

## RURAL EDUCATION IN THE AMAZONIAN AMAZON AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF RURAL WORKERS



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### ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of a research on rural education in the Amazon and highlights the understanding of rural workers from union organizations operating in Amazonian cities, forest spaces and riverside communities. This is an excerpt from the master's research in education. The objective is to analyze rural education, its problems, experiences and specificities in Amazonian municipalities from the perspective of the Federation of Agricultural Workers and the Unions of Rural Workers. The research methodology included bibliographic and documentary surveys and fieldwork. Rural education was investigated based on the educational and sociocultural experiences of men and women who experience the local reality, its problems and its specificities. Education is problematized from the Amazonian reality in the spaces of the countryside, forests and waters. The research showed that public policies for rural education must be able to contemplate the knowledge, cultures and education of the Amazonian peoples as a way of valuing cultural diversity and identity processes. The study shows the process of understanding union organizations and their participation in the construction of public policies aimed at the local reality. It was found that the idea of field in the Amazonian Amazon is expanded in the dynamics of the various forms of organization of Amazonian life, which implies the recognition of different subjects and the appreciation of their knowledge and cultures. Rural education policies present significant elements and practices in this direction.

**Keywords:** Rural education, Trade union organizations, Rural workers, Amazon.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article<sup>2</sup> presents an excerpt from the research of a master's dissertation<sup>3</sup> in education developed at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). It aims to present the understanding of rural education in the Amazon, considering the Amazonian context. The study was based on the understanding, struggles and experiences of rural workers who are members of the Federation of Agricultural Workers (FETAGRI) and the Rural Workers Unions (STR's).

Rural Education, formerly known as Rural Education, has been built in recent years and has taken on a new approach to understanding based on the action of popular social movements and trade union organizations that have guided their agendas by the struggle for rural education, taking on another social, political, cultural and educational dimension.

Rural education, built by peasant and popular movements, takes on dimensions that surpass the well-known rural education. Rural education, historically constructed by different institutions, reinforced the role of the State by adapting to and reproducing the interests of capital, where the rural should serve the interests of the city and the urban. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that in rural areas, school delay is configured in a discriminatory way, compromising the dynamics of permanence in school and the quality of education. It can be seen, therefore, that the trajectory of rural education in Brazil has been marked by great contradictions.

On the other hand, it is understood that building a rural school is to guarantee the right to education to the rural man in the place where he lives, without having to go to the city in search of this right. Arroyo (2004, p.100) states that "what is most impressive in the data on Rural Education is the historical vulnerability of this right. They are denied the right to education or are guaranteed the minimum of the minimum for one reason only: to live in the countryside."

Rural education is a concept that is not closed in on itself, since it incorporates the very dynamics of social movements and emancipatory educational practices, linked to the

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<sup>3</sup> CAMPOS, Raimundo Sidnei dos Santos. Rural education: perspectives, dilemmas and perspectives of rural workers of FETAGRI in the state of Amazonas. Master's thesis. Graduate Program in Education, UFAM, 2007. Available at: <https://tede.ufam.edu.br/handle/tede/9902>

project of social justice. Concretely, it is a field that dialogues with cultural complexity, that creates a totality of relationships, that takes on its own forms from multiple contexts.

Rural education represents a conception of education, of the countryside and of society. In Brazil, the different social and trade union movements in the countryside played a significant role in the process of building the public policy for rural education articulated with other public policies aimed at the project of development of the countryside and peasant lives.

Historically, the movement of struggle for public policies in this education has gained greater expression from the achievements and contributions of the movements of landless rural workers, who in turn have played a leading role in pedagogical practices of popular education, constituting a pedagogy of the social movement that, due to its pedagogical, political and social principles, is in direct opposition to the model of rural education.

The education of rural men and women has assumed specific relevance in the area of education and public education policies. Thus, considering the Amazonian context, it can be said that thinking about rural education in this region leads to many concerns, especially due to the specificities of the spaces of the forests and waters and the sociocultural diversities of different indigenous subjects, farmers, fishermen, extractivists, riverside dwellers, settlers and many others.

An approximation with the educational processes of the countryside in the Amazon implies considering the complexity of the region, the sociocultural diversity and the multiple manifestations of identity. It also implies considering that the history of education shows that the colonizers imposed their culture, customs and ideologies on the people who lived in the Brazilian territory. Since the colony, the education of the Amazonian peoples as well as their culture has been denied and stereotyped.

