concept of education as dialogic action, a large-scale model of educational practice not merely restricted to schools, but of fundamental historical and social incisiveness.

#### WITH FREIRE, DIALOGUE ENTERS THE PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

We are going to examine the basic perspective of the feature that is the peculiarity of Freire's educational methodology, the dialogue.

During its five centuries of history, Brazil experienced the so-called predominant "human dumbness", its non-participation in the solution of common social problems. Brazilian society missed all the experience of community life (Castro, 1978).

Tracing the history of the country, we have seen that Brazil was born and grew up without any experience of dialogue. The same Freire stated:

With his head down, for fear of the Crown. Without printing. Without relationships. No schools. Without an authentic language. It is from here that Brazilian "dumbness" originates.. A society where there is no place for dialogue, and instead of dialogue goes on receiving press announcements, necessarily becomes silent (Freire 1978).

Freire did not stop with his first methodological insights, but developed his method throughout his life. He did not want his theory of knowledge reduced to a simple methodology. Actually,

the steps of his method can be fully understood only if set in an epistemological context. For this reason, it is worth to accentuate this point, because there are multiple interpretations of Freire which he did not recognize. Let us think of political, dogmatic, sectarian, mystifying, unscientific and lax readings.

Then, where to find the conditions necessary for a popular consciousness to emerge? From the lack of opportunity for dialogue in which Brazil grew up? From disdain for popular education we were always doomed? It is not clear precisely how to exercise dialogue in a Brazil where for a long time education was imparted in an authoritarian manner.

It is necessary, first of all, that those who are denied their primordial right to speak, can regain this right. The pedagogical method proposed by Freire tries "to ditch" the educational facilities in Brazil and above all to create the conditions for a genuine dialogue focused on very specific questions. It does not want to make an intellectual exercise on oppression. According to Freire, dialogue is a relationship nurtured by love, humility, hope, faith and confidence. There is no change without dreams nor dreams without hopes: "[...] *If dialogue is the encounter of men and women becoming more human, it cannot be realized without hope*" (Freire, 1979).

We see that Freire, in every stage of his life, was optimistic. With ideas and concepts based on a dialogic educational practice, he could see a "more beautiful, more just world", recreated from a conscious society:

"I am not optimistic out of stubbornness but for an existential historic imperative. I do not mean, however, that because I am optimistic I attribute to my hope the power to transform reality and with this confidence I leave for the fight without considering concrete material data. My hope is necessary, but not sufficient. It alone does not gain the fight. Without hope, however, the fight weakens and wobbles. We need critical hope just as a fish needs unpolluted water" (Freire, 1979).

Freire restores these features of dialogue with new formulations throughout his extensive works and contextualizes them. He also believes that it is necessary to have the courage of our democratic experiment. He reminds us that virtues do not arrive unexpectedly; they are transmitted intellectually, because virtues are embodied in practice or not at all.

In the opinion of the Brazilian writer, this dialogic pedagogy is humanist and liberating: in it, the work of education, in its broadest sense, contributes to the revolutionary process before the political power itself. According to Freire, even the exercise and assertion of freedom, is always something collective and dialogic, never individual. *"Each one fully exercises freedom through the affirmation of the others' freedom. The prerequisites for a dialogic action are trust and respect for the people"* (Freire, 2011).

The pedagogy presented in the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1987) is a revolutionary pedagogy for it is a dialogue-centered pedagogy. Freire emphasizes that the process of revolutionary struggle is a process to regain the right to create, to re-invent the world, to recreate the culture, education and the way of doing politics. He bases politics and pedagogy on love:

[...] There is no dialogue, however, if there is not a deep love for the world and for people. You cannot give the world a name, in an act of creation and recreation, if love does not provoke it. Love, which is the foundation of dialogue, is also dialogue (Freire, 1992).

The real revolution is an act of creation and love. Human beings cannot live without love. Love gives the basis for dialogue and is dialogue itself, since it is an act of courage, and never of fear, love "compromises" with humans. Wherever people are oppressed, the act of love consists in compromising with their cause, the cause of liberation. However, this compromise, being an act of love, is dialogical (Freire, 1992).

