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Mathematics Education in Brazilian Rural Areas: An analysis of the Escola Ativa public policy and the Landless Movement Pedagogy

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Mathematics Education in Brazilian Rural Areas: An analysis of the *Escola Ativa* public policy and the Landless Movement Pedagogy

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Abstract

The article discusses mathematics education within two educational projects addressed to rural multigrade schools in Brazil: Active School Program (in Portuguese, Programa Escola Ativa—PEA) and the Landless Movement (Movimento Sem Terra—MST) Pedagogy. It is based on an ethnomathematics perspective drawn from Wittgenstein's later work and Michel Foucault's thinking. Data comprised PEA teachers' and students' documents, MST guideline documents and reports about mathematics education projects developed in MST schools. Its analytical strategy considers the new configurations of what was formerly called rural and urban spaces, in countries like Brazil. Based on this, the article examines the relationship between peasants' knowledge and school mathematics in those two projects. We show that taking peasant language games into account was important for both. However, for PEA, this was the point of departure while these were taught at schools as part of their struggles for MST. Thus, we argued that the two different educational projects for multigrade peasant schools in rural Brazil (connected to different projects of society) were in dispute: the first was aligned with neoliberal hegemonic logic while the second was attuned to the struggles of MST in opposition with World Bank guidelines.

Keywords: mathematics education, Brazilian rural areas, Escola Ativa public policy, Landless Movement pedagogy

Introduction

This article analyzes the mathematics education of two different pedagogical projects currently existing in rural schools in Brazil: the pedagogical project promoted by the Landless

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Movement (in Portuguese, *Movimento Sem Terra*—MST, a social peasant movement spread across the country) and the Active School Program (in Portuguese, *Programa Escola Ativa*—PEA), addressed to Brazilian multigrade peasant schools. The article focuses on school mathematics—considered to be the most relevant curriculum area in the country, in particular, in the schooling of the peasant population (Knijnik, 2006; MST, 2005). Currently MST includes more than three million members and organizes its actions based on the following objectives: the struggle for land, for land reform and for social changes in the country. Attuned to those struggles, one of the core aims of its Pedagogy is to oppose the neoliberal hegemonic logic with which the Brazilian State is aligned; school mathematics is part of this. For the MST, the educational processes, whether they are part of the prevailing system of education in the country or are developed as extra-curricular projects must necessarily be connected to their struggles.

As discussed elsewhere (Knijnik & Wanderer, 2010), the schooling processes performed by the MST are specific (Knijnik, 1998; Leher, 2009). The schools of children, primary and secondary education, and, more recently, higher education, belong to the public system of education (on the municipal, state or federal levels), i.e. they are subject to official guidelines and regulations. Furthermore, due to the relative autonomy provided by the Brazilian Educational System, the MST has organized the curriculum of its schools based on pedagogical and philosophical principles (Knijnik, 1998) that serve the interests of their struggle for land reform. These principles are the guide to MST schools and its teacher training courses (Knijnik, 2007) in the sphere of teaching and learning mathematics.

However, PEA is a national public policy that involves more than ten thousand multigrade peasant schools (one million students from first to fourth grade); it establishes collaborative work between universities and the public educational system, produces pedagogical resources, promotes teacher education courses and in each community where PEA works, it creates microcenters to discuss issues concerning teaching and learning processes. The pedagogical resources distributed to schools participating in PEA are addressed to the children (teaching and learning books from different areas of the school curriculum) and to the teachers (a book with pedagogical advice to train educators and others focusing on different areas of the curriculum). The program also sends kits with specific learning resources for everyday classroom activities.

In 2008, the Brazilian government created PEA. The Peasant Education Movement took leadership over the discussions. But soon tensions arose between the proposal from official educational authorities and the MST pedagogical principles with their links to political, economic and social struggles. More recently sharp criticism of PEA has emerged from the social movements and researchers involved in peasant education. Converging on these criticisms, when analyzing the PEA documents, we identified a dissonance between the position of the social movement called Articulation for Peasant Education (Kolling, Nery, & Molina, 1999)—present in a number of PEA texts addressed to the teachers, and those expressed in other PEA documents. The following example is clear about this dissonance:

[...] Peasant Education is different from [rural education, because it is constructed by and for the different subjects, territories, social practices and cultural identities that compose diversity in the rural area. It presents itself as a guarantee

that enables peasant men and women to create and re-create the conditions of existence in the rural area. Therefore education is an important strategy to transform the reality of peasant men and women in all its dimensions. (MEC, 2010, p. 16)

Here, there are clear echoes from those who organized social movements and are politically active in the sphere of peasant education (Kolling et al., 1999). However, the pedagogical orientations of PEA are radically distant from any anti-neoliberal position; rather, it is aligned with the hegemonic logic, where agribusiness prevails—a logic that is configured from the social, economic, political, as well as educational, standpoint as going against the peasant social movements' demands.