It follows that the problems and particularities of Amazonian education have occupied a marginal place in the scenario of educational policies, which has resulted in biased educational projects, which are not able to overcome the existing school deficit in the region, nor do they respond to the identity process of the Amazonian. On the other hand, the sociocultural processes that emerge from the Amazonian context show a rich sociodiversity that official education needs to take into account in the formulation of educational policies and strategies. This is because Amazonian education reveals the Amazonian way of life and includes indigenous knowledge and traditional popular knowledge produced by different cultures with specific social meanings.

This diverse and specific way of social life is a cultural and social expression of peoples who live and coexist in an intimate relationship with the land, with the river, with the forest, in lowland and upland regions, in settlements, in indigenous communities, quilombolas, that is, in different places, with different ways of being and coexisting. This results in multiple educational and intercultural processes, new forms of subjectivity and knowledge. Knowledge that, most of the time, is not valued by the school system.

The countryside in the Amazon has its specificities. It is a social and cultural space that incorporates diverse contexts, specific ways of living and different subjects. In this sense, the research is guided by the formulation of the following problem: do public policies for rural education contemplate the particularities, needs and educational reality of the men and women who live in the countryside, the forest and the waters in the context of the Amazon?

From this perspective, other guiding questions were dismembered from the research problem pointed out, namely: what is the concept of field that applies in the Amazon, specifically in Amazonas?; what is the conception of rural education that is present in the understanding of the men and women who live in the Amazon?; And, finally, what conception of rural education permeates the formulation of these public policies elaborated with the participation of popular social movements and trade unions?

This article presents as its main concern to analyze rural education in the Amazonian context, seeking to understand the vision of social movements in the countryside, the forest and the waters. In this way, it seeks to discuss elements of the conceptions that underlie the understanding of rural education, addressing aspects of this education in the Amazonian context, evidencing problems and specificities in the light of the understanding of the union movements and organizations researched.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research was developed from the focus of the historical materialist dialectic, having been carried out a bibliographical, documentary and fieldwork study. The approach was quantitative-qualitative. The bibliographic survey pointed to an approach to rural education based on a political-pedagogical conception not limited only to the geographical space, which due to its political, social and pedagogical foundations surpasses in terms of public policies the education known as rural.

Education and its relations with the rural environment were analyzed from a perspective of totality and from a critical view, enabling a contextualized approach. Interviews were conducted with workers who are leaders of FETAGRI and the Rural Workers' Unions (STR's) who participated directly in actions related to rural education issues in the municipalities of Amazonas, at the regional and national levels. The research took as subjects the representatives of rural workers in the State of Amazonas, namely: 7 (seven) active members of FETAGRI as directors and 16 (sixteen) representatives of STR's.

FETAGRI is an entity affiliated to the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) and at the time of the survey had 43 affiliated STR's. The informants are representatives and leaders of FETAGRI made up of active leaders, former licensed leaders, community leaders, representatives of STR's, members of collegiate bodies linked to education, subjects directly involved with the problem of rural education in Amazonas and with experience in the organized union movement.

The field research consisted of interviews and observations. It was developed with a significant sample of FETAGRI-AM leaders and representatives of STR's-AM from the capital and other municipalities in the state.

The universe of the research comprised the FETAGRI and the STR's of 19 municipalities in the state, making a total of 17 STR's, given that the STR of Manaus also incorporated the municipalities of Careiro da Várzea and Iranduba. The research had as subjects 23 union leaders, 7 of whom were leaders of FETAGRI and 16 representatives of STR's, involving a total of 17 STRS belonging to 19 municipalities of Amazonas.

Thus, 23 workers' representatives were interviewed, distributed as follows: 7 (seven) active members of FETAGRI, 4 (four) men and 3 (three) women. 16 representatives of the STR were also interviewed, 13 men (81.25%) and 3 women (18.75%). In all, 17 STRs were consulted, including those that make up FETAGRI, representing 39.53% of the 43 STRs officially existing in the State of Amazonas. Of the total of 23 interviewees, 7 (30.44) were directors and 16 (59.56) representatives of the FETAGRI base.