Freire's pedagogy is also based on courage, where dialogic action is a rigorous and creative discovery. It is the rejection of manipulation, of cultural invasion, the refusal of education considered as a mere transmission of knowledge. He is re-inventing education. The identity of this process of dialogue is action-reflection, which is not just activism devoid of critical reflection, nor is it an abstract reflection, empty of meaning. It is the basic elements of the transformation of reality; a permanent exchange between individuals who seek liberation, with human formation and revolutionary political struggle. Freire's method is not a tool that the teacher uses to "tame" or indoctrinate students, but theory that takes shape in educative acts. It is the consciousness. The method gives both teachers and students the chance to be subjects who are aware of understanding reality in a critical manner.

According to Freire, human beings realize themselves not in a condition of silence, but in generating the word. The overcoming of this condition reveals fundamental needs: the exercise of educative dialogue, to read the world, the collective creation, the transformation of the self and the world. Giving voice to people and using dialogue as a tool of the educational process allows students to talk and feel each other. "Feel it" means to be open to the other's words, gesture and differences (Telleri, 2000).

The education Freire dreams of is not intended to standardize and equalize our uniqueness as individuals, as cultures, as peoples. Diversity constitutes us as we are, with unity in diversity and the self that interacts with the other. His dream of society is to include everyone in diversity. The challenge for all societies is meeting and dialoguing with others. However, it is only through access to the means (political, economic, ethical, and educational), understood as a right and not as a gift, that humanity is redeemed. Fighting to gain those rights is a collective, radical act, and is an act of love. The pedagogical contribution to the reconstruction of men and women is that they, in order to grow and live, need to meet another.

Humanly speaking, to exist means to read the world, to change it. The world, once read, is “problematized” to those who read it, thus demanding them to read it again. Freire repeats several times, that a person is the subject of relationships, not simply contacts, because a person is not alone in the world but is part of it: “[...] *If you do not love the world, if you do not love life, if I do not love people, I am unable to dialogue with you*” (Freire, 1978).

Being with the world derives from being open to reality, so men and women become the subject of their relationships. Through their relationship with reality, that is the result of their being in the world and with the world, through gestures of creation, recreation and decision, men and women make history more dynamic. They dominate reality, humanize it by adding something that they themselves created. “[...] *If persons transform the world by giving it a name, through the word, dialogue becomes necessarily the way by which persons acquire their sense as such.*” (Freire, 2003).

There is no dialogue, if there is not a deep love for human beings and for the world, Freire tells us. This love towards dialogue and the world, to life and human beings, requires the exercise of humility and of never recognizing oneself as “owners of the truth”. In fact, ignorance is not only in the others. For this reason we must recognize the contribution of all: we are not self-sufficient. The first virtue of dialogue is respect towards students, not only as individuals, but also as expressions of a social practice. It is not an attitude in favor of grass roots initiatives that leaves students left to their own devices. The presence of the teacher is not a shadow for the students, and the authority of the teacher is living.

In his theory of knowledge, Freire always started from the conviction that we must first know what we already know, and subsequently what we do not know. To keep pace, to keep up to date on a certain subject in a certain time means above all, to deepen one’s learning of what is included in the sphere that is “already known”. In Freire, the educational genesis is rooted in



the match-clash with the real conditions where human beings live in a rebellion and redemption dynamic, where education itself must become an interpreter to save and promote the authentic values inborn in the person. In Freire, there is no one who can be denied the right to be fully human, that means a free builder of one's future.

Dialogue is part of human nature itself. Humans build themselves through dialogue because they are communicative. The Freire method of knowledge develops in three dimensions: a self, a you, and an object of knowledge that mediates them.