In short, in Brazilian rural areas, two antagonist educational projects for multigrade peasant schools (connected to different projects of society) are in dispute. A key element of this dispute can be found in school mathematics, positioned in the Brazilian hegemonic pedagogical discourse as one of the important areas of the school curriculum, in particular in rural regions. What will the future be and role of school mathematics in this dispute? While this article does not aim to answer this question, it seeks to problematize school mathematics by exploring how these two educational projects conduct rural school multigrade subjects. Achieving this goal allows us to understand the current rural education and its possibilities for the future, in particular, in school mathematics.

To reach this objective, we have chosen as a theoretical framework the ethnomathematics perspective conceived by Knijnik (2012). In the next section, we discuss this perspective, which articulates Michel Foucault's theorizations and the work of the late Wittgenstein. We highlight the cultural and social dimensions of mathematics education of Brazilian rural areas today. They are examined from a political standpoint. Here it is important to mention the meaning we are assigning, in the article, to this last expression. Political standpoint does not only refer to the broad aspects of the political realm; it mainly involves the educational policies and the politics of knowledge of mathematics curriculum.

The article is divided into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section discusses the theoretical framework of the study, the third section focuses on the description of the empirical data and the methodology followed by the results in section four and lastly the conclusions in section five.

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in the previous section, the theoretical framework of the study is Knijnik's ethnomathematics perspective, which is inserted in the field of ethnomathematics, emerged in the mid-1970s (D'Ambrosio, 1990). In fact, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, mainstream mathematics education research was impacted by a new trend focusing on examining school mathematics in relation to mathematical practices outside school. Different socio-political processes (struggles for democracy in countries like Brazil and struggles for independence in colonial countries like Mozambique) can be seen as establishing the conditions of possibilities, in Foucault's words, for the emergence of this social approach in mathematics education. The new world socio-political configuration would

highlight the need to diminish the high rates of illiteracy and the large number of children in those countries who failed mathematics at school.

In recent decades, migratory movements have increased worldwide leading to many immigrant children being schooled in central countries such as those belonging to the European Union and the United States. The field of education and particularly mathematics education gained awareness of the need to pay attention to this socio-cultural phenomenon that has concrete repercussions in schooling and broader social contexts (Abreu, 2001; Civil, 2007). One of the most significant mathematics education trends that expresses this awareness is ethnomathematics.

Similar to other fields of knowledge, since its beginning ethnomathematics has been a vast, heterogeneous area of study, rendering it impossible to establish generalizations about its theoretical-methodological contributions. Even so, the studies in this field can be understood as comprising works aimed at identifying, recognizing and valuing the mathematical language games produced in different forms of life. One of the main risks of these works is the ‘domestication’ of the indigenous knowledge, i.e. the subordination of this knowledge to school mathematics and the curriculum logic to which it is attuned. As discussed later, Wittgenstein’s ideas show very clearly how the displacement of a language game from one form of life to another is an unsuccessful operation. Another risk of ethnomathematics refers to the research work which mainly highlights the mathematical contents of the ‘indigenous’ practices connected to ‘our’ mathematics. At one end, such kind of research reinforces the hegemonic mainstream mathematics, precisely what ethnomathematics would intend to problematize. Dowling (1991) very clearly discusses this point. Other important critical analysis of ethnomathematics has been done since this field emerged. It is worth mentioning the works of Skovsmose and Vithal (1997), Rowlands and Carson (2002) and, more recently, the paper published by Pais (2011) which extend the analytical criticisms about ethnomathematics.

