

Meaningful curriculum: the process of teaching and learning based on the reality of a traditional coastal community in the Brazilian Amazon

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Abstract

The study took place at Maria Benedita Mota School, located in the coastal community of Perimirim, which is part of the Araí-Peroba Marine Extractive Reserve (RESEX-Mar) in the municipality of Augusto Corrêa-PA. The participants of the study are educational agents (principals, pedagogical coordinators, teachers and students) immersed in the context and who have knowledge related to local biodiversity, such as the sea, mangroves, small-scale fishery, crustaceans, and family farming. The aim of the study is to understand how the school develops the meaningful curriculum based on the local reality and to systematize the traditional knowledge through oral texts about the mangrove and preservation of the local ecosystem in order to reach students. The methodology is a participatory observation of qualitative nature, which allows the understanding of the object under study having as starting point its reality. The project developed at the school comprised a class trip to the mangrove, drawings, paintings, poetry, paper folding, research, paper cutting and collage, ending up with the presentation in the pedagogical projects exhibition of the school. The results show that the teaching and learning processes become pleasurable, relevant and meaningful for students when the curriculum is based on the reality of people, especially students.

Keywords: Meaningful Curriculum; Tradicional Coastal Community; Tradicional Knowledge; School.

1. Introduction

Everyone has the right for education regardless of social, economic and political class. Education makes human beings able to transform the world. Corroborating this idea, we can state that “[...] the human being, as a social being, is constituted and constituent of the work process through language, culture and education [...]” (Melo, 2012, p. 24).

However, we live in a discriminatory society, in which the judgments are based on economic status, that is, the less economically favored a group is, the more this group suffer, either because of the social and political situation, or because of the devaluation of their own culture. For the aforementioned, we believe

that the only way out of this discriminatory society in order to consolidate values and culture is through education. Education can make people spread their culture and knowledge and also value their identities.

To support this idea, it is observed that:

[...] Education can be understood as a fundamental category that allows the understanding of the relationship between learning, development and culture. It has a socializing function: its social nature makes us know and approach values, norms, practices and knowledge strategies specifically related to the group with which we interact [...] (Stolz, 2012, p. 78).

Education has a socializing function that consists in enabling people to know, respect and value the other, so that they become enlightened and aware people. This function refers to the cultural diversity that exists in traditional communities, which are also built through relationships with the environment in which they live. Therefore, we can conclude that culture is essentially important in the life of each human being. It is through culture that we build and value the environment in which we live, and seek for the fulfillment of rights and duties in society, reflecting on the human development (Stolz, 2012) that has its origin in cultural interactions of social nature, through language or other socialization processes. The result of these interactions is an awareness of cultural identity, since these people are bonded with the territory where they live.

Perimirim community, for instance, has fish and crab fisheries and family farming as main source of subsistence. Therefore, their identity representations are outlined in the territorialities, starting from individual and collective actions related to several aspects of culture and subsistence existing in the community.

The school is also an essential part in the definition of territorialities and, consequently, of identities. It helps, or should help, to create conditions for respecting culture and valuing the environment, which certainly develop the feeling of belonging, as in the case in Perimirim community. Therefore, the teaching and learning processes of children and adolescents start from the local reality, with pedagogical practices that teach them to value the resources related to the biodiversity of the fauna and flora existing in the mangrove, as well as the traditional knowledge acquired in fish, crab and shrimp fishery. Furthermore, family members transmit this kind of knowledge to current generations through orality, which is essential for the recognition and appreciation of the nature in which they live.

Perimirim community, which is part of the Araí-Peroba Marine Extractive Reserve (RESEX-Mar), is located 9 km from the headquarters of the municipality of Augusto Correa, on the Brazilian Amazon coast, in the Northeast of the state of Pará. It is a traditional community and has environmental resources linked to marine life, such as small-scale fishery, crustacean and shellfish extraction with emphasis on the mangrove ecosystem.

Therefore, this study aims at understanding how the local school develops the school curriculum and its relationship with the natural resources available in the community, as well as identifying pedagogical practices and their connection with activities that are representative in traditional communities. Our assumption is that children know the natural resources, especially the mangrove ecosystem and its

biodiversity, as they reside in the community and maintain a direct relationship with this territory in their everyday life.