The option for workers who were part of the direction and base of FETAGRI-AM was born from the concern for understanding the conception and experiences of rural workers, often forgotten or silenced. From the experience lived by the workers, their looks, desires and concerns and about the policies of rural education, their participatory forms in the

educational and socio-political process. It can be considered that the respondents are rural workers, most of whom were born in the fields, are the children of farmers and started farming as children, and the vast majority still live from farming.

Regarding the current participation in the unions and in the federation, the data are presented as follows: in the STRs surveyed, all the 16 (sixteen) workers interviewed participate in the community, although for some this participation is more effective than for others. As for FETAGRI, all workers of this federation develop any type of participation in the community. However, for some the participation is more intense in the union and for others in the community; for others, participation is occasional both in the community and in the union. The age range of the workers varies between 20 (twenty) and 65 (sixty-five) years of age.

The documentary survey consisted of the analysis of booklets, annals, documents, minutes and reports. Then, observations and visits were made to FETAGRI for six (6) months in an attempt to monitor the daily life of the trade unionist, his actions and relations with the community, partner agencies and base.

23 interviews were conducted with trade unionists, community leaders (non-unions), members of the associations, university professors who are linked to educational projects in the settlements were heard, residents of the settlements, fiscal councilors, women's associations and teachers from settlement areas were heard in order to learn about the educational problem from various perspectives, however it was counted for the purpose of quantitative and qualitative analysis only the formal interviews with 7 leaders active in FETAGRI and 16 representatives of STR'S that make up the base of the Federation.

## **RESULTS**

The research shows that rural education in the Amazonian Amazon in the understanding of workers makes explicit the vision of the field articulated with the concrete dynamics of social, political and cultural life. Not necessarily, a knowledge polished by formal schooling, but rather coined in popular struggles, practical experiences and resistance. It refers to the learning of daily life and life in various instances. It emerges from the vision of education based mainly on two perspectives, one that defines all education as school and the other that reveals education beyond the walls of the school.

It is evident that the research subjects reveal a critical understanding of education through the reading of reality and because of their experiences, which in our view, is largely



due to the experiences of the movements and organizations that participate. At the same time, each worker expresses his or her own conception of education and collectively shares a political and social project.

In the context of the research, a tendency was observed to break with the ideals of education present in most public policies of rural education, in which the starting point is a vision centered on the schooling of the worker, without, however, considering their multiple local needs, the nature of the place and its concrete particularities. Contradictions of these policies were evidenced in the educational care of men and women who live in/from the countryside and who produce much more than food, but also produce ideas and knowledge that need to be valued and taken as a basis for the formulation of public policies.

In the understanding of the respondents, the rural school needs to be transformed, as it has predominantly worked on content with an end in itself, not having the ability to dialogue coherently with the productive system, despite the law of guidelines and bases of national education and the operational guidelines for rural schools.

The school as it is (dis)organized in the rural environment has not yet been able to overcome the reproducivist logic of contents and implement a democratic, participatory and articulated training process with the other sectors that would promote qualitative changes in the way of doing education, even though it is known that education alone would not be able to change the life of the rural man. However, without it, transformation would not be possible, because without social and political awareness, no change would be truly emancipatory.

Education should be thought of as a strategy to keep man close to his place of origin, living with a family and guaranteeing his way of life, without having to be expelled from the countryside to the city in search of employment and better living conditions. A differentiated education for rural workers would undoubtedly increase opportunities. However, the insufficiency of school education and work in the countryside was a relevant concern of the representatives of rural workers who, even with these rural policies, have not yet been able to change reality.

Taking into account rural education, it is seen that the countryside is not reduced to just a geographical space, but is a field of struggle and construction of identities. The Amazonian reality, due to its social and territorial dynamics, is complex and diverse, in which the link with the countryside is not only due to the fact of living in the place, but also of belonging. In this specific context, the field is not only a physical space, but essentially

the place where men and women were born, live, work, struggle, resist, produce and die. The field is not restricted to the field in the Amazonian context. The countryside is the place of the forest and the space of the waters. The countryside is a pluriactive space linked to multiple cultures and places. It is a field of struggle, but first, it is a field of people and dreams.

In the study carried out, two field views were basically identified, one resulting from the view of the South of Brazil that is predominant and the other that carries more regional elements and brings with it other identity traits, including the Amazonian way of life. However, it is important to emphasize that these views are not antagonistic, but complementary. The idea of considering the countryside as a rural area was widely used by the interviewees, however, elements of the local geographic space, nature and Amazonian culture were revealed.