Knijnik’s ethnomathematics perspective, which provides theoretical support for this article, allows us to discuss some of Dowling’s critics, as shown later on. The perspective is considered a theoretical toolbox built upon the notions of Wittgenstein’s later work and of Michel Foucault’s thinking. This perspective enables: ‘examining different mathematical language games and their family resemblances, and the discourses that constitute academic and school Mathematics, analyzing their effects of truth’ (Knijnik, 2012, p. 91). As discussed elsewhere (Knijnik, 2012) based on the work of Wittgenstein and some of his interpreters (like Condé, 2004; Glock, 1996), it can be stated that different forms of life produce different language games, each marked by specific grammar. Such grammar, as a set of rules, constitutes a specific logic. This rationale entails that there is more than a single language: there are different language games. Thus we can ask: Is there some kind of relationship between them? If the answer is positive, how does it operate? The response to these questions was provided by Wittgenstein through the notion of *family resemblances*. The philosopher would say (as shown in aphorisms #66 and #67 of *Philosophical Investigations*) that language games form ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and cross-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’ (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 32).

The ideas developed by Wittgenstein in his maturity phase express a concept of language no longer with the marks of universality, perfection and order, as though they existed

before human actions. His work challenges the existence of a universal language and problematizes the notion of total rationality, of an ontological foundation for language. Thus, since the meaning of a word is generated by its use, the possibility of essences or fixed guarantees for a language are questioned, leading us to also problematize the existence of a single mathematical language with fixed meanings.

Based on the ideas of Wittgenstein, Knijnik (2012) argued that the mathematical practices generated by specific cultural groups can be understood as a set of language games associated with different forms of life, aggregating specific rationality criteria. The ideas presented by Wittgenstein are productive for problematizing the understanding of a universal and foundationalist reason which sustains modern thinking, in which mathematics holds a privileged place (Walkerline, 1995). This productivity is one of the key points of interest for the ethnomathematics perspective.

As previously mentioned, the theoretical toolbox that comprises this perspective also includes Foucaultian notions such as: discourse, politics of truth—and their related concepts. Their use, to theoretically sustain the discussion undertaken here, enables us to consider academic mathematics and school mathematics as discourses implicated in the production of power-knowledge relations and regimes of truth. Thus they can be thought of as constituted by (at the same time as they constitute) a general politics of truth (Foucault, 2003) which institutes what functions as true in the field of mathematics education.

Following Wittgenstein's and Foucault's philosophical conceptions we can establish a dialog with Dowling's critiques of ethnomathematics. In fact, the 'plural monoglossism' mentioned by the English researcher can be explained in other terms. It is not a matter of saying that ethnomathematics considers the society as heteroglossic but each form of life monoglossic. First, because forms of life are not isolated at all (especially in the globalized world in which we live), this destroys any possibility of 'pure' monoglossism. Moreover, it becomes clear how Knijnik's ethnomathematics perspective goes against the existence of a single (and universal) rationality, i.e. modern thinking. Finally, it is important to mention that the reasoning developed in this section offered elements to show the consistency of articulating Wittgenstein's and Foucault's philosophical ideas: their convergent anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism attitudes and their common understanding about language.

Methodology

The research material analyzed in this article included documents written by MST about pedagogical principles of Peasant Education and those made available to educators by PEA, especially those in the field of mathematics (MEC, 2010; Alves, 2010). In accordance with the theoretical framework of the study, these documents were examined using the analysis of discourse inspired by Foucault. By adopting this analytical perspective, we were aware that what was said in the material would have to be considered in its externality. It was a matter of considering what was said on the surface, without submitting it, for instance, to interpretations of the cause-effect type, which Foucault, inspired by Nietzsche, opposed. Nor was one to make judgments of value regarding the pedagogical orientations presented in the documents: this attitude of judging value would compromise

the analytic exercise that we wanted to undertake inspired by the French philosopher. Further, according to his formulations, we considered that these documents ‘converge with institutions and practices, and carry meanings that may be common to an entire era’ (Foucault, 2002, p. 139). In other words, they are in the ‘order of the discourse’ of contemporary (Brazilian) pedagogy.

Examining the MST and PEA documents gathered here, we did not aim at verifying if those documents were used at schools, or whether their guidelines and prescriptions were effectively followed by the teachers. The documents were considered artifacts that serve as ‘guides for conduct, instrument to govern the ways in which teachers and also the families are encouraged to carry out children and youths’ education’ successfully. This implied considering what was said in its externality. We were vigilant to stay away from an appraised position—to search for explanations about what could be hidden in the material. We took the precaution of not asking about the internal logic of the enunciations present in the research material. On the contrary, the focus of the analysis was to highlight the recurrence of enunciations, organizing series, looking at the ruptures and continuities/discontinuities that they maintained among themselves. The result of this analytic exercise is presented in the next section.

