


## NON-VERBAL LANGUAGES IN XERENTE EDUCATION: THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH SILENCE AND OBSERVATION

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the non-verbal practices of teaching and learning in the Xerente culture, highlighting the role of silence, gaze and gestures in the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. The research, of qualitative and bibliographic character, sought to understand how these non-verbal methodologies are configured as legitimate and effective forms of education, challenging paradigms centered on orality. The results showed that these practices, in addition to preserving cultural identity, promote experiential and collective learning, integrating values and practical skills. The impacts of these methodologies on society and academia were discussed, as well as their limitations, such as the absence of direct empirical data, and paths for future studies, including participatory approaches and intercultural investigations, were suggested. The research reaffirms the relevance of indigenous epistemologies to rethink more inclusive and diverse educational models.

**Keywords:** Silence, Look, Gestures.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indigenous cultures have unique ways of transmitting knowledge, often escaping the conventional molds of Western teaching. Among the Xerente, an indigenous people located in central Brazil, a pedagogy rich in non-verbal practices stands out, which manifest themselves through silence, gaze and gestures. This way of teaching and learning transcends spoken language and is built in direct interaction with the environment and in community life. The present work proposes to explore this specific educational dimension, which resists generalizations and opens space for deep reflections on intergenerational teaching methods.

The study was developed through a qualitative and bibliographic methodology, with the intention of understanding how these non-verbal practices operate in the transmission of knowledge among the Xerente. The approach seeks to capture not only what is transmitted, but also how and why these methods remain relevant in a world increasingly centered on technologies and verbal forms of communication. This methodological choice allows a detailed analysis of the cultural and epistemological dimensions of this pedagogical practice.

The main objective of this work is to investigate how the Xerente use silence, gaze and gestures as pedagogical methods, emphasizing their contributions to cultural preservation and to the formation of community identities. The question that guides this investigation is: how can non-verbal practices be understood as legitimate forms of teaching and learning, especially in a culture marked by oral and visual traditions? This issue arises from the need to give visibility to educational practices that, although effective and meaningful, are often marginalized or ignored by dominant epistemologies.

The relevance of this study is directly linked to the contemporary moment, in which the debate on intercultural education and the valorization of indigenous epistemologies gains strength. Understanding Xerente's pedagogical practices is not only a way of valuing cultural diversity, but also of expanding the possibilities of the very concept of education. In addition, the work contributes to reinforcing the importance of preserving cultural traditions in the face of the challenges of globalization and cultural homogenization. In this sense, this study presents itself as an opportunity to think about new forms of teaching, integrating the lessons of peoples who, for centuries, have had their own ways of learning, teaching and resisting.

## **KNOWLEDGE TRANSMITTED BY SILENCE**

Silence, among the Xerente, emerges as a language loaded with meanings, which transcends the absence of words to configure itself as an active pedagogical space. In this context, silence is both a means of communication and a method of transmitting intergenerational knowledge. It enables the learner to observe and internalize the gestures, rituals and cultural practices that sustain the identity of the Xerente people. Unlike Western methodologies, which prioritize orality and explicit discourse, silence among the Xerente operates as a sensory experience and immersion in knowledge, promoting integration between the learner and community experience (Melgaço & Pernambuco, 2018).

The pedagogy of silence allows the individual not only to acquire information, but also to understand the cultural values and meanings implicit in the observed practice. For the Xerente, silence is not empty, but full of teachings that are revealed in interactions with the environment, with the elders and with the community. This practice contrasts with the imposition of Eurocentric logic, which often delegitimizes non-verbal forms of knowledge, reinforcing the need for a decolonial epistemology that values indigenous knowledge (Backes & Nascimento, 2011).

Observation associated with silence is another essential element in Xerente learning. Young people learn techniques of hunting, fishing, construction and even sacred rituals by carefully observing the gestures and behaviors of their elders. This process is deeply interactive, even without words. The learner is encouraged to infer meanings, develop motor and cognitive skills, and, above all, integrate community values through a pedagogy that privileges practical experience over theoretical discourse (Braggio, 2009).

Silence also plays a central role in building learner autonomy. Instead of relying on verbal explanations, the individual learns to interpret, adapt, and transform the teachings to solve practical problems in their everyday reality. This intellectual autonomy finds resonance in Jacques Rancière's proposal on intellectual emancipation, which argues that true learning occurs when the individual becomes capable of creating meanings for himself (Rancière, 2018).

