

HEALING ARTS WITH THE MEDICINE OF THE EARTH: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE OF RIVERSIDE WOMEN IN THE AMAZON OF TOCANTINS



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how riverside women from Ilha Téntem, in Cametá (PA), exercise their knowledge related to medicinal plants and build their identity through their cultural and ancestral experiences. Methodologically, in addition to the bibliographic research on traditional knowledge, medicinal plants and herbs, women and education, with emphasis on Freire (1987), Pinto (2004, 2010), Brandão (2017) and Pinto (2018), a qualitative research was undertaken with semi-structured interviews and free conversations with three riverside women. The collection of oral narratives evidenced the appreciation of cultural healing practices, demonstrating their autonomy in the daily use of home remedies to treat diseases in their community.

Keywords: Education. Knowledge. Healing Practices. Riverside Woman.

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how riverside women from Ilha Tétem, in Cametá (PA), exercise their knowledge related to medicinal plants and build their identity through their cultural and ancestral experiences. It also analyzes the hegemony of homogenizing educational models that disregard the historicity and experience of these women, holders of ancestral knowledge of healing. In addition, it seeks to understand the transmission, teachings and acquisition of this knowledge, exploring how they learn and apply the management of the earth's remedies.

When it comes to traditional knowledge of healing with medicinal plants, the resistance of empirical practice and the relationship of Amazonian women with the production of home remedies made from herbs and plants can be observed. Furthermore, there are still few records that value and recognize this trajectory from the perspective of cultural and socio-spatial practices (PINTO, 2010).

In this sense, Veiga-Neto (2012) reiterates the need to recognize our "basements", that is, the anxieties and motivations that direct the researcher in his investigation. It also highlights the relevance of building epistemological foundations that support our educational practices.

This aspect concerns the ancestral memory that we carry, intertwined with the experiences and marks of experience that constitute us. By revisiting them, one has the opportunity to locate, identify and recognize traces of what has been and continues to be part of our existence as a cultural practice.

For this, it is important to dialogue with the riverside women who participate in this study as interviewees, holders of knowledge and healing practices. His experience makes it possible to visualize such knowledge in the field of education. By valuing their healing practices with medicinal plants, it is feasible to draw the lines of these women's subjectivity and connect with the multiplicity representations that cross their experiences.

The study of the knowledge produced by these riverside women in their sociocultural daily life is significant to assimilate the pedagogical practice in the education of riverside students in their own territory. Everyday knowledge is linked to practice and the resolution of practical and immediate problems. Freire (1996) highlights that these relationships between students and the knowledge constructed in their daily lives are fundamental for the development of pedagogical practices.

Memory connects meanings to our social relations and, in this study, the oral memory of riverside women about medicinal plants emerges as a means of transmitting ancestral healing knowledge. This transmission occurs according to daily experiences shared between grandmothers, mothers and aunts. According to Pinto (2010), these women develop relationships of affection and solidarity that strengthen community ties on a daily basis.

Discussions about women from the Tocantina region, holders of healing knowledge with medicinal plants, have gained space in academia, allowing debates that rescue their stories, knowledge and daily experiences through oral narratives. This shows that the great achievements over time do not belong exclusively to patriarchy, which, for centuries, has positioned itself as the protagonist of history. Theoretical advances indicate a movement towards a society that rethinks the historical hegemony of knowledge, expanding the inclusion of the sociocultural representation of women, who have always occupied and demarcated their spaces.

During the field research, the richness of the contributions that this theme can provide to education was evidenced, in addition to its value in the historical construction of knowledge and socio-educational practices. The daily life and knowledge of the women interviewed are the core of this study, since their oral narratives, immersed in memories, experiences and experiences, reveal a cultural universe rich in details and knowledge, especially in healing practices. In the perspective of Pinto (2010, p. 106), "the practices and knowledge of these women have been consolidated over the years". In view of this, the riverside women in this study exercise the gift of healing with medicinal plants, a knowledge culturally transmitted between generations in the researched community.

To guide the study, methodologically, a bibliographic research was carried out with works by authors who address themes related to medicinal plants and herbs, women, traditional knowledge and education, highlighting: Freire (1987), Pinto (2004, 2010), Brandão (2017) and Pinto (2018). A qualitative research was also undertaken with a survey of oral sources, through life stories and experiences of women from Ten Island, in Cametá (PA), essential for the construction of this work. Thus, by following the paths of oral memory, chosen as the main source, a theoretical and methodological basis was sought in the study of Alessandro Portelli (1997), one of the authors specializing in Oral History, who elucidates the relevance and characteristics of these oral sources, by asserting that:

The precious element that oral sources have about the historian, and that no other source possesses in equal measure, is the subjectivity of the expositor. If the approach to the search is sufficiently broad and articulated, a contrary section of subjectivity can emerge. Oral sources tell us not only what the people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they have done (PORTELLI, 1997, p. 31).