Study Results

Our analytical exercise took into account the new configurations of what was formerly called, dichotically, rural space and urban space. Thus, we considered that both spaces have currently become complex in countries such as Brazil. This complexity covers not only the urban–rural relationship, but also the economic, cultural, social and political non-homogeneity of each of these spaces. Therefore, this is relevant to consider when discussing the forms of life whose schools are connected to the PEA and to the MST. For example, similar to the communities where PEA was implemented, in the MST settlements there were also schools where the teachers were not members of the Movement and, in general, traveled from nearby urban spaces to teach. However, at each of the settlements there was an intentionality among its members that these teachers become part of the everyday life there, and more broadly, participate in the MST struggles and mobilizations.

In recent years, in association with the rural exodus, many rural schools have closed. The settlement schools (which MST managed to prevent from closing through mobilizations) began to work with students from nearby rural and urban communities, who travel daily with transportation paid by the State. As observed at one of the Movement schools, in the south of Brazil, where approximately 80% of the students were from ‘outside’, the pedagogical work carried out there was aligned with the guiding principles of Landless Pedagogy. This was assured by the school staff who belonged to the Movement.

Thirty years after the emergence of MST, in the settlements, there was a higher incidence of children and grandchildren of the first generation of peasants who struggled to be settled, who now work in factories or in the service sector, not directly connected to farm work. This indicated that, in the same way as in communities where PEA was present, the rural and urban forms of life were becoming blurred. However, it is necessary

to highlight the differences between the PEA and the Landless approaches of such obscurity. The superior position assigned to the urban life can also be seen in the sphere of mathematics education: since the mathematics language games belonging to the peasant form of life did not coincide with the results obtained by the mathematics language games taught at school, they were considered ‘mistakes’ and therefore devalued, placed in a ‘wild externality’ (as conceived by Foucault), regarding the order of discourse of school mathematics. In what follows this point is discussed in depth.

We examined the similarities and specificities of PEA and MST mathematics education in their competing pedagogies. It was focused on the discussion of mathematical language games proposed by PEA and by MST to the Brazilian rural schools’ curriculum. Specifically we paid attention to those language games practiced in rural forms of life associated with geometry and those taught at MST schools and PEA pedagogical guidelines. Moreover, we examined how PEA and MST shaped the relationship between peasant knowledge and school mathematics. Their approaches differed and for both it was important to take peasant language games into account in the schooling processes. However, for PEA, knowledge was only the point of departure for school mathematics. In turn, for MST, the peasant mathematics language games were taught at their schools as part of their struggles, which included not only a higher quality education but the struggle for land and for a more just society. In fact, the analysis of the booklets used by PEA teachers and their students showed tensions between what was expressed in the pedagogical guidance and in the didactical resources given to the teachers. The pedagogical guidance of these booklets indicated the importance of valuing the local knowledge of the communities to which multigrade schools belonged, as shown by two of the objectives defined for school mathematics ‘to construct, by interaction with the physical/social environment, knowledge on numbers and their uses, numerical system and operations, on measures and geometry; to seek in the community, in the tradition and characteristics of the peasant culture to inform learning’ (Alves, 2010, p. 10).

The emphasis given in these guidelines to the pedagogical use of the students’ experiences as the point of departure deserves further analysis. We are led to think that, on the one hand the valuing of language games of the community form of life was emphasized; on the other hand there was an indication of ‘extrapolating the numerical knowledge which is predominant in their region’ (Alves, 2010, p. 10). The use of the term ‘point of departure’ is associated with this extrapolation which ultimately positions these games as hierarchically inferior (Knijnik, 2007).