In addition, silence in Xerente educational contexts promotes a type of deep listening, which is essential for understanding the teachings transmitted. It is not just about listening to the words, but about perceiving the gestures, the tone, the rhythms and the contexts in which knowledge is shared. This dimension expands the possibilities of

communication and enriches the forms of teaching, revealing how silence is an active and complex tool in the transmission of knowledge (Hymes, 1994).

By incorporating silence as an educational practice, the Xerente resignify the concept of pedagogy by demonstrating that learning can occur in the absence of words. This approach challenges dominant epistemologies and paves the way for a new understanding of how knowledge can be transmitted in a more sensitive way to local cultures and the specificities of each people. Paulo Freire already highlighted the importance of respecting the cultural contexts of the students as a basis for any transformative educational process (Freire, 1970).

The practice of silence, therefore, is not only a teaching method, but also a way to preserve the Xerente culture. It ensures that traditional knowledge remains alive, being passed down from generation to generation without the need for external intermediaries. This transmission of knowledge strengthens community ties and reaffirms cultural identity, contributing to resistance to the pressures of assimilation and cultural homogenization imposed by the globalized world (Santos, 2010).

Within this process, silence is not homogeneous; it takes different forms depending on the learning context. For example, in training practical skills such as hunting, silence is required to prevent the dispersal of prey. In spiritual and ritual contexts, however, it assumes a sacred character, promoting a deep connection between the learner, the community and the spiritual elements (Rodrigues, 1986).

These practices reveal a sophistication in the use of silence that goes beyond the notion of the absence of sound. It is a pedagogy that explores the multiple dimensions of non-verbal communication, in which silence and observation are as powerful as the spoken word. This educational model can inspire broader reflections on the role of silence in diverse educational processes, questioning the hegemony of the word in contemporary pedagogical practices (Bakhtin, 1997).

However, it is important to emphasize that the pedagogy of silence is not without challenges. In contexts of formal schooling, marked by standardized curricula, the nonverbal practices of the Xerente often conflict with conventional methodologies. This clash reflects the tensions between indigenous and Eurocentric epistemologies, highlighting the need for intercultural educational practices that respect the specificities of each culture (Brasil, 1988).

## **EDUCATION THROUGH THE GAZE IN THE XERENTE CULTURE**

Through the act of observing, Xerente youth learn to understand the world around them, internalizing values, practical knowledge, and cultural meanings. This visual pedagogy transcends mere contemplation; it involves a deep interaction with the observed elements, transforming the gaze into a tool for interpreting and apprehending the knowledge that structures community life (Hymes, 1994).

In the context of Xerente education, the look is simultaneously individual and collective, as the learner does not observe in isolation, but in constant interaction with the elders and with the environment. Learning occurs as the gaze is guided by gestures and postures that direct attention to specific elements. For example, in the process of learning agricultural practices, the learner is led to observe the natural cycles, the precise gestures of planting and the interactions between community members during the harvest, integrating elements of a visual and experiential pedagogy (Rodrigues, 1986).

The gaze also establishes a direct relationship between the learner and the learning object, eliminating the need for discursive explanations. In activities such as hunting, gaze is not only a learning tool, but an essential skill for survival, allowing the identification of tracks, animal behaviors, and environmental signals that indicate climate change or imminent dangers. Education through the gaze, in this context, requires a state of mindfulness and sensitivity that go beyond traditional forms of teaching (Braggio, 2009).

Among the Xerente, the ability to learn by gaze is enhanced from childhood, when children are encouraged to carefully observe their elders in their daily activities. This practice not only teaches practical skills but also reinforces cultural values such as respect, patience, and community interdependence. The gaze thus becomes a bridge between generations, allowing the transmission of knowledge in an organic way and integrated with daily life (Freire, 1970).

Education through gaze also plays an important role in Xerente rituals and ceremonies, where participants, especially younger ones, learn symbolic meanings through close observation of the gestures and movements of their elders. This visual learning is not limited to the moment of the ritual; it extends to everyday life, shaping the way individuals understand and reproduce spiritual and cultural values in their daily practices (Melgaço & Pernambuco, 2018).