The mangrove ecosystem in the Brazilian Amazon has been noticeable due to its richness in natural resources and its ecological and economic importance, as well as to being an essential nursery for the (re)production of animals (Schaeffer-Novelli, 1989). The current study is sustained in this environmental scenario and draws forth debates that are necessary to be done within a traditional coastal community in the Amazon.

1.1 School Curriculum and its Interfaces in Traditional Communities

Before addressing issues related to the school curriculum and its interfaces in traditional communities, there is a need to make inferences about the definition of territoriality. This element sometimes consolidates the direct relationship with education, since the development of meaningful learning consists of the relationship between the school curriculum and the territory in which the school is located.

According to Raffestin (1993, p. 158), “[...] territoriality reflects the multidimensionality of territorial living by members of a collective and by societies in general”. It results in the valorization and conservation of the environment (mangrove), in which knowledge, culture and the definition of identity are concerns and their location, that is, their cultural roots are taken into account.

In this scenario of definitions, we understand the identity of the human being constituted by rich memories. For instance, we mention the project “*Meu Amigo Manguezal*” (My Friend Mangrove), that was developed in the aforementioned school, which aims to teach and learn through the knowledge of people who have direct relationship with the mangrove ecosystem, such as fishers and crab collectors, who are important characters that can help to develop meaningful learning with children.

Corroborating this idea, Arroyo (2011, p. 195) argues that:

When real childhood becomes the focus, collectivities are led not to ignore the diversity of ways to live it. Pedagogical proposals are compelled to articulate with the specificity of the ways of living childhoods, conditioned by their social, ethnic, racial, or gender differences, or if they live in the countryside, urban areas or peripheries. Generic visions of a single childhood are overcome.

We know that the understanding of childhood in school spaces is becoming “prominent” in school curricula. This understanding is caused by the entrance of children and adolescents from the lower classes into public schools, and it requires schools to “[...] overcome generic visions of childhood [and] pedagogical, curricular, didactic, and evaluative proposals that are generic and decontextualized from the diversity of ways of living this human time [...]” (Arroyo, 2011, p. 195). Although the term childhood is quite broad, it has different meanings according to their social differences, and it is up to the school to incorporate these differences into the curriculum. Consequently, childhood will have its rights fulfilled and the curriculum will be significant, since it comes from the experiences lived by children.

It is worth remembering that, even today, the curriculum is considered as something utopian in schools. The contents comprised in it "[...] are poor in social experiences [...]", that is, they do not match the experiences lived by children, and "[...] their knowledge becomes poor in social, political, economic and cultural meanings [...]" (Arroyo, 2011, p. 119). Consequently, the school is no longer interesting and attractive to children. We believe that children's learning is affected and has no meaning when the school curriculum is constructed based on a generic reality. Therefore, the school curriculum needs to reflect the reality of the students and be translated into a fertile field for understanding the local and regional aspects and extended to territorial, political, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

This scenario is prescribed by Arroyo (2011, p. 128) when he points out that:

[...] Curricula have to be translatable into experiences in order to be interesting and thought-provoking. They need to be able to capture and reframe the rich and cruel questions that popular children, adolescents, young people or adults carry to schools. If this process is blocked, the mobilization for teaching-learning is unlikely to be achieved by teachers. Blaming them is unfair.

Based on these reflections, this study proposes to analyze the representations that coastal environments raise in the learning of students from the Perimirim community. It is essential to consider the importance of the meaningful curriculum and its insertion in the pedagogical practices for in the first grades of elementary school students from an educational institution located in a traditional coastal community.

1.2 School Curriculum: a feasible meaningful action

According to Moreira (1990), the Brazilian school curriculum had its theoretical bases in the American curricular models. However, it was adapted to the Brazilian school reality through the experiences of Anízio Teixeira, Francisco Campos and Fernando de Azevedo, who are considered the Pioneers of the Manifesto of New School in Brazil, a political document that addressed problems related to teacher training and to the needs of this "new" educator in order to work in the new school. These pioneers analyzed the educational background of a given period and recognized its historical and social context: "every education always varies according to a conception of life, reflecting, in each era, the predominant philosophy which is determined by the structure of society" (Azevedo, 1932, p. 40-41).