Freire goes even further and claims that dialogue is the meeting of persons through the mediation of the world. Therefore it does not extinguish itself in the relationship me-you, it is the encounter of humans, mediated by the world. The word is the means that seeks the elements of transformative practice. Language humanizes us, as it allows the relationship between human beings and the world, and persons among themselves. The world is an historical building and, as such, is possibility. It is neither a fatality nor a natural fact, as in the case of the animal world. It includes the thought of people, thanks to which ideas are generated and transformed into action. This collective way of doing, theoretical and practical at the same time, is permanent in the historical process, in order to build a world with neither oppressors nor oppressed. For Freire, the dialogue proposed by the elites is vertical. It forms the students as a mass, making it impossible for them to manifest and to express themselves. In this assumed dialogue, students are expected just to listen and obey. The concept of Paulo Freire is that dialogue is a horizontal relationship. In the relationship between school and families, Freire understood that he never would have reached a father who beat his son by speaking abstractly to him, such as in "Piaget's children code of ethics". Instead the reasons for the father's behavior had to be found in his discomfort in not earning enough to survive, and whose "real" situation had to be examined and discussed.

To switch from naive consciousness to critical consciousness, a long process is required. Through it, the student rejects the oppressor who lives inside himself and who considers the pupil as ignorant and incapable. It is the path of the student's self-determination as a subject. *"The dialogue has a precise meaning because the dialogic subjects not only save their identity, but defend it and in this way they grow up with each other"* (Freire, 1989).

Freire rejects any mechanistic, deterministic or idealistic notion of history, as he claims that people can create new possible futures. The future, for Freire, must be created and done; otherwise, it will not be as individuals want. To communicate, in fact, we need a kind of mentality that does not bloom in enclosed spaces. An educational practice based on truth and ethics leads the educational act in the direction of the liberation of the subject - a freedom which respects and fosters the dignity of the person, because it keeps alive the hope, the dream of "transforming the world" into a "more beautiful, more just one". "This is the hope that moves us", which stimulates the search for educational resources and requires existing political and educational commitment for a democratic and humanly dignified development.

#### DIALOGIC EDUCATION: A NEW PARADIGM IN THE RELATIONSHIP TEACHERS-STUDENTS

As we have seen so far, the coordinates that diversify and characterize the pedagogy of Paulo Freire are to read the word and read the world. The goal is to make teachers and their students aware, by encouraging a problem-solving education, as an alternative to a "banking education". In a "banking education" the school, at any level, is transformed into a "knowledge market." The teacher becomes a sophisticated specialist who sells and distributes a "packaged knowledge"; the student, the customer who buys and "devours" such a knowledge. On the contrary, if

the teacher is not involved in “bureaucracy” during this process, but is helped to keep alive his curiosity, he discovers objects and dimensions which hitherto have been ignored. First, it is necessary to start from the learners and evolve with them into an equal educational process. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating a “deposit” educational method, which considers the student as a passive object, “banking” the knowledge. In this case, despite all the good intentions, the student is not the active subject of his own learning process. Teachers can impose school attendance on students, but certainly students are not aware of their condition and will remain “objects.” Even in their social reality, they will never be in a position to significantly affect its transformation. According to Freire, the struggle for a different world cannot be done by human beings reduced to “things.” The process of “humanization” means overcoming this state of “things”. Thus dialogue is an existential need. And if it is the point of meeting of solidarity and action of the subjects oriented towards a world to transform and humanize, it cannot be reduced to a mere action of depositing ideas from one subject to another. Much less can it become a simple exchange of ideas, as if they were consumer products.

According to Freire, the educator must have specific qualities that characterize the essence of his practice. In his book *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (Freire, 1996), Freire examines objectively the key issues for the training of educators, giving suggestions for educational practices. Moreover, he shows that the educator can establish new relations and conditions of educability with his students. The central feature of this method is, therefore, the “dialogical” relationship between teachers and students, mediated by the knowledge that both possess, in order to affirm the freedom of each other. In the continuing education, the key moment is that of critical reflection on the practice. It is by critically thinking the educational practice of today or of yesterday that we can improve the practice of tomorrow (Freire, 2009).

In this way the teachers, in the context in which they carry out their activities and in their commitment to the process of “transforming the world”, are opposed to the possibility of conceiving, in educational practice, a neutral position. According to Freire, the role of teachers in the world is not only simply one of those who observe what happens, but also, and especially, of those who intervene as the creator of events. This is clear in teachers’ practice.