Working with oral sources requires a significant approximation with the research subjects, whose reports carry unique experiences. The subjectivity present in these narratives is invaluable, since it reflects the experience of individuals and communities who, through the art of detail, weave their cultural representations, leaving their history, their legacy and cultural heritage.

The oral sources connect the research to human relationships, making it possible to learn from the stories and reports of the women who collaborate with this study. Pinto (2010) emphasizes that the work with Oral History establishes deep ties with the interviewees, bringing us closer to their trajectories and making their experiences part of the investigative process itself.

According to Portelli's (1997) analysis, which considers subjectivity as a central element of oral narratives, it is understood that the life stories of riverside women make it possible to follow the flow of memory and its resignifications over generations. This journey reveals how the knowledge related to medicinal plants was transmitted by their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, reinforcing the importance of this ancestral knowledge.

Memory, in this scenario, is resignified through language, which moves and promotes its cultural appreciation within the community. For this reason, the approach of oral narratives with these riverside women becomes essential, since their life stories cross social, cultural and religious dimensions of the population in which they are inserted, justifying the importance of analyzing these oral sources.

As a result, the research was articulated from a sociocultural and educational perspective, characterized as ethnographic, due to the historical significance of the practices established by the women interviewed; qualitative, by analyzing the subjectivity of these experiences; and participant, as it involves direct interaction with the investigated group. This route made it possible to immerse themselves in the community of Isla Téntem to understand the experiences of the participants and record their traditional knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE, LEADERSHIP AND RESISTANCE: RIVERSIDE WOMEN IN THE PRESERVATION OF HEALING PRACTICES

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF DONA MARIA DO CARMO MACIEL IN THE PROVISION OF BASIC HEALTH NEEDS IN THE COMMUNITY

The traditional knowledge of the use of medicinal plants and herbs is an ancestral practice integrated into the daily life of various societies. "In this way, plants are used as the only therapeutic resource of a portion of the Brazilian population and of more than 2/3 of the planet's population" (ARGENTA *et al.*, 2011, p. 52). This millennial traditional knowledge is an inseparable part of the identity of the riverside communities in the interior of the Amazon, carrying with it aspects of the culture of these peoples.

In this scenario of handling plants with therapeutic properties, women assume a prominent role, because, in line with Borges (2021), they are the ones who, most of the time, use plants and herbs to treat the disease in their communities.

Thus, the practice of popular culture of dealing with plants, in this case, has always been highlighted due to its therapeutic potentialities applied for centuries. Since then, health care has been developed, mainly, by women, who used and use medicinal plants and herbs to treat the health of the people in their family (BORGES, 2021, p. 123).

Thus, knowing, through Oral History, the experience of the residents of the Island of Téntem, their experiences and practices, is an enriching exercise that values their voices and recognizes the vast knowledge that these women have. The riverside dweller Mrs. Maria do Carmo Maciel, 50 years old, better known in the community of the Island of Téntem as Mrs. Duca, is a cheerful and authentic woman, with a singular laugh. Married and mother of four children, she is a great connoisseur of medicinal plants and produces several home remedies from them.

When approaching everyday activities, Mrs. Maria do Carmo identifies herself as a housewife and, occasionally, does some sewing for her acquaintances. In addition, she plays the role of coordinator of the Pastoral da Criança in the riverside community of Isla Téntem, a function of great relevance for the inhabitants of the region. Its leadership role is manifested in the constant action to meet the needs of its people.

Pinto (2010, p. 109) points out that "these women, by overcoming the condition of the 'fragile being' and 'passive', were able to construct the history of their own existences and their villages, through the typical strength arising from their personalities and their multiple forms of resistance". In this way, it is observed that Mrs. Maria do Carmo Maciel

(Mrs. Duca) assumes indispensable roles in maintaining the health care of the inhabitants of the community. To understand the different roles of Mrs. Duca, it is necessary to know a little about the Pastoral da Criança and its connection with the experience and practices of this woman in her locality.

Founded in 1983, in the city of Florestópolis, state of Paraná, by the sanitary doctor and pediatrician, Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann, and by the then Archbishop of Londrina, Dom Geraldo Majella Agnelo, the Pastoral da Criança has the following mission:

[...] to promote the development of children, in the light of the evangelical preferential option for the poor, from the mother's womb to the age of six, through basic health, nutrition, education and citizenship guidelines, based on the Christian mystique that unites faith and life, contributing to their families and communities to carry out their own transformation (WHO WE ARE, n.d.).

The Pastoral da Criança is a social action structure of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) according to Decree No. 05/2006 of the CNBB. Currently, he is part of the Episcopal Commission for Socio-Transformative Action of the Catholic Church, with the following activities:

[...] organization of the community and in the training of volunteer leaders who live there and assume the task of guiding and accompanying neighboring families in basic health, education, nutrition and citizenship actions with the objective of the "integral development of children, promoting, according to them, also their families and communities, without distinction of race, color, profession, nationality, sex, religious or political creed" (Article 2 of the Statute) (WHO WE ARE, n.d.).