In the 19th century, society underwent major transformations: industrialization, urbanization, immigration in large metropolises. Certainly, these transformations also affected the school in an extraordinary way, since the curriculum is constituted from what society and economy dictates yet.

Then the school was noticed as capable of playing an important role in fulfilling these functions and facilitating the adaptation of new generations to the economic, social and cultural transformations that were taking place. The curriculum was considered the instrument of excellence in social control that the school intended to establish [...] (Moreira & Silva, 2009, p. 10).

Corroborating this idea, Frigotto (2010) emphasizes that education is the main human capital. It is conceived as a producer of work capacity, enhancing the work factor, that is, education is seen as a commodity, through which we are educated for the labor market. The current curriculum in Brazilian schools, for the most part, is still produced by the hegemonic power and, certainly, dictates the representations of this ideology in the curriculum.

For Apple (2009), there are still many struggles and resistances to create a curriculum focused on realities, because we need to break some paradigms that we have been inculcated of, for instance, that hegemonic power is superior to heterogeneities.

In the view of Sacristan (2000), the curriculum must have a relationship between theory and practice. It must be constructed from a distinguished perspective, related to the realities in which people live in order to transform them through educational praxis. In other words, “[...] the most important parts of the curriculum are the experience, the re-creation of culture in terms of experiences, the incitation of problematic situations [...]” (Sacristan, 2000, p. 41). Therefore, the curriculum is location, space, territory, confrontation and the identity marks of children, young people and adults. That is why it is so influenced and constantly moves.

Usually, the school curriculum does not concern about traditional communities, cultures, traditional knowledge and local biodiversity, that is, these issues are denied and silenced by the curriculum designers. By not concerning about these concepts, the school proposes a “tourist curriculum” that marginalizes and denies the existence of local and cultural richness (Santomé, 1995).

The school aforementioned needs a curriculum that differs in its specificity, that focuses and takes into consideration the reality of the locus of our research: the coastal community in which the RESEX-Mar is located. This kind of curriculum should be meaningful for the student, making them feel that the context to which they belong is inserted in the educational process (Arroyo, 2011). The teachers need to be permanently trained to guide their school activities (Hage, 2014), in order to enable significant transformations to happen in the school and consequently in the community.

Finally, we expect that the school curriculum contemplates coastal environmental education, traditional knowledge and its relationship with the natural resources of the mangrove ecosystem and its surrounding areas, through teachers’ reflection and autonomy.

2. Methodological Procedures

Methodologically, the approach used in the research was qualitative. According to Ludke & André (1986, p. 18), this approach considers that “[...] knowledge is not something finished, but a construction that is constantly made and remade [...]”. We used the participatory research, in which the researcher “[...] shares the experiences of the other participants of the research, also participating in a systematic and permanent way [...]” (Severino, 2016, p. 126).

In addition, we used the technique of direct observation, which is considered essential for any type of field research within the scope of Human Sciences, supported by the field notes and the photographic record in order to materialize the research (Severino, 2016).

The data were collected from March to December, 2019. The research involves a group of 23

preschool students (Kindergarten) and a group of 30 first-grade elementary school students, who were part of the project “*Meu Amigo Manguezal*”, developed by the teachers of the aforementioned classes at Maria Benedita Mota School, located in Perimirim community, Augusto Corrêa-PA.

Data analysis was carried out in the light of field observations and impressions collected as the mangroves came and went. We also conduct readings and understandings of the pedagogical practices applied by the teachers during the research.

2.1 Community and School Profiles

Perimirim community is located in a coastal area in the Amazon, Northeast of the State of Pará (Figure 1). The community is rich in natural resources, with typical characteristics of traditional communities (Brandão & Borges, 2014). In addition to the natural resources, it is rich in memories, cultures and knowledge that are directly connected to the “uses of natural resources” (Diegues, 2000, p. 8).



Figure 1. Location map of Perimirim Community in the Araí-Peroba Marine Extractive Reserve (highlighted) in Northeast of Pará, Brazilian Amazon Coast. (Source: QGis. Eyzaguirre L. A. Indira, 2020).