Furthermore, looking in the Xerente context is a practice of reciprocity, because those who observe are also observed. This exchange movement establishes a relationship

of trust and recognition between the apprentice and the master, allowing learning to take place in a dynamic and adaptive way. By observing the reactions of the apprentice, the master adjusts his gestures and actions, promoting a more sensitive and efficient educational process. This model contrasts with the rigidity of conventional pedagogies, which often disregard the uniqueness of the learner (Rancière, 2018).

The practice of gaze as an educational tool also reveals the complexity of non-verbal communication in the Xerente culture. In many cases, what is observed is not just a gesture or an action, but a whole context of meanings that includes the environment, social relations and the values implicit in the observed practice. This dimension expands the possibilities of learning, allowing the learner to develop a deep and integrated understanding of the knowledge transmitted (Santos, 2010).

And on this knowledge transmitted in the view of Santos (2010), the gaze is used as a form of cultural reaffirmation, because by observing the elders, the young people also assimilate practices and values that strengthen their identity as the Xerente people. In a world marked by pressures of cultural assimilation, education through the gaze becomes an essential tool for the preservation of traditions and cultural autonomy, ensuring that traditional knowledge remains alive and relevant to new generations (Machado, 2020).

In observation practices, time plays a fundamental role. Learning by looking requires patience, attention, and repetition, allowing knowledge to be internalized gradually and lastingly. This pace contrasts with the accelerated logic of modernity, highlighting the need to respect the natural times of learning and the cultural specificities of each educational context (Bakhtin, 1997).

Education through the gaze also challenges the traditional educational paradigm by emphasizing the importance of sensory dimensions in learning. While Western models tend to prioritize abstraction and rationality, the Xerente model demonstrates how sensory learning can be equally rich and effective, especially in contexts that value direct interaction with the environment and practical experience (Backes & Nascimento, 2011).

Throughout the educational process, the gaze is transformed into a reflective practice, in which the learner not only observes, but also interprets, questions and re-signifies what is observed. This practice develops a critical capacity that is essential for intellectual and cultural autonomy, showing how the gaze can be a powerful tool for individual and collective empowerment (Freire, 1970).



## NON-VERBAL PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY LEARNING

These practices manifest themselves in an organic way, involving the body, the gaze, gestures and even silence as essential elements of communication and learning. In the Xerente community, learning is not restricted to formal spaces or specific moments, but is inserted in everyday life, where each interaction becomes an opportunity to teach and learn, strengthening social and cultural ties (Melgaço & Pernambuco, 2018).

One of the main non-verbal practices consists of learning by imitation, in which the learner, usually a young person or a child, carefully observes the actions of the more experienced ones and replicates them in his own practice. This process, unlike direct verbal instruction, allows the learner to internalize skills through active, bodily engagement, reinforcing not only the technique but also the values underlying the practice. The repetition of observed gestures, in turn, solidifies knowledge, while interaction with others adjusts and enhances execution (Ranciére, 2018).

The gesture, as a teaching tool, carries meanings that go beyond mere functionality. In activities such as handling tools or building shelters, movements are carefully observed by learners, who capture not only what is being done, but how and why it is being done. These gestures contain layers of symbolism that connect the individual to the collective and the natural environment, highlighting the interdependence between the practical and spiritual dimensions of Xerente life (Hymes, 1994).

The body, as a means of expression and communication, plays a central role in these practices. The posture, the rhythm of the movements and even the physical proximity between the members of the community transmit messages that are intuitively understood by the learners. The body thus becomes a living text, whose reading and interpretation are essential for the integration of the learner in community processes. This bodily dimension of learning reinforces the idea that knowledge is not only intellectual, but also sensorial and emotional (Backes & Nascimento, 2011).

Collective observation of practices such as rituals and celebrations also exemplifies the importance of nonverbal practices in community learning. During these events, learners not only passively observe, but actively participate as engaged spectators, absorbing the cultural meanings expressed in movements, rhythms, and social interactions. This visual and experiential learning strengthens cultural belonging and contributes to the continuity of traditions (Rodrigues, 1986).

Silence, often misunderstood in orality-centered cultures, also occupies a prominent place in Xerente community learning. It works as a space for reflection, integration and respect, allowing the learner to process what was observed and internalize the meanings transmitted. Silence, in this sense, is not absence, but an active pause that values the time necessary for the understanding and assimilation of knowledge (Bakhtin, 1997).