In the world of history, culture, and politics, “I note” not to “fit in” but to “change”. When we ascertain, we become able to “intervene” in the reality and this task is incredibly more complex: to generate new knowledge rather than simply adapt to it. Therefore, it does not seem neither possible nor permissible to have a naive position, or worse, to adopt the neutral attitude of those who study, be they philosophers, biologists, sociologists, mathematicians, or education researchers. No one can be in the world, with the world and with others in a neutral manner (Freire, 1979).

Such an education should give courage to people to discuss their problems, in order to find the strength and the courage to fight, instead of being dragged passively and of losing themselves by submitting themselves to another’s requirements.

Going beyond the “borderline situation”, the teacher-student comes to a global vision of the program, going beyond the contradictions to the last stage in the development of each study. To put dialogue into practice teachers must not find themselves in the position of those who consider themselves candid keepers of all knowledge. They must put themselves in a humble position of those who know not to know everything, recognizing that the illiterate is not a “lost” soul out of the world, but someone who has the whole experience of life. Therefore he/she is the bearer of knowledge.

Within a class, the central category of Freire’s method, the dialogue, is not just a technique to achieve better results, to make friends or win over the students. If dialogue had only these inten-

tions, it would not be dialogue, but tampering. In dialogue, we find the indispensable relationship and for this reason, the teacher and the student grow together: *"No one educates anyone; people are educated together, with the mediation of the world"* (Freire, 1979).

The real help to give students is helping them to help themselves, making them the agent, and placing them in a critical position in front of their problems. In the "banking education" vision, knowledge is a courtesy from those who consider themselves wise to those they judge ignorant. This approach is based on a set of postulates that call to mind "vertical" relationships:

The teacher teaches and the students are taught.

The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.

The teacher thinks and the students are taught about what is thought.

The teacher talks and the students listen meekly (Freire, 1987).

For this reason, Freire, prefers a model in which each party has equal dignity and has the right not to accept the point of view of others. Through dialogue, the relationship teachers-students is better clarified: no longer has the teacher taught students; no longer are they the teachers' students. The teacher not only is the one who educates, but is also the one who, while he or she educates, is educated in dialogue with the student. The student in turn, while he or she is educated, also educates. When the two poles of the dialogue are united in love and hope in mutual faith, they become critical and want to experience something new together. The result is a mutual sympathy that generates communication.

This method of education proposed by Freire has never been forgotten. It is demonstrated by the numerous centers of research and pedagogical experimentation in Brazil and throughout the world that have arisen even after Freire's death. They are still active and thriving, especially in Brazil, as we shall see later.

From the experience of Jaguaquara to the actualization of a model: a look at rural schools in Brazil.

Brazil is a huge country two and a half times the size of Europe with about 190 million inhabitants, equal to the population of France, Italy and Germany together. It is therefore almost impossible to get to know all of the projects and educational programs based on the method of Paulo Freire. To date, they are active from the north to the south of the country. Here, we would like to consider only one of the many schools that use the educational method proposed by the Latin American educator. We will look at the context in which the school is located, and observe one of the many special features that characterize the educational institutions in Brazil, namely the rural school. In Brazil, currently, there are 76,200 rural schools and 8.4 million of school-age children, living in the countryside. There are many challenges to take up in this particular area, which occupies a large place in the field of education in Brazil.

The education sector has not followed in a satisfactory manner the development of the "Green Giant". Brazil is a country of mainly agricultural origin where about one-fifth of the population lives in rural areas. However, the Brazilian countryside does not offer a school that is actually appropriate for the rural environment. The lack of formal education is attributed to the presence of the great poverty areas of the country, and the lack of education is an element that reinforces poverty. Until 1891, education in rural areas was never mentioned in the constitutional texts, a fact that shows the indifference to the subject by national political leaders (Abraão 1989).

The lack of government commitment to give momentum to education in rural areas, has made rural life increasingly difficult. Basic education was provided which was unsatisfactory and disrespectful to the local inhabitants, often denying farmers the chance to be leaders and architects of their lives. What was necessary was to strengthen the values the peasants believed in, to root them more to their homeland. Consequently, this involved

the adaptation of school curriculum and programs to the environment and rural culture.

