

Literacy practicing in the process of school appropriation by the MST

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At Maríldes Marino (In Memoriam)

During almost 30 years the MST, the Landless Rural Workers Movement, (CALDART, 2004; RIBEIRO, 2002) along with trade unions and other social movements have placed rural education at the center of the national Brazilian scenery, giving itself meaning as collective subjects, taking over rural land as historical space in its dispute for land and education (ARROYO, CALDART & MOLINA, 2004; RIBEIRO, 2007). In this context, the subjects, the rural population in Brazil, and its practices which have been silenced and marginalized until the last decade of the 90's, last century, have been organizing, empowering and presenting themselves to Brazilian society through the social, political and scientific scenery. Education has been one of the major fields of dispute at all levels and modalities by the people, including native Indians, maroons and land reform settlers, and this dispute has been expressed strongly through the battle for the existence of schools that attends to children, inside their own territory, opposing the rural increasing number of schools that have been closed, which generated a government act in 2010, trimming up those closures. As it is, the public schooling appropriation process has been placed as a question for different entities and movements involved, and at this instance, it presents itself as a need to understand how literacy has been building itself inside settlement schools linked to the MST movement.

The ethnographic aspect was, thus, fundamental to capture the construction process of literacy practicing (Street, 1984; BRANDT & CLINTON, 2002; KLEIMAN, 1995; Goulart, 2006) in the settlement school classes, since the school's routine is alive, dynamic, contradictory, and not the reproduction of school culture or pedagogy inherent of a social movement. The strategies which oriented the research were defined, then, towards the search to understand the school inside the settlement, parting from its everyday challenge (ROCKWELL & EZPELETA, 1987) within a context of orientation and guidelines from the MST (CALDART, 2004) and rural education, against the hegemonic power which was set by schools and schooling formats. Field research was performed in a settlement indicated by the social movement, based in its importance as a territory in which the school and the schooling processes were (and are) part of core questions. The first instance of research arranged itself as investigative and was done in 2006, whereas the second was performed still in 2007, from April to December, in alternated weekly periods. To define schools classes, the availability of research professors and the momentum of class schooling were both considered. Through the whole period of time I was a house guest to the teacher who had her class researched. During field work I could count on different sources of information in order to know the settlement: observation of its daily routines, mapping of its families, casual talkings with children, with settlement dwellers and with leaderships, documental analysis, interviews and secondary data. Daily activities recording was done by the production of a field diary and by video, and through the direct focus of the literacy events (HEATH, 1982), alternated with informal chats and interviews with the teacher, supervisor, principal, parents, residents, and by sharing in meetings with the educational offices in the settlement as well as with the supervision and direction of the state school.

I'm not familiar with... (a story of a water reservoir) my mother is the one who knows... I think it was also done with the manifesto... now they want to close down all the

schools...to close our school and they are talking about...they are going to make a manifestation next wednesday not to close the school. This observation and analysis came from Luciano, a 10 year old boy on the 5th year of elementary school and took place while we walked through the settlement's agrovilla. Luciano was the first child to be born in that territory soon after the occupation of the land and the organization of the settlement. In a shy manner he showed me the places where he most liked to play, his best friends houses, the most beautiful street, which was full of trees and flowers, and proudly indicated the most important equipment like the water reservoir and then the school, both achieved by the force of manifestations and battles of the social movement along with the state and county. Luciano is able to distinguish one of "them" from one of "us", to show who is on the move to make the manifestation, who is organizing the fight, at that moment, against the closing down of rural schools. The school (which is joined with the state school is a second address), has a strong presence in this settlement, one of the first ones to get contracted teachers from the settlement, either by the state or the county, like Maria, who has a degree in pedagogy and who has moved to this place because of her marriage. Teachers, parents and representatives of the settlement compose the branch of education which performs by expressing the local demands for education and public power in the municipal and state levels. Proffers of schooling, including youth and adult education move forward usually at every two years, and the only offerings which remain fixed are for kindergarten (4 and 5 year old children) and elementary school (1th to 5th year of school, counted since enrolment, at age 6). A coercive and unspoken force is internally perceived in the community, prompting everyone to get involved with the schooling processes.

A mixed graded class with nine children, between 8 to 12 years old and the teacher experienced, most of the time, reading events, during the observation period. Oral and silent reading were very much watched by the teacher and, in some of the events, were object of interest by the students. The silent reading of literature books selected by the teacher was a daily event. Poetry reading and other texts, done in class, individually and collectively, or in the community events, witnessed the oral and written relation. The oral readings done by students and followed by the oral explanations of the teacher were frequent in geography and science, subjects that had didactic books as support. The desire of the students to express themselves in voice reading any texts, except their own, was present in the majority of events. Therefore, in classes, the use of didactic and literature books as well as dictionaries in the reading events, emphasized the material and integral aspects of the cultural practices (ROCKWELL, 2001; SEWELL, 2005).

Where does orality, in reading events, have more importance (HEATH, 1983)? As already phrased, the oral is present in the oral reading, in the explanations of the teacher, in the dialogs of students and teachers, in the presentations of the students. In these events, silent reading was little observed, being it more valuable to the experience of the students with the literary narratives. For most part, in events of oral reading, orality is placed for the student as a mark up entry to school knowledge. This happens regardless of the area of school knowledge (with exception of literary narratives as was mentioned before) as we can see by the analysis of the reading modes.

Orality was also central in the text production of meaning, and better still, for the practices of reading. Not only does orality expresses itself strongly for the authorized reader (DE CERTEAU, 1980), either the teacher or the student, but by the orality found by the student-reader in the process of producing meaning for the text. Maybe these

oral interactions, in classes, can be expanded or revised, if they are closer to the literacy events of the social movement. Thus, the weight of the oral word is affirmed, placing the questioning of the classic identification of school with a “written culture” and where language teaching is predominantly seen as a written school object (ROCKWELL, 2007), fundamental in the construction of meaning for reading practices in the classroom (TERZI, 1995).

In literacy practicing, especially in the reading construction practices in the classroom, the relation between the local and global context, the orality and the written word, the state and the social movement is placed as a core question in the appropriation process of the school by the social movement. Furthermore, these are, on one hand, indicators of tension between the state/schooling/school culture/written word, an intrinsic relationship of a society’s project built and defended in this last century in the Brazilian context as a more universal literacy model, and on the other hand, the written appropriation/orality/schooling/social movement, a relation identified in the classrooms which needs to be empowered, pondered and amplified within an educational project which would confront knowledge and social values, established as Rural Education, in a more specific dialogue with the pedagogy of MST (CALDART, 2004).

The understanding of rural education experienced in a land reform settlement school passes through, at least, three dimensions which are interrelated. The first of these, by taking the National Movement for an Education of/in Rural Lands, arising as a result of the articulation of trade unions and social movements, in opposition to the traditional vision of the rural education, as already mentioned. The second, by the understanding that structures and social values are conditionings of the relationship with the written word, due to historical and socio-cultural dynamics in the land reform settlements. The third takes up the involved subjects, from teachers to students, who constitute the classrooms, directing, defining, modifying, maintaining, meaning the school practices. It is through this interaction of forces that rural education is been built.

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