Based on these assumptions, the Pastoral da Criança develops its actions through community organization and the training of leaders, who assume the function of guiding and accompanying neighboring families. Its main activities include the accompaniment of children from 0 to 6 years old and pregnant women, carried out by volunteer leaders who live in their own communities and become agents of social transformation.

Furthermore, the Pastoral acts "permanently and actively in the Social Control of Public Policies, at all levels of the federation", through mobilization campaigns. Currently, the Pastoral da Criança is "present in all Brazilian states and in 10 other countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean" (WHO WE ARE, n.d.).

In her interview, Dona Maria do Carmo Maciel mentions the Pastoral da Criança as a social project of the Catholic Church, of which she has been coordinator in the riverside community of Ilha Tétem for nine years. She points out that the Pastoral was recently integrated into the government's Bolsa Família program, which allowed the expansion of

nutritional monitoring in the community. The social project aims to monitor pregnant women and children up to six years old.

Dona Maria do Carmo also shows that some families register only after the birth of their children and, currently, 52 families in this locality are enrolled in the program. About the Pastoral da Criança in her community, she points out that:

The Pastoral da Criança is a social project that we have now included in the Bolsa Família, but we weigh the nutritional weight, we already have a nutritionist. We have been working with nutrition for two years and we have been monitoring pregnant women and children from pregnancy to six years old. But there are families that enter after the birth of the child. We have 52 registered families, but there are only 49 who work, these families are from here in Témentem. We have our Pastoral here in Rio, founded with only three leaders. The area coordinator is also from here in our community. So, the objective of this Children's Pastoral is like the health agent's: to help people maintain hygiene, care with food, in short, with everything to avoid health problems (Maria do Carmo Maciel, resident of Ilha Témentem).

Dona Maria do Carmo evidences, in her speech, that her role in the Children's Ministry is similar to that of a health agent, since she guides the inhabitants of the community about the importance of hygiene, adequate nutrition and disease prevention. When a child or a mother falls ill, she carries out the follow-up, offers guidance and teaches the use of home remedies to treat the diseases. In this sense, according to Pinto (2010):

Their keen perception, observation and the skill developed and consolidated with the practice and experience of daily life offer them the condition of popular doctors. By exercising their functions based on a relationship of affection and proximity, they end up playing important roles in health care for women and children, as well as for an entire needy population in distant and inaccessible areas, where official medicine does not reach (PINTO, 2010, p. 106-107).

Based on Pinto's (2010) analysis of the roles played by women in rural communities in the Tocantins region, it is possible to understand the relationships that occur with women who take the lead in social issues, meeting the needs of their community. Due to the knowledge they have, these women are often recognized as "popular doctors".

Mrs. Duca's reports show that her attachment to work is based on affectivity, as she does not receive any government aid for her activities in the community, characterizing her work as totally voluntary. On this, he ponders:

It is a solidarity work. Now we have already managed to do it when the coordinator changed, that she has already managed to register for us to win some things. We have already earned manioc, bee honey, but we don't earn money. What we earn is the lunch, but it's not enough, because they send it like this: R\$ 1.50 for each child, that's not enough for a glass of lunch. But for them, because of the nutritionist there, she thinks that has to be it. Then what happens, it depends on what it weighs, if in

the month I visit 30 families, I will only receive the money from those 30 that is to buy lunch for the other, but not for ourselves. It receives a very important thing that I think is the affection of families and children, I say that these children for me are like children. Unfortunately, not all people give importance to this (Maria do Carmo Maciel, resident of Éntem Island).

Mrs. Duca's account reveals the bond of solidarity and affection that permeates her solidarity work. By holding meetings with the registered families, their desire to contribute to the health of the community, through the production of home remedies and guidance, demonstrates a relationship of complicity. For her, the affection received in return is invaluable, serving as motivation to continue to take care of the well-being of her people.

Likewise, her volunteer work in the Pastoral da Criança reflects her commitment and solidarity, particularly in the loving way in which she cares for children. As she herself states: "... These children for me are like children", demarcating that the little ones are seen as part of their family, whose healthy growth needs to be accompanied with dedication and affection.

AFFECTIVITY AND COMPLICITY OF DONA LUZIA DO SOCORRO PINTO BATISTA IN HER EXCHANGES OF KNOWLEDGE WITH MEDICINAL PLANTS

The cultural space in which a person is inserted considerably impacts their daily lives, their social relationships and the construction of their identity, which is constituted according to the feeling of belonging (HALL, 2016). In this context, the life story, experiences and knowledge of Mrs. Luzia do Socorro Pinto Batista, 53 years old, mother of five children, married and who considers herself a housewife, is briefly highlighted.