Here it is important to problematize the operation of bringing the mathematical language games of non-school forms of life into the curriculum. In the pedagogical guidelines of PEA for school mathematics, these people’s knowledge—specific, regional, local knowledge—was considered a point of departure to achieve the ‘universally accepted’ mathematics, acknowledged as science. As such it maintained a ‘systemic organization governed by rules and principles and the use of standards that render it universal’ (Alves, 2010, p. 10). In the mathematics booklets used by the students, it is interesting to observe how this evolutionary approach operated: in the first (addressed to the first grade students), knowledge about the peasant form of life was mentioned (even if marginally); in the last booklet (addressed to the fifth grade students) there was no mention of other knowledge besides school mathematics. We are led to think that this was related

to enhancing a Platonic view marked by transcendence—universality and abstraction of mathematics—in opposition to the ethnomathematics perspective marked by contingency, the mathematics language games practiced in ‘rough soil’. According to Wittgenstein, ‘[...] it is necessary to return to the friction of rough soil (I.F. [*Philosophical Investigations*] §107) of the social practices and then establish the criteria of our rationality’ (Condé, 2004, p. 29).

We considered that there is tension between the pedagogical guidance given to teachers and the activities proposed for the PEA students. The documents emphasized that ‘it is important to pay attention so that the knowledges identified with the community will not be devalued’ (Alves, 2010, p. 9), and that it is necessary to deconstruct the idea that children know nothing of mathematics. ‘They acquire much information and construct informal mathematical knowledge in their daily play and experiences’ (2010, p. 18). Thus, ‘when beginning school a child already has many incipient, incomplete and informal mathematical notions. It is the teacher who should look at which and what type of experience they have and based on this plan and begin their work’ (2010, p. 11). However, the pedagogical resources made available to the students was evidenced above all by mathematics language games specific to the school form of life, whose grammar was marked by abstraction and formalism (Knijnik & Wanderer, 2010).

When we analyzed geometry in the mathematics booklets addressed to the PEA students, we found that the activities proposed did not take into account ‘the tradition and characteristics of peasants’, as indicated in the aforementioned guidelines for educators. For instance, mass, length and capacity measurements were approached using units such as kilogram, meter and liter, respectively—namely, the standard units of the decimal metric system imposed on the country from 1873 onwards (Santos & Knijnik, 2005). As discussed in another study (Knijnik, 2012), we can say that the mathematics language games involving non-official measurement units continued to be practiced. However the PEA students’ booklets hardly referred to these games, reinforcing the privileged position usually held by standard measures in school mathematics. If this happened, the activities using non-official units led the students to conclude that these were not the best units, since, differently from the decimal metric system, they were not precise. Thus, due to this imprecision, these measurement units should be used only as a point of departure to acquire the standard units.

However, since its beginning the guidelines for pedagogical practices developed at schools emphasized the relevance of using mathematical knowledge from peasant forms of life. In fact, the pedagogical principles of MST have so far constituted guidelines for the work developed in their schools, guidelines which have been very heterogeneously incorporated in the different educational instances of the movement. They configured a pedagogical trend rather than a closed set of principles. The documents stated that the purpose of teaching mathematics at the MST schools was to lead the students to learn how to: ‘solve the mathematical problems of their reality in the settlement, i.e., the calculations needed in everyday life, at home and at work, using money, measuring the land ...,’ and ‘helping their parents and other settlers to practice the mathematical knowledge they already have and to show them how they can further improve it’ (MST, 2005, p. 77).

Studies like those developed by Knijnik (1998, 2006, 2007) at MST schools sought to include these two dimensions: valuing knowledge about the peasant forms of life, without

taking them only as the point of departure in teaching mathematics. And they also emphasized the importance of teaching, at school, the knowledge that has been socially legitimized. Analyzing this point, the author (Knijnik, 2012) referred to mathematic language games of the landless form of life as marked by orality. She narrated an episode in which one of the MST teachers explained that ‘reckoning in one’s head is part of peoples’ lives, including those of children [...] when they begin school, they have already brought this way of reckoning with them’. Another teacher said: ‘I had a few students among those I worked with who had great skill at reckoning very fast, in their head, but they found it difficult to write it down. However, according to him, this did not matter, what mattered was that they knew how’. These excerpts provide an example showing that the pedagogical practices of the MST schools seek to ‘value the way these people live, the way they talk and also the way they do mathematics’ (Knijnik, 2012). According to the interviewees, this way of doing mathematics involves using different units of measure and reckoning in one’s head.

The interviews performed in Knijnik’s studies highlighted that the pedagogical practices of MST schools incorporated life in the community, because often the students bring to the classroom situations, problems that were solved there and returned to the community. Using the ideas of Wittgenstein, we were led to think that the set of language games that constitute the orality of the Landless peasant form of life presents strong family resemblances to those that shape school mathematics. Possibly these approaches occurred due to the fact that the MST school was organized, in the words of a Landless teacher, by the general principles of the school, which was a peasant school promoting the general values of human person development, working in integration with the community.