The countryside is the geographically determined place that shelters the riverside dwellers, who depend on the rivers for their subsistence, it also welcomes the idea of the extractivist men who live in the forest and all those who live in the settlements. The countryside was also conceived as a base, a space for political action, as a place and territory, as a rural area and as a field of work and production.

The research shows that the idea of field in Amazonas refers to the place characterized by local specificities, reinforcing one of the hypotheses of this research, which is based on an Amazonian conception of field both from the geographical point of view and in its sociocultural features, different from the south and midwest regions, a vision that is based on the culture and geography of the place, but also, in the idea of belonging to the Amazonian world. Current rural education policies, although they advance in many aspects, still do not conceive these aspects in their entirety.

The Amazonian countryside, therefore, appears as a space that welcomes riverside dwellers, extractivists, settlers, campers, family farmers and so-called traditional populations. Another striking characteristic present in the speech of the respondents is the idea of the field associated with productive activity, the swidden and the plantations. Another consideration concerns the fact that the settlement view implies an understanding of what is meant by field in the Amazon region. Some of the respondents treat this understanding very much within the union movement with the idea of traditional communities, which is a denomination aimed at identifying that the Amazon region has specificities and especially characteristics that are different from other regions.



## DISCUSSION

The concept of Education in/of the Countryside necessarily involves the understanding that one has of the countryside. In this sense, Fernandes (2005) helps to understand the construction of the concept of the countryside as territory, which is the place where the various forms of organization of the peasantry take place, as well as the forms of organization of capitalist agriculture, and other forms and productive processes that date from modes of production different from those that arrived with the arrival of Europeans to America.

In this sense, for Fernandes (2005, p.28-9) "[...] To think of the countryside as territory means to understand it as a space of life, or as a type of geographical space where all the dimensions of human existence are realized. [...]" . The field thought of in its broadest sense, in the case of the Amazonian context, has its own specificity and dynamics. It is undoubtedly a complex reality that incorporates different spaces, forms, subjects and cultures. It has its very peculiar temporality and spatiality. The reality is completely different and deserves a different treatment.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the study identified that some leaders surveyed used the term rural education as a synonym for rural education, making no distinction between both, even though they spoke of an education centered on the reality of rural men and women, which confirms the hypothesis that there is a lack of depth in the debate on the subject in the specific context of Amazonas.

From this perspective, it can be said that the idea of field and settlement in Amazonas has its own characteristics. Nature and the Amazonian man, due to their specificities, give the settlements a peculiar form from the relationship with the forest, the geographical aspect of the area where the person settles must be taken into account, as it implies preparation of the land for planting. Many settlers are riverside dwellers/fishermen, forest dwellers, men who live in their daily lives with the waters, with the forest. In the case of the settled Amazonian subjects, they are notably characterized by their identity and culture. This reflects a lot on their way of producing and relating to the land.

Another important argument to be put forward is the issue of territory and its cultural formation, as its place and way of life is decisive in the set of its relations and in the educational process as a whole. Thus, rural education is predominantly a peasant education with respect to its subjects. The legislation in this sense contemplates the different subjects who live in rural areas. On the other hand, going deeper into this

discussion, it seems strange to some to talk about peasants in the Amazon, but studies mention the Amazonian peasant. In this regard, Fraxe (2000, 2004) in his research identifies rural workers in the countryside as riverside dwellers, caboclos, family farmers, fishermen, men who live on the banks of rivers, lakes and streams in the Amazon. These social subjects she calls metaphorically amphibious men and sociologically peasants.

Witkoski (2007) uses the category of Amazonian peasant to refer sociologically to the riverside dweller, the rubber tapper, the quilombola, among other Amazonian subjects whose economic and cultural relations are drawn by the elements of the land, the forest and the waters, where they live and work with their families. In this sense, it corroborates the research, as it reveals that most of the respondents identified themselves as riverside dwellers, extractivists, indigenous, settlers, farmers, among others, as being the subjects who live in the countryside in the state of Amazonas, but this field includes the forests and riverine regions deeply linked to rivers and waters.