Since 1996, with the flexibility of LDB<sup>1</sup> Law (*Lei de diretrizes e bases da educação nacional*), which supports education throughout the national territory, – and allows educational systems to be adapted to rural peculiarities of interest to the students, the possibility of a new order and a new meaning was on the way. It was only on June 3, 2003, that the Government established the Permanent Working Group for Rural Education, “with the task of disseminating and discussing the implementation of DOEBC” (*Diretrizes Operacionais para a Educação Básica nas Escolas do Campo* – Operational Guidelines for basic education in rural schools). These decisions, however, seem to come late.

Nowadays, in Brazil, the people living in the countryside are often found in social conditions in which many of them are still learning “*a dizer a sua palavra e a fazer a sua pergunta*” (to talk and ask questions). Furthermore, few children have access to schools in rural areas and, in any case, they have no guarantee that they can continue to study or enjoy a good quality of education. The practical guidelines developed in these schools do not seem to give importance to students’ lives or to formal educational activities. All this leads to illiteracy<sup>2</sup>.

A viable opportunity for rural education is the pedagogy of alternation, as it is more and more emerging as effective and meaningful to strengthen the paradigms that oppose the exclusion of children in educational institutions (Calvo, 1999). In Brazil, the first rural schools that have adopted the alternation pedagogy

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<sup>1</sup> Law of guidelines and bases, 1996 has brought many changes compared to the previous laws, such as the inclusion of early childhood education (nurseries and kindergartens) as the first phase of basic education.

<sup>2</sup> When talking of illiteracy, Freire did not mean the lack of education acquired in the conventional way, but the lack of acquisition of knowing the reality. Indeed, the peasants though incapable of reading a page, can read the world. “To read the world comes before writing skills” (Freire, 1994).

arose in 1969 in the State of Espírito Santo, under the name *Escola família agrícola* (EFA). The first EFA was born under the initiative of the ngo MEPES (*Movimento Educacional e Promocional do Espírito Santo* – Brazil) and the AES-CCC of Padua, Italy (Association of Friends of the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo – Community Collaboration Center), with the initial financial aid given by Italians. Now, the Ministry of Education (MEC), not only accepts the alternation, but also asks for its diffusion. Currently, 21 states in Brazil with 155 rural schools follow the alternation pedagogy and are grouped under different acronyms: *Escolas famílias agrícolas* (EFA), *Casas familiares rurais* (CFR), *Escolas comunitárias rurais* (ECR)<sup>3</sup>. Despite their specificity, all the schools encourage and stimulate families and communities to be engaged in the education of their children. They promote a community spirit (just staying in school is an exercise for community living) and let families and communities understand the importance of constant training, arguing that the best learning takes place throughout life and that the school is part of life itself.

The name “pedagogy of alternation” is due to the fact that students alternate between different places of learning: a period at school, in the form of internship, where they complete the full formal education and a period at home, with theoretical and practical activities, in which itinerant teachers of the team visit students and their families. This practice reduces truancy of students coming from rural areas. Life in the countryside is the true

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<sup>3</sup> The first rural family-schools, however, were not born in Brazil, but in Europe. In the thirties, in France, the government and the Church paid scant attention to the difficult living conditions in the rural areas. Farmers’ children often dropped out of school because their families were in need of their help in the fields. At the same time, they were not economically able to keep them in cities. This social, economic, political and educational situation, created new challenges for the French rural families, trade unions and socially oriented co-operatives. Italy was the second country, after France, where family-schools operated at the end of the 1950’s, and from where in the late sixties they reached some Latin American countries.



teacher. This is the basic precept of the Pedagogy of alternation and fully reflects the thoughts of Freire. For example:

We do not study anymore to work, nor do we work to study; we study by working. Thus, this unity between practice and theory is concrete. But then again, what is being surpassed by this unity between practice and theory, is not study as critical reflection (theory) on the past practice or the future one, but the separation of the two moments. The unity between practice and theory thus leads to the unity of school, regardless of level, as theoretical context and productive activities, as a unitary dimension of the concrete content (Freire, 1979).