This riverside woman has vast knowledge about medicinal plants, recognizing, cultivating and managing several species. It uses leaves, bark, seeds, roots, fruits, oils and sap to make home remedies, in addition to growing vegetables for its own consumption.

For riverside women like Dona Luzia, traditional folk medicine is valued for its effectiveness in health care. Its connection with plants with healing properties is reflected in the production of home remedies, which meet basic health needs in places where official medicine is not yet widely accessible.

Dona Luzia's narratives reveal that her knowledge and practices in the management of medicinal plants and herbs are associated with the care of the health problems faced by the inhabitants of the riverside community of the Island of Téntem. This work makes her one of the volunteers of the Pastoral da Criança, in which she participates in meetings and

workshops that encourage good hygiene practices in the production of home remedies. In addition, she shares and exchanges recipes, improving her knowledge regarding the cultivation and therapeutic use of medicinal plants.

Another striking aspect in Mrs. Luzia's care for children is her responsibility and seriousness in the treatment of diseases, especially in urgent cases that require immediate attention:

What we can do, we do. We are not going to leave here (the sick child), for example, to give the child diarrhea, then we instruct the mother to give the homemade serum, there is that little spoonful of serum, which is two of sugar, but with boiled water, clean water, we will not take this water from the river and make the homemade serum, no, It has to be clean water. Then you take two tablespoons of sugar and one of salt, it becomes (homemade whey) the same as coconut water, then give it to the child. Then we advise them to take them to the doctor (Luzia do Socorro Pinto Batista, resident of Ilha Téntem).

As a result, home remedies are prepared from the precise dosage of leaves, herbs, fruits, flowers, cascarias and roots, transforming into infusions, syrups, teas and bottles to treat various ailments. The knowledge of these women is essential in traditional riverside communities, in which traditional medicine is fundamental for health care and well-being. Many residents prefer natural home remedies because they do not have side effects. Among mothers, it is common to use these preparations to treat flu, belly aches, headaches of their children, relying on the knowledge and experience of women who master the management of herbs and medicinal plants.

MRS AÍDA MARIA GONÇALVES DA CRUZ AND THE MAINTENANCE OF HER KNOWLEDGE IN THE RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY OF TÉNTEM ISLAND

Mrs Aída Maria Gonçalves da Cruz, 35, is another of the women of the riverside community of Téntem recognized for her home remedies and much sought after to treat her people. A resident of the island, she is a housewife, married, mother of two daughters and graduated in Pedagogy, although she identifies professionally as a fisherwoman.

In addition to serving on the Community Council of Téntem Island, Mrs. Aída is well known for her relationship with medicinal plants, cultivated since childhood. Such recognition is a legacy passed down for generations, learned from his grandmother and mother, who also mastered the knowledge and practices of traditional medicine, as he narrates:

The medicinal plants came through my grandmother and my mother, and usually when we had a fever or had sore throat problems, they always made teas, bathed us, they also planted them to put in the food. It was through her that my desire to continue came (Aída Maria Gonçalves da Cruz, resident of Téntem Island).

Mrs Aída Maria's narrative clearly illustrates how the transmission of knowledge related to medicinal plants occurs and the resistance of these empirical practices, which are perpetuated through orality and daily observation, passing from one generation of women to others. After all, as Pinto (2018, p. 5) points out, these women are "wise, apprentices of nature, whose lessons were the practices of infusions, ointment, and drinking of leaves, bark, and wood roots to cure the ills of the body."

In accordance with this view, Mrs. Aída Maria emphasizes the relevance of the oral transmission of this knowledge for its preservation. As she herself says: "all knowledge, if it is retained for us, is worth nothing, because when we leave, it will be gone". Such a perception reveals his understanding of the need to leave the legacy to his community. For her, ensuring that her daughters continue to exercise this ancient knowledge is paramount. In this sense, she reinforces:

When I change the manure, they (her two daughters) are together with me, I explain to them what it is for, what their names (medicinal plants) are. And also, when I go to make some tea, I say "Isa, go get this little plant". She says: "how is it?". "Look, it's like this, like the small sheet". Helena again, I ask her to come and get it. They already know it, they don't know how to do it. When I'm doing it, I put them on the side so they can learn (Aída Maria Gonçalves da Cruz, resident of Éntem Island).

Mrs. Aída Maria's speech elucidates her understanding of the importance of preserving knowledge about medicinal plants, transmitting, mainly, this knowledge to her daughters, who are still children, but who from an early age need to develop autonomy to recognize and, in the future, prepare home remedies when necessary.

Once again, the strong connection of this traditional knowledge with the riverside territory is noted, where everything is reconfigured, resignified and rebuilt within its own cultural dynamics. These women are true guardians of the forests, rivers and streams, as well as of the historical experiences of their village (PINTO, 2004).