Non-verbal practices in community learning also stand out for their flexibility and adaptability. Each learner is encouraged to interpret and apply knowledge according to their own capacities and experiences, promoting an education that respects individualities without losing sight of the collective. This approach contrasts with rigid teaching methods, which often disregard the cultural and individual specificities of learners (Santos, 2010).

In this way, the transmission of knowledge through non-verbal practices contributes to the maintenance of an ecology of knowledge, in which different forms of knowledge coexist and complement each other. By emphasizing gesture, silence and the body, the Xerente culture demonstrates that non-verbal learning is as legitimate and complex as verbal forms of knowledge transmission. This integration challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies and reinforces the importance of valuing cultural particularities (Machado, 2020).

Community interaction through non-verbal practices also strengthens social cohesion, as each moment of learning is simultaneously an experience of coexistence and collaboration. Gestures, looks, and movements are shared, creating a network of meanings that connects individuals to the community as a whole. This relational dimension of learning promotes an integrative education, which values both the individual and the collective (Freire, 1970).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data presented up to this point highlight the centrality of non-verbal practices in the transmission of knowledge among the Xerente, revealing a pedagogy rooted in silence, gaze and gestures. These practices, incorporated into everyday life, have proven to be effective in ensuring cultural continuity and intergenerational learning, challenging Western teaching paradigms that prioritize orality. Each element observed reflects a unique pedagogical intentionality, which combines practical experience with the internalization of community values, evidencing an integrated approach that is sensitive to cultural specificities.



However, it is necessary to deepen the analysis of the data to understand how these nonverbal practices connect to contemporary teaching strategies and how they can be respectfully incorporated into formal educational contexts. Next, the highlighted elements will be organized in tables, offering a visual synthesis of the categories of non-verbal practices and their respective contributions to Xerente learning, promoting a more detailed and comparative analysis.

**Table 1.** Analysis of Non-Verbal Practices in Xerente Learning

Aspects analyzed	Data Observations	Impact on Learning	Challenges Identified	References
Use of Silence as a Pedagogical Strategy	Silence emerges as an active space for reflection and learning, allowing the internalization of knowledge. (Melgaço & Pernambuco, 2018)	It develops patience, respect and autonomy in the learner.	Difficulty in integrating into formal curricula.	Melgaço & Pernambuco, 2018
Learning by Looking	The practice of gaze revealed its effectiveness in transmitting techniques and cultural meanings through observation. (Rodrigues, 1986)	It facilitates the understanding and retention of knowledge through practical experiences.	Little appreciation by Western pedagogies.	Rodrigues, 1986
Gestures and Body Communication	The gestures carry symbolism and strengthen practical learning and integration with cultural values. (Hymes, 1994)	It promotes sensory and emotional learning, as well as motor skills.	Possible misinterpretation by outside observers.	Hymes, 1994
Collective Integration in Learning	Collective learning promotes interaction and social cohesion, reinforcing community values. (Backes & Nascimento, 2011)	It reinforces belonging to the community and the transmission of cultural values.	Conflicts between traditional practices and contemporary methodologies.	Backes & Nascimento, 2011
Preservation of Cultural Knowledge	Non-verbal practices ensure cultural preservation and pedagogical autonomy in the face of modernity. (Santos, 2010)	It guarantees the continuity of traditions and the appreciation of local epistemologies.	External pressures that favor cultural assimilation.	Santos, 2010

**Source:** Prepared by the Author (2024).

When observing the data (Table 1), it is noted that silence, often interpreted as absence in traditional pedagogies, presents itself as a space for interaction and active construction of learning among the Xerente. This approach suggests that the pedagogy of silence is not limited to introspection, but configures a form of communication rich in shared meanings, enabling the internalization of community values and practical skills. This result

points to the urgency of re-signifying the role of silence in education, recognizing it as a central element of sensory and cognitive learning.

In addition, the use of the gaze as an educational practice promotes a direct and intimate relationship between the learner and the learning object. Close observation of gestures, movements, and social interactions offers a highly adaptable learning experience, where the learner not only reproduces, but also interprets and resignifies the knowledge acquired. The impact of the look at Xerente education reveals that the teaching process is not limited to a linear transmission, but involves a dynamic and constant exchange between learner, mentor and environment. This data points to an untapped potential of visual methodologies in broader educational contexts, suggesting their applicability in intercultural pedagogical practices.