Among other things, how to conceive a rural school, without agricultural activities? To be defined as “rural”, the school must start from the experiences of its students. It must foster dialogue between rural stakeholders and the environment in which they live. Education does its job only by starting from the relationship of individuals with the environment. In this interaction with the environment, in a process of adaptation, the subject begins to assimilate, incorporate and realize his or her mental conceptions. It is in the interaction with the environment to which they belong, that students find their balance and realize themselves. The subject can only act as the center of a process if his interests are taken into consideration with him. For rural students, what arouses their attention is the land surrounding them and the ways to exploit it. This possibility of an existence of a true rural school becomes more vital and stronger with the pedagogical model of alternation, which is realized in Jaguaquara.

## EDUCATION AT JAGUAQUARA: CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

The small town of Jaguaquara<sup>4</sup>, 51,019 inhabitants, is a municipality located in Jiquiriçal valley, in the micro-region of Jequie, southwest of the state of Bahia, 320 km from the state capital, Salvador, and 1752 km from Brasília. The rural school that has arisen gave Paulo Freire, the opportunity to not only see the realization of his dream "I do not want to be followed I want to be reinvented", but it has also allowed citizens of Jaguaquara to implement a new educational and social experience. The key to success of the rural schools is their innovative methodology, going from teaching in classrooms, to the library, to agricultural and botanical activities.

Until the end of the twentieth century, educational institutions in Jaguaquara did not attract farmers. The need was to have schools that would guarantee a space for building up knowledge, starting from everyday life, in an enjoyable way. Had this been the case, perhaps students would not have ceased to attend them. Many factors contributed to the school dropout phenomenon in that area. The first one is the long distance between children's homes and the school. The second one, which may explain the early school dropouts, is that public schools did not offer a school curriculum oriented towards the realities of the countryside, even if prompted by legal ordinances and governmental plans. The distance between the proposal of the formal school, implanted in the countryside and the real needs of those who should have benefited, was a real problem. For this reason, the differences in behavior, because of the diversity of mentality, should be the starting point for a school curriculum proposal. As a third fac-

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<sup>4</sup> "Jaguaquara" is a Tupi word meaning "touch of Oz" for the joining of the terms *îagûara* Kuara. The city of Jaguaquara stands out in the context of agricultural production and horticulture, mainly tomatoes, potatoes and carrots. It is characterized by a dry sub-humid climate: cold in winter, hot and dry in summer, the average annual temperature is 21.5° C, and 601,000 mm of rainfall.

tor for early school dropout in Jaguaquara, there is the serious phenomenon of continuous displacement of families. Families moved very frequently because parents were often dismissed by landowners and tried to look for work in other *fazendas*. Often they went in search of “better things”, that is jobs in the big cities, which very often proved to be frustrating<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, leaving school early in rural schools led to dropping the studies.

The rural school *Escola Estadual Jaguaquara Rural Taylor-Egídio* (ERTE) was established in March 2001, and is a concrete response to these problems. In Brazil the project was awarded the Freirian School prize by the Ministry of Education in 2007. The educational context of this rural school is the countryside and therefore, the importance of social and cultural contexts is essential for learning. The reality of student life at Jaguaquara aims to be at the center of educational practice. When children leave their homes and go to school, they need to go or return with the awareness that they are continuing to plot the course of their lives. It is crucial for them that school does not represent a cut, but a break in their daily life. Professor Sonilda Sampaio, headmistress of this school, in an interview, begins with this statement:

In inaugurating the school, we made the proposal to educators to study Paulo Freire and understand his proposal for education, as the perspective of humanization, liberation, conscientization, that is the path to full acquisition of consciousness and awareness.

The pedagogy applied in the rural school of Jaguaquara is very complex, rich and deep. It is a participatory methodology, increases the sense of duty which is appropriate for economies characterized by two dimensions: the family dimension and the community dimension. The privileged context where the peda-

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<sup>5</sup> All the territory of Brazil experiences the rural exodus in the name of utopia of a better life in the cities. In addition, owners of rural land, ranchers prefer day laborers, (those receiving the tasks and gain for a specific job and pay a fixed-term work), no employment contracts, no own habitation, to prevent them from acquiring any right to property within the *fazendas*.

gogy was born and has developed is rural family agriculture. In these contexts, children are often expected to work in the farm instead of going to school, and parents are deprived of the technical knowledge that would allow them to optimize the work in the fields. This pedagogy is a training method for both children and parents. Children are the driving force of knowledge, those who learn at school, rework, and bring the knowledge back home. Parents are the final beneficiaries of the knowledge chain. Rural families are unique and, as such, they have to learn and have to be taught in a continuous dialectic, assuming a critical position and fitting into the history. A rural education agency that knows how to be a full participant in the construction of a new reality, in which men and women dream and assume the leadership of their own stories, is an institution that should aim to learn and teach, interacting with students and their families.