In this interweaving of knowledge being experienced daily by the residents of Ilha Téntem, Mrs. Aída Maria shares her experience in the Children's Ministry and, with enthusiasm, reports that:

Our community participates in the meetings of the Pastoral da Criança, and this year is the second year of the fair that we do with medicinal and ornamental plants.

Then when the mother says the name of the plant, the children explain it, otherwise the son says the name of the plant and the mother explains it (these are dynamics carried out at the fair to learn medicinal plants). It's a way for the community to get to know it, for the children to grow up, for the young people to continue to know (Aída Maria Gonçalves da Cruz, resident of Téntem Island).

From this perspective, it is feasible to understand the strong desire to keep alive the memory of knowledge about medicinal plants in the community, creating opportunities to share them with the inhabitants through experiences, fairs, meetings and home visits. According to Pinto (2010), women play important roles in the health care of women, children and everyone who needs it. For the author, "they are relationships of affection and complicity that make them doctors of their own village and are recognized, valued and sought after daily to take care of the health of their people" (PINTO, 2010, p. 105-107).

Dona Aída Gonçalves, a member of the Children's Pastoral, actively participates in the meetings, assisting in the organization of workshops and sharing her knowledge in the making of home remedies. The narratives of these riverside women overflow with knowledge and practical techniques about the cultivation and management of medicinal plants, demonstrating the cultural and identity richness of these ancestral practices. Such a scenario highlights the female role in the maintenance and transmission of traditional healing knowledge in the region.

EDUCATIONAL PROCESS: THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN LOCAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND FORMAL EDUCATION

The riverside women interviewed evidence, in their statements, representations rooted in their daily social practices. Their experiential knowledge emerges from the relationship with the waters, the forest, medicinal plants and herbs and local cultures, manifesting themselves in the educational, religious, medicinal and cultural spheres. By navigating these rivers of knowledge, it becomes feasible to reflect on the educational practices that integrate such cultural knowledge within the community, promoting its understanding and appreciation among riverside students.

To think of education as a cultural practice, Freire (1987) discusses the attitude of teachers who ignore the cultural experience of their students, reducing them to mere listeners in classrooms. In this regard, for the author:

To speak of reality as something stationary, static, compartmentalized and well-behaved, when not to talk or lecture on something completely alien to the existential experience of the students, has really been the supreme concern of this education.

Their unbridled eagerness. In it, the educator appears as its indisputable agent, as its real subject, whose inescapable task is to "fill" the students with the contents of their narration. Contents that are fragments of reality disconnected from the totality in which they are engendered and in whose vision they would gain meaning. The word, in these dissertations, is emptied of the concrete dimension it should have or is transformed into an empty word, into alienated and alienating verbosity (FREIRE, 1987, p. 33).

In this sense, a differentiated education is imperative, capable of meeting the needs of the riverside student. For this, the educator must know the local culture, the aspects that shape the experiences and experiences of the students. In this way, the introduction of realities disconnected from the riverside daily life is avoided, with contents distant from the experience of those who inhabit water regions, such as the populations of the islands of the municipality of Cametá.

An inclusive and equitable education, which values elements of the riverside daily life, becomes pertinent by strengthening the cultural representations of students. For this, it is essential that the educator constructs his educational practices together with the students, breaking with a merely depository teaching, in which "the students are the depositaries and the educator the depositor" (FREIRE, 1987, p. 33). This approach, known as the banking view of education, ignores the experiential knowledge acquired in the daily life of riverside communities.

In view of this, from the narratives of riverside women about the use of medicinal plants, it is possible to understand their deep connection with nature and the elements that structure their way of life. It is a popular education, which goes beyond formal education and is rooted in ancestral knowledge transmitted from generation to generation. This knowledge is manifested in the speech of Mrs. Socorro when explaining the preparation of home remedies:

When there was an outbreak of flu here, I made syrup. I take the nettle, the vergamot, the mint, the Vick in plant, the jamacaru leaf, a piece of ginger and boil everything. Then I squeeze everything, then I boil it again with sugar and then I put the bee honey, which is for this cough, it eliminates the phlegm in the chest. Many people came to ask for this syrup (Luzia do Socorro, 53 years old, resident of Éntem Island).

The knowledge that Mrs. Luzia has is knowledge deeply rooted in the land, in nature and in plants, representing solidarity and complicity in caring for her community. Its narrative allows us to reflect on an education as care, manifested in the family's daily life, in

which educating means instructing, caring for and teaching other people how to prepare home remedies.