Caldart (2004) states that to think about rural education is to assume a vision of the totality of social processes, which in addition to being a pedagogical conception, is a conception of the field and a conception of a model of development of concrete and historically situated subjects. Caldart (2002) says that the rural education project reaffirms and dialogues with the pedagogy of the oppressed, that the oppressed are the subjects of their own education; This project also dialogues with the pedagogy of the movement, understanding the strongly educational dimension of people's participation in the social movement and also affirms itself as one of its specificities: the pedagogy of the land. Therefore, it is a matter of educating people as human subjects and as social and political subjects.

Gohn (2001) emphasizes that social movements have an educational character that is constructed and reconstructed in various ways, in various planes and dimensions that are articulated. According to the author, the education of the movement is built in the process of struggle and in daily social practice. It is a historical reconstruction that is based on the exercise of citizenship.

In the case of Amazonas, rural education encompasses the educational processes of riverine peoples and extractive peoples who live in the forest. On the other hand, it was clear that rural education is opposed to conventional education that was historically intended for rural men. Conventional education was restricted to schooling, without conceiving the subjects of the countryside from their own history and sociocultural context.

This resulted in the destruction of the identity of the rural man, as many do not value the countryside, but rather the city, the urban.

As for the Operational Guidelines of Rural Schools, the need to broaden the debate on these policies and their legal frameworks is identified, as it was found that the guidelines are being very little worked on in the context of the Amazonian context, which reinforces the initial hypothesis of this research. In fact, what we have, in our view, is a homogenization of issues and processes that are only understood in their specificity. Arroyo (2004) considers that the approval by the National Council of Education (CNE) of the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Rural Schools represents a significant step towards recognizing the specificity of the countryside and the need for specific policies to guarantee this right.

The historical conditions of the Amazonian peoples is a challenge to be treated with more attention when talking about public education policies. Education in the Amazon must be built from the specific, the local and the Amazonian culture. It cannot be forgotten that culture in the process of building the identity of the Amazonian people is a striking trait. It is therefore necessary to situate it in its relation to educational processes and in the whole of social relations. It is thus understood that the identity of the riverside dweller is built in his relationship with the river. The river is a space of identity, life and struggle for survival. In this sense, Araújo (2003, p.36) says that "[...] The directions of the waters of the rivers of the Amazon trace the course of their civilization."

Thus, it is important to understand that education is imbricated in the dynamics of everyday life. Everything is education, because in this relationship the values, the way of life and the feeling of belonging to the place are reaffirmed. To understand what the rural school is, it is essential to know that the social movements ended up dialectically resignifying rural education, transforming it into Rural Education. Caldart (2002, p.27) clarifies that "It is an education of and not for the subjects of the countryside."

## **CONCLUSION**

It sought to analyze aspects of rural education in the Amazon, from the reality of Amazonas in the understanding of rural workers working in the Federation of Agricultural Workers and in the Rural Workers Unions (STR's).

The survey pointed out weaknesses and strengths of rural education in Amazonas. The results indicated the effort made by the union movement to demand improvements in

education. However, it also showed contradictory relations in the practices of union organizations, especially in the articulation of micro and macro political issues.

Rural education in Amazonas is a complex theme and reveals particularities related to the Amazonian way of life. It was found that this is a process characterized by important cultural and social elements that reaffirm traits of Amazonian identities.

It was found that public policies for rural education have not yet fully incorporated the values and needs of the men and women who live in Amazonian spaces, which presupposes adaptations and new legal formulations. This is because the countryside in the Amazon is conceived as a more expanded and multifaceted space, which includes riverside and forest spaces.

On the other hand, it is understood that the social and trade union movement has developed a conception and practice of emancipatory education based on political and educational participation, not necessarily on the schooling process.

The conception of education in the countryside of Amazonas that permeates the pedagogical proposal of the trade union movement is basically based on the rescue of the knowledge and knowledge of riverside peoples, extractivists, artisans, farmers, indicating the valorization of local culture linked to their territory and their place. In this reality, the lack of teachers and their poor training, the lack of schools and their adequate equipment, the existence of multigrade classes, the curriculum outside the rural reality, the problem of school transportation, the lack and misuse of financial resources still persist.

Rural education in Amazonas, from the perspectives of the research subjects, reveals a critical reading of public educational policies in the local context and points to the need to know more about Amazonian education and culture. In this sense, this understanding teaches us that it is necessary, first of all, to cross the river and enter the forest to know the pedagogical power of the educational processes experienced in lands, waters and forests in the Amazonian Amazon, thus unveiling knowledge and practices associated with the social and cultural diversity of Amazonian men and women.

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