Education at Jaguaquara, therefore, takes place in a context where the integral formation of the persons who want to be new, conscious, responsible, and transformers of the environment occurs. The education seeks the utopia of a better life and a new future; it goes toward Christian ethics and requires the utmost skill and dedication from its interlocutors. It is self-assertion that cannot be learned outside the existential environment. The commitment, as proposed by Freire is exactly to change and transform the reality, starting from the existential context of the students. It puts the emphasis on dialogue and stresses the need for an organization and the responsibility of self-management in order to make the educational process of cultural construction and community development as permanent. Freire's pedagogy is not a ready-to-use recipe, but is a constant research, a participatory research, and a direct personal contact with the person one works with.

## INTERVIEWS AND POINTS OF VIEW: A NEW HOPE FOR BRAZIL

At Jaguaquara, in the ERTE a new hope for rural schools in Brazil glows with the basic principle to educate to happiness and peace, with a positive attitude towards life. It is an education that goes toward freedom, creativity and acceptance of differences. In this sense, the school curriculum in Jaguaquara is differentiated, as well as the attitude of the teachers who constantly follow permanent and systematic training courses. The current headmistress of the Jaguaquara school Professor Sonilda Sampaio<sup>6</sup> describes the organization of their work at school:

We work with 600 children, divided into three groups of 200. While we have 200 children attending formal education, we have another 400 families visited by the traveling team. In the countryside, the itinerant teachers of the team grade papers and give guidance on agriculture issues already examined during the lessons. These concepts are reinforced at home, where pupils teach their parents. The traveling team then makes an assessment on the result of this work, in which the school teaches the students to put into practice what they learn within their own families<sup>7</sup>.

This method makes possible a valuable interaction between school and family, leading to the achievement of good results in the educational process. A traveling educator says:

Often, parents take time away from their children's doing homework, because they need to have the children's help in the fields, to bring food home. According to some parents, when their

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://erte.com.br/site/>

<sup>7</sup> Transcribed and translated by Toni Venturi video documentary on the death of Paulo Freire, produced by TV PUC "PAULO FREIRE CONTEMPORARY" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A02WaJH\\_Chk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A02WaJH_Chk)) .

children are at home for two months there is no time for them to do their homework.

In this interaction between school and social context, a great help can be found in Freire's method, as a teacher of ERTE, Sandra De Souza, tells us. She found the support to deal with the difficulties in educational practice.

We have done our best because it was difficult for us to be able to take in a child who came from the countryside and who remained two months at home and only a month here. Then, we realized that the first thing to do was to do was to immerse ourselves in new methodologies readings. The basis for us was Paulo Freire, because he proposed a theory very close to us<sup>8</sup>.

During the internship in a rural school, students are taught the rudiments of a life in the community, such as, to keep their room clean, to take turns for setting the table etc. They are also helped to manage and organize their free time. It is not easy for these students to get used to everything, because it means to leave their family, their habits, to face a new environment where habits and rhythms are very different. Another teacher, Professor Nalva Gomes describes the first encounter of pupils with the school:

At first, when children come to us they are very aggressive and therefore it is very difficult for us even to get close to them. Immediately they take a defensive position. Today, we see real changes in the lives of these children. We note that, as time goes on they change their attitudes. They also show affection towards us and they come to us and sit on our laps<sup>9</sup>.