Taking such knowledge to the riverside school environment promotes an education that values subjectivities and orality, giving voice to women who often did not attend a formal school, but have experiential knowledge transmitted from one generation to another through orality. In view of these reflections, the deep connection between the knowledge of healing practices with medicinal plants and nature is understandable. In this way, according to Brandão (2017):

The interactions between the human person and nature, as well as those that take place between people and each other – mediated by nature through culture – are not only social. They are socially historical, and due to a double reason. First: because they are constructed within the process of history. Second: because they construct their own history, which is nothing other than human work destined to create and signify the different dimensions of a culture, within and through which human communities inhabit "their world". By transcending a world given by nature and by constructing, materially and symbolically, a world of culture, man asserts himself, in turn, as the creator of his own conditions of existence and as the subject of history (BRANDÃO, 2017, p. 394).

According to Brandão (2017), nature connects human action through the exchanges and experiences lived by the subjects. From this relationship, culture, meanings and representations emerge that shape various ways of constructing stories and recognizing oneself as an integral and inseparable part of nature, to which we all belong.

Figures 1 and 2 – Aida Maria Gonçalves walking in the forest between the native vegetation and the one she cultivates



Source: Photographs by Erleney Garcia Arnoud, research collection (2024).

As Brandão (2017) emphasizes and Figures 1 and 2 suggest, nature is very present in the daily life of the riverside, symbolically configuring itself as a space of culture and identity, in which individuals become historical subjects. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that the forest is an environment of wealth of knowledge, as medicinal herbs, bark and tree roots are extracted from it for the production of teas, syrups, blessings and baths, in addition to cultivating a great diversity of vegetation essential for the survival of the inhabitants.

When entering the forest with the interviewee Aída Maria, we observed her daily relationship with nature and her ecological awareness in preserving it, since it is from this environment that she extracts medicinal plants and herbs for the production of her home remedies. Thus, thinking about an educational practice that values this knowledge, the relationship with nature and the culture present in the connections with the riverside people is indispensable. This model of education, according to Freire (1987), is characterized as liberating, to the extent that:

Liberating, problematizing education can no longer be the act of depositing, or narrating, or transferring, or transmitting "knowledge" and values to students, mere patients, in the manner of "banking" education, but a knowing act. As a gnosiological situation, in which the knowable object, instead of being the end of the

knowing act of a subject, is the mediator of knowing subjects, educator, on the one hand, and students, on the other, problematizing education poses, from the outset, the requirement of overcoming the contradiction between educator and students. Without this, the dialogical relationship, indispensable to the knowability of the knowing subjects, around the same knowable object is not possible (FREIRE, 1987, p. 39).

For Freire (1987), a liberating education must, above all, recognize and value the autonomy of students, promoting critical reflection as a path to the transformation of their reality. This process ensures the recognition of cultural identity, stimulates curiosity and encourages experimentation with one's own sociocultural reality. Additionally, it allows the exchange of experiences among students, strengthening their knowledge. However, for this to happen, the educator must act as a mediator and connoisseur, and not as an authority figure.

In view of education as an act of care and as a popular process that is not usually present in formal education, Oliveira (2008) highlights that:

Education is presented in the family routine, in the sense of guiding, giving attention, explaining, having as a reference the wisdom acquired by age. Caring acquires the attitudinal sense of respect for people, of welcoming the other, regardless of age, and also a dimension of otherness. To educate is to know how to respect the other, both adults and children (OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 72).

It is possible to associate the author's idea with the report of Mrs. Luzia do Socorro, who highlights the relevance of the meetings held in the Pastoral da Criança, in the Ilha Tétem community, as an important way to maintain healing knowledge with medicinal plants. In these workshops, several women participate to improve their knowledge about the therapeutic use of plants, strengthening the transmission of this ancestral knowledge. About this experience, Mrs. Luzia narrates that:

We get together, it's a lot of women, it's not just me. Each one teaches the other, passes on the knowledge we have. We learn how to make the syrup. Then, there is not just one who does it, everyone does it. It's a knowledge there. A knowledge that there is no teacher there, who knows, maybe he will teach (Luzia do Socorro, resident of Ilha Tétem).

From such analyses, it is noted that the riverside women interviewed act as mediators of cultural knowledge about medicinal plants. The knowledge they have is shared and transmitted through affective relationships, without hierarchy between those who know more or less. They all perform the same function in the preservation and application of curative knowledge, based on everyday experience.

This context exemplifies what Oliveira (2008) defines as education constituted in the family routine, based on care, sharing, complicity and wisdom present in these cultural relationships. In this way, an education mediated by the exchange of experiences of the subjects is elucidated, in which teaching and learning become inseparable processes. Regarding this relationship, Freire (1987) assures that:

The educator is no longer the one who only educates, but the one who, while educating, is educated, in dialogue with the learner who, by being educated, also educates. Both, thus, become subjects of the process in which they grow together and in which the "arguments of authority" are no longer valid. In which, in order to be, functionally, an authority, one needs to be with freedoms and not against them. By the way, no one educates anyone, just as no one educates himself: men educate themselves in communion, mediated by the world (FREIRE, 1987, p. 39).