The author (Knijnik, 2012) mentioned that an interviewee reinforced this idea, saying that ‘school seeks to enhance what the people know [...] the way they talk and also their way of doing mathematics, in other words, the way they calculate, they measure [...]’. As to the measures of length used in his pedagogical practice, he said that ‘most of our people are not carpenters, but all know how to build a hut [...]. Most people [in the settlement] do not have a measuring tape and all of them build their huts. However, to measure they use: step, foot, handspan, cord, their own height, don’t they’. Nevertheless, the peasants know that ‘these ways of measuring require that one person does not measure a line, and another person another line, because there would be a difference’. Thus, according to them, ‘at school we also teach the meter, its multiples and submultiples because we believe that it is our task as teachers and also the school’s task’. Here it is worth highlighting that this rationale converges with MST oppositions to neoliberal economy subjected to the logic of the market, which is ‘the mechanism which best allocates resources in society. Planning ignores th[e] localistic character of knowledge’ (Olssena & Peters, 2005, p. 317).

In summary, this section highlighted elements to support the argument that there are significant differences between the PEA guidelines and Landless Pedagogy regarding school mathematics.

Conclusions

In this article, we examined PEA and Landless Pedagogy as educational projects that, in different ways, handle the conduct of teachers and students of Brazilian rural areas.

PEA is an educational policy addressed to so called ‘disadvantaged groups’, in this case, the small communities of rural areas with only a single (multigrade) school. We agree with Domenech and Mora-Ninci (2009, p. 159) in their argument that the World Bank very clearly mentions the importance of positioning groups like those we examined in this article as ‘disadvantaged’ ones, which represent ‘higher risks’. They must be identified and monitored in order to become object of compensatory programs. In their words:

The WB [World Bank] is interested in studying and monitoring these ethnic and cultural minorities with the purpose that they might be of help to economic development. This focus on indigenous communities should be understood as a way to deal with issues of development with the purpose of furthering capital expansion and opportunities. These communities have traditionally been outside the outskirts of the market and its emphasis is precisely to bring them inside the realm of capital. Furthermore, the focus on these communities is also due to their anticapitalist nature as they provide further motives for attention. (Domenech & Mora-Ninci, 2009, p. 159)

However, we showed that, also in its educational project, MST put itself in opposition to the World Bank recommendations. Agreeing with Leher (2009), we considered that MST work, together with other social movements in Latin America, ‘can create entirely new conditions’ for building a public education in opposition with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) neoliberal rationality. Nevertheless the author calls attention to ‘the alliance between educators and several sectors of the working class will have to face hegemonic policies that are being implemented, unifying dominant sectors and part of the forces that formerly combated neoliberal policies that nowadays are the operators of those same policies’ (Leher, 2009, p. 132).

The public policy implemented by the State for the peasant multigrade schools led the rural population to silence about current rural conflicts in the country. In accordance with what happens in the media, the PEA ultimately ‘naturalizes’ the ways of operating agribusiness as the best economic solution for agriculture in Brazil. More broadly, it ‘naturalizes’ the neoliberal logic to which it is submitted. The MST, in turn, organizes its struggles in opposition to this logic. It considers education as part of these struggles and, in this sense, seeks to give visibility, also at their schools, to the social, economic and political contradictions present today in the Brazilian rural spaces.

Mathematics education plays an important role in PEA and MST educational projects. As we discussed in the last section, for PEA, knowledge of the peasant forms of life were considered at school as only the ‘point of departure’ for the mathematics classes. This can be interpreted as a way of positioning the peasant forms of life as inferior to the urban ones. At the MST schools, this incorporation was seen as part of the struggle for an education that values local knowledge, without classifying them regarding the knowledge that is generally part of the school curriculum in Brazil and other countries aligned with the OECD guidelines. By analyzing the school mathematics education of the two educational projects currently developed in multigrade peasant schools in Brazil, we sought to show how this area of the curriculum was part of the school machinery (Varela & Alvarez-Uria, 1992). As such, it helps constitute very specific meanings about education and society which are/will be incorporated by students, teachers and more broadly, the rural population.

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