What students learn does not finish within the classroom, but it reaches their families, giving a qualitative contribution to their

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.10:46'-12:56.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.14:44'-16:50'.

lifestyle, as evidenced by the educator Professor Marlon Mascarenha:

In returning to their families, students take home some seeds such as rape-red carrots and vegetables they have learned to cultivate in school, in order to convey to parents the knowledge acquired or to reinforce knowledge already possessed<sup>10</sup>.

The same parents of students confirm this. The mother of a pupil says:

When they return home, after the internship at school, our children teach us many things. They carry the seeds of the plants, and then show us how teachers taught them to sow. But we say, *"Look, here we cultivate differently, we sow the whole soil ..."* And they say to us: *"Look Mummy that is not so, the professors have taught us a better way ..."*<sup>11</sup>.

The contribution of these students to families is huge; some of them help to improve the economic situation, trying to sell the products they cultivate. Another teacher, Sandra de Souza speaks:

*"Some of them even start to sell what they cultivate and then we found them joyful because they have gained a little bit of money. When they come back home, they plant parsley, lettuce, etc. ... then sell everything in the markets and make a small profit. Then they also teach parents the techniques learned from the teachers at school"*<sup>12</sup>.

The school attempt is to give a global education, opening new perspectives for the future of these pupils. Professor Leticia Dos Santos explains:

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 22:20-25:16'.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 25:10-25:20'.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 22:20-25:16'.

“When pupils live here, we try to work starting from their everyday life but, at the same time, we try to enrich their knowledge and enter into the educational programs: the use of the internet, computer science, art and drama workshops, so that they can transform their lives, opening up to new possibilities for the future”<sup>13</sup>.

Therefore, the educational method used at ERTE not only aims for literacy, but also involves students in their relations with the world and with others, forming them as individuals with their work, to transform and create their own world (Freire, 1981).

## CONCLUSIONS

Why education to dialogue? Why start inclusion programs for the population in a school setting?

I found answers in Freire’s pedagogy, a revolutionary pedagogy based on love, which paved the way for a theoretical and practical collective dream: new men and women neither oppressors nor oppressed, a more beautiful and fairer world.

Dialogic education, based on the holistic concept of human development, turned out to be a new paradigm of a valid and efficient educational work in Brazil, capable of facing and solving the problems of violence and conflicts in various social contexts.

The educational project of Paulo Freire developed in the city of Jaguaquara (Brazil) – object of the study in this paper – is an example of the practical application of this new educational model. It proved capable of involving all the social contexts of the pupils, thanks to its various programs addressed to specific targets and implementation strategies in educational and social spheres. His educational project in its practical application was able to awaken

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 28:30-00:10’.



new feelings in the citizens and give them a new sense of the world and the person: to ameliorate economic, psychological and cultural difficulties, to raise self-esteem, serenity, tolerance, hope and the awareness that reality can be different. The pedagogical method of Freire, applied to ERTE (*Escola Estadual Rural Taylor-Egídio*) in Jaguaquara, allowed students to be the protagonists of their development and turned out to be a path full of potential.

Obviously, this work does not claim to be an exhaustive guide to all the experience made in the context of dialogic pedagogy, and the experiences mentioned go far beyond the vast horizons to be explored. However, we have verified that the method proposed and still practiced by Freire, in several places of the world through programs, courses, movements and promotion of education campaigns is very valuable and universally appreciated.

The experience of Jaguaquara has shown that the modernity of Paulo Freire is undeniable and that it is not forbidden to dream and hope. With the increase of projects like this one in the most diverse fields, school life can contribute to a process of global change by promoting a new culture which is a strong indication of the possibility of creating a better world. The future demands a new culture built on the foundations of education to others, a culture capable of teaching men and women to act and to live in justice and make individuals "fully human", therefore free. We have noticed that the school, although it is not the unique place where education is given, is considered as a reference point in our society and in educational action. Therefore, the necessary material, technical and especially human resources should support it. This paper would demonstrate that there is no openness to others, without education to dialogue.

As to rural schools in Brazil, Freire's pedagogy is a challenge that opens new perspectives and is applicable to other educational settings.

The subject, however, continues to be open, with hope that new studies will focus on Paulo Freire, the true philosopher of

education and will deepen his methodology, which is the basis for educational practice both in Brazil and in a wider international pedagogical context.

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