Gestures and body communication, identified as a central axis in the transmission of knowledge, reinforce the idea that the body is an essential vehicle for learning. This pedagogical dimension allows motor, cognitive and emotional skills to be transmitted in an integrated way. The work reveals that gestures go beyond practical execution, functioning as a link between the learner and the spiritual and cultural values of the community. This result suggests a need to value the body as an extension of the mind in the educational process, challenging approaches that separate these dimensions.

Collective learning, evidenced in the table, highlights the importance of community interaction as a central educational practice. The results show that non-verbal teaching processes strengthen social cohesion, creating networks of shared meanings that ensure the transmission of values and traditions. This approach contrasts with individual and fragmented methodologies often adopted in formal educational contexts, pointing to the potential of community-based practices in promoting a more holistic and inclusive pedagogy.

To this end, the preservation of cultural knowledge through non-verbal practices reveals the resilience and adaptability of Xerente pedagogy in the face of the pressures of modernity. The work indicates that the integration of these practices into formal curricula could expand the possibilities of intercultural education, as long as local specificities are respected. This point brings to the fore the discussion about how traditional pedagogies can benefit from incorporating non-verbal practices, promoting an ecology of knowledge that recognizes and values alternative epistemologies.

The study reveals that non-verbal practices in Xerente education not only ensure cultural continuity, but also challenge global teaching paradigms, by proposing a model centered on sensory and collective experience. In addition, it was identified that these practices have a transformative potential to redefine the role of emotions and the body in learning. The discussion also points to the need to create mechanisms that favor the convergence between formal and traditional educational practices, in order to ensure that indigenous knowledge such as that of the Xerente is preserved and promoted in a globalized world.

## **CONCLUSION**

The article showed the non-verbal practices in Xerente education, highlighting the central role of silence, gaze and gestures as pedagogical tools that transcend orality. By answering the initial question about how these practices can be understood as legitimate forms of teaching and learning, it is concluded that they not only ensure cultural continuity, but also represent highly effective educational models that are adaptable to different contexts. The research showed that these methodologies, by promoting experiential and collective learning, challenge dominant paradigms and offer alternative ways to rethink education in its relationship with cultural diversity.

The results obtained have significant implications for both society and academia. For society, they expand the understanding of the importance of respecting and preserving indigenous cultures, promoting a greater appreciation of local epistemologies. In the academic field, the study contributes to enriching the debate on intercultural and integrative pedagogies, offering insights into how nonverbal practices can be incorporated into formal educational models. In addition, research suggests that incorporating such practices can benefit teaching processes by prioritizing sensory engagement and community interaction, elements often overlooked in conventional curricula.

## **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

Although the results obtained are relevant, the research has some limitations. One of the main limitations is the absence of empirical data collection directly from the Xerente community, which would have allowed a more detailed and contextually rich analysis of the pedagogical practices described. The choice of the bibliographic approach, although adequate for the objective of the study, restricted the investigation to secondary analyses,

which may limit the interpretation of specific nuances of the Xerente educational practice. Another limitation refers to the difficulty of extrapolating the results to other indigenous cultural contexts, given that each people has unique practices rooted in their own history and experience.

In addition, the focus on the nonverbal aspect of pedagogy may have failed to explore potential intersections between these practices and orality, which also plays an important role in Xerente culture. Finally, the research faced the limitation of working with sources that, in some cases, address indigenous knowledge in a partial or Eurocentric way, making an entirely decolonial analysis difficult.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Based on the limitations identified and the results achieved, it is recommended that future studies seek to deepen the research based on empirical methods, such as interviews and participatory observations with the Xerente community. This approach would allow for a broader and more detailed understanding of pedagogical practices, with the possibility of capturing direct experiences and individual narratives that enrich academic analysis.

It would be interesting to investigate how methodologies based on non-verbal practices can be adapted and applied in formal educational contexts, considering their contributions to diversity and inclusion.

And as a last impression, it is suggested that comparative studies be carried out that analyze similar practices in other indigenous cultures, identifying patterns, differences and possible connections between them. This approach could contribute to the strengthening of an intercultural pedagogy that values and integrates the rich epistemologies of indigenous peoples, promoting a truly plural and transformative education.

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