From this perspective, when reflecting on the dialectic between popular education, understood as an act of care, and formal education taught in school, one understands the significance of connecting these two types of knowledge. Integrating education as care into the riverside school environment enables riverside students to contextualize learning from their reality, promoting a reflection on the cultural knowledge belonging to their community. In this process, it is up to the educator to know, mediate and foster the exchange of knowledge.

In this interweaving of knowledge, Oliveira (2008) clearly exemplifies the dynamics of popular education in riverside communities, showing how this unique knowledge is manifested in daily life and social relations. For the author:

Education as care is associated with the culture of conversation, that is, with the experiential knowledge learned in everyday social life, through orality. Orality is presented as the typical way of rural-riverside populations to express their experiences, transmit their knowledge, values and habits from the older generations to the younger generations, which allows the rooting of a culture of conversation. Within this culture, education is manifested from the narration of stories lived by the elders, whose experience enabled them to acquire wisdom to be transmitted to other generations (OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 73).

In this sense, incorporating experiential knowledge and orality as forms of knowledge transmission in the school experiences of riverside students strengthens a culture that is repeatedly absent in institutionalized education. When the educator promotes this "culture of conversation" in his teaching method, bringing elements rooted in the reality of the riverside student, he promotes a more meaningful and contextualized teaching.

For example, by recognizing the role of mothers, grandmothers and aunts as holders of curative knowledge with medicinal plants or by valuing the search of these women to assist in the treatment of diseases, the educator contributes to the appreciation of this knowledge. Stimulating dialogues that elucidate the relevance of riverside women in the transmission of medicinal knowledge reinforces their role as agents of care and knowledge within the community.

The riverside community of Téntem Island faces considerable challenges in accessing quality education. The Municipal School of Infant and Elementary Education Professor Jacinto Garcia (EMEIF), which serves students from Kindergarten I to the ninth grade, is not operating, compromising the continuity of studies of riverside children and adolescents. Regarding this issue, the interviewee Aída Maria reports that the "municipality of Cametá was building a new school on another piece of land that a family donated so that the community could have a school, but the construction has been paralyzed since the end of October 2024 (Aída Maria, resident of the island of Téntem).

During the visits to the community of Isla Téntem, it was possible to observe the old school, built of wood, already worn out by time and without adequate structure for an educational environment. According to the interviewee's account, the need for a school was so urgent that the residents themselves donated land to the city hall for the construction of a new teaching unit, ensuring that their children could study within the riverside community itself.

This situation highlights the challenges faced by public education and how, often, political discourses do not translate into concrete actions, reinforcing the lack of priority in the provision of quality education. In this regard, Nadal (2008) points out that:

Over the years, and despite the fact that education is among the priorities that are presented in political discourses, as well as despite the evolution of criticisms and propositions of educational theories, it has not been possible to satisfactorily reverse the situation of education, especially public education. It may be possible to say that, in some senses, the situation tends to worsen with the loss of some hard-won advances, since the Modern Social Welfare State starts to assume a neoliberal stance, being at the mercy of the logic of the market (NADAL, 2008, p. 8).

According to the author, education still faces great challenges, especially in the context of public education, in which the struggle for quality becomes even more intense and challenging. This reality is evident in the riverside community of Isla Téntem, whose inhabitants recognize the need to demand an accessible education within their territory.

Currently, the construction of EMEIF Professor Jacinto Garcia is paralyzed, making it impossible for riverside students to access the institution due to security. Regarding this situation, the interviewee Aída Maria reported that:

The Department of Education of Cametá, together with the Christian community of Bom Jesus dos Navegantes de Téntem (Catholic Church of the locality), gave a contract made by the lawyer of the Parish of São José das Ilhas Diocese of Cametá, thus giving the city of Cametá (SEMED) the shed for the operation of EMEIF Professor Jacinto Garcia until the school was built (Aída Maria, resident of Ten Island).

The interviewee's report on the functioning of the school in the community elucidates the important role of the Catholic Church in the fight for the educational causes of the riverside people of Ten Island. Faced with the educational precariousness, the Church ceded to the Municipality of Cametá – SEMED the shed for parties and meetings, enabling a temporary space for riverside students to continue their studies while waiting for the completion of the construction of the school by the municipal management.

In the course of the field research, the interviewee addressed the issue of classes and exposed:

Classes have not yet started according to the SEMED calendar, the community council did not authorize the renewal of the contract, only after a meeting with the mayor and the secretary of Education to ask for an explanation from the parts of the managers and demand that the resumption of the construction of the school be resumed immediately, and if there is an agreement on both parties, for classes to start (Aída Maria, resident of Éntem Island).

The interviewee's speech demarcates the resistance of the riverside community in the struggle to guarantee the school, a claim led by the community council of Ilha Téntem, whose members are part of the local Catholic Church. Such representatives are fully aware of the need to fight for the educational rights of their children, showing an active commitment to the cause. In view of this, the public, free and quality education system needs to advance, going beyond political discourses and ensuring, in fact, access to education for indigenous, riverside and quilombola peoples. Another relevant aspect mentioned by Aída Maria refers to school transport in the riverside community. According to her, "school transportation is scarce, when they have it, students go. When not, parents take it with tails, hull to rowing or small boat".

This reality reveals the barriers faced by riverside communities in the Lower Tocantins region with regard to the right to school transportation, which is not fully

guaranteed. Several irregularities hinder students' access to this essential service, as highlighted by the following authors:

School transportation is a policy guaranteed by the federal constitution, and guarantees access to educational institutions, in riverside communities, this service is as essential as the school itself, especially with the implementation of the policy of nucleation of schools. Despite being an extremely important public policy, school transport faces a series of problems and irregularities ranging from the hiring of vessels to their operation. School transport is an educational policy and because it is linked to mobility and riverside territoriality, it is also a territorial policy (VEIGA; BROOK; PEREIRA, 2016, p. 2).

School transportation is a fundamental right of riverside students and, when not guaranteed, causes several problems, such as school dropout and difficulties in accessing school. It is a public policy directly related to the right of these students to come and go, making the struggle for this effectiveness relevant. Thus, according to the authors, riverside school transport:

In the municipality of Cametá-PA, it faces a series of problems, first of all, the political process of management is quite complex and problematic, in relation to: the hiring, regulation and operation of river school transport. This presents serious irregularities and conflicts involving (partisan) politics, municipal public management, school directors and teachers, parents of students or guardians, students and boatmen of river school transport (VEIGA; BROOK; PEREIRA, 2016, p. 2).

In view of the above, several problems faced by riverside school transport are remarkable, a reality that extends to other communities in the Lower Tocantins. On Éntem Island, such difficulties impact education, hindering its full development. In view of this, representatives of the Catholic Church, together with the residents of the community, continue to fight and claim for quality education, consistent with their rights.

The difficulties of riverside education in the Lower Tocantins are perceptible in the narratives of the interviewee Aída Maria, a resident of Ilha Téntem. Among the numerous challenges faced, the absence of effective educational policies, the paralysis of school construction, the precariousness of school transportation and other barriers that compromise access to education stand out.

In such a scenario, it is essential to develop an educational practice that values the local culture, the healing knowledge with medicinal plants of riverside women, as well as the experiences of men and women in the community. From this perspective, Nadal (2008) points out that:

The classic function of the school – to ensure the transmission of knowledge – has its importance maintained when resignified, because school knowledge can no longer be seen as a mere adaptation of the scientific ones that are presented through school manuals and, following their logic, be taken as definitive and closed truths to be presented to students to be assimilated. The school needs to make room to welcome the experiential, affective and local dimensions (NADAL, 2008, p. 8-9).

This means that the knowledge and cultural representations historically constructed by this riverside population must be recognized by educators, since they constitute a pedagogy of significant relevance. Daily social practices configure an education of care, while the integration between popular education and formal education enables a liberating education. As Freire (1987) argues, it is essential to promote the appreciation of cultural identity in the educational process.

CONCLUSION

The course of this study made it possible to understand, in line with the oral narratives of the women interviewed, that they are guardians of memory and of the construction of knowledge that emerges daily in the riverside territory to which they belong. The social context in which they are inserted is intrinsically articulated with their identity, defining their cultural representations, while their knowledge connects with the forests, rivers and natural elements that make up their daily lives.

Another relevant aspect is the role of the Catholic Church in the riverside community of Isla Téntem, which cooperates with the valorization and maintenance of cultural practices related to the production of home remedies. This religious space also plays an indispensable role in the oral transmission of knowledge, promoting meetings between women who carry out healing activities with medicinal plants and perpetuating cultural values and traditions.

With regard to medicinal knowledge, it was found that there was extensive knowledge about the therapeutic purpose of each plant for the treatment of various diseases. Such knowledge is transmitted orally over generations from great-grandmothers to grandmothers, and from these to mothers and daughters. This universe of knowledge is marked by daily experiences that strengthen relationships of solidarity, affection and care for the community.

The healing practices of these women are crucial for collective well-being, as they provide basic health care. In emergency situations, the home remedies they produce are

readily available to treat common ailments, such as belly pain, headache, flu, inflammation, and diarrhea, among others.

In view of the above, this study reflects the interaction between education as care and formal education learned at school. The intertwining of these two types of teaching in the educational practices of the riverside communities of the Lower Tocantins is essential to strengthen cultural experiences and value healing knowledge with medicinal plants. Thus, by integrating such knowledge into the school environment, the riverside student can recognize himself in this education as part of his experience and identity.

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