This community is located within the Araí-Peroba RESEX-Mar, regulated by the National System for the Conservation of Nature (Serviço Nacional de Unidade de Conservação da Natureza – SNUC), through Law no. 9,985, of June 18, 2000, which characterizes RESEX-Mar as:

Art. 18. The Extractive Reserve is an area used by traditional extractive populations, whose subsistence is based on extractivism and, in addition, on subsistence agriculture and the creation of small animals, and has as basic

objectives to protect livelihoods and the culture of these populations, and ensure the sustainable use of the unit's natural resources (Brasil, 2000).

Perimirim community is within a Conservation Unit. Therefore, it aims at protecting the culture and the livelihoods of the community. The community should strive for “[...] conservation, preservation and sustainable use of natural resources in expressive areas of the Brazilian marine coastal ecosystem [...]” (Santos, 2015, p. 44).

Maria Benedita Mota School is part of this context of a traditional community within a RESEX-Mar. The school was founded in 1974 by people coming from Coroa Comprida beach, located on the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean, which was being destroyed by erosion. The families from the beach had to migrate to the other side of the Ocean due to this situation (Political-Pedagogical Project).

The school operates in two buildings far from each other: the first is located close to the waterfront of the community, and the second building approximately 1,000 meters from the first one. The school comprises morning and afternoon sections of classes. The building structures is simple and unsuitable for serving educational agents and school activities appropriately. Some teachers come from Perimirim community, while other teachers come from nearby communities, from Augusto Corrêa headquarters and from Bragança, a neighboring municipality.

3. Results and Discussions

The School has the power to influence and transform the reality in which it is inserted. With this understanding, we observed that there was a process of environmental degradation on an accelerated scale in Perimirim community. Having this scenario in mind, two teachers from the second building of Maria Benedita Mota school carried out the project: “*Meu Amigo Manguezal*”. The project had as initial objective to raise awareness among children about the importance of the mangrove ecosystem for the minimization of the degradation process that part of that community's territory was undergoing, and about the need to conserve the environment in order to guarantee that people are more aware about the preservation of the environment.

3.1. School and Meaningful Curriculum: experiences in traditional communities

The aforementioned project was developed as follows: initially, the teachers presented students the project and talked about the importance of the mangrove, its vegetation, fauna, flora, types of soil in the community, and the importance of this ecosystem for the subsistence of the people who live there. The teachers organized a class trip to the mangrove, “[...] with the purpose of observing the natural and human environment [...]” (Legrand, 2010, p. 15). The students observed several types of trees in the mangrove. Back to the school, there was a conversation about what they observed and the students made their representations of the mangrove through the production of oral texts and pictorial texts (drawings), among other activities. Then, the students with the help of the teachers built a panel with the types of mangrove trees found in the class trip (Figure 2). In concomitance with these activities, observations and conversations about the significant curriculum were carried out with the educational agents of that school.



Figure 2. Panel built after the class trip with students and teachers. (Source: School’s photo collection, 2019).

With the construction of the panel, the children realized the differences between the three types of mangrove trees: the *mangueiro* (*Rhizophora mangle*), the *tinteiros* (*Laguncularia racemosa*) and the *siriubeira* (*Avicennia schaueriana*) and their respective seeds. The identification of the types of mangrove trees was based on the traditional knowledge of a very experienced fisher from the community, who taught the children about the differences between those trees, which are popularly named as: black mangrove (*mangueiro*), red mangrove (*tinteiros*) and the white mangrove (*siriubeira*). We could notice that the presence of symbols and their meanings are essential to understand the local culture (Laraia, 2001).

In another moment, the teachers worked with two poems: *No mangue tem...* (In the mangrove, there is...) and *Introdução à poesia* (Introduction to poetry), both written by Ronivalber Ferreira. We present the original poems in Portuguese and their translation into English below:

Poem 1: No mangue tem...

| | |
|--|--|
| No Mangue tem de tudo Da natureza a desfrutar Tem caranguejo, tem Siri Tem peixe e tem Guará. | In the mangrove, there is everything From the nature to enjoy There's crab, there's <i>siri</i> There's fish and there's <i>guará</i> . |
| No Mangue tem de tudo Que podemos admirar Tem árvores grandes Para os pássaros pousar. | In the mangrove, there is everything That we can admire There's big trees For the birds to sit. |
| No Mangue tem de tudo Para nos deliciar Tem crustáceos, Tem Turú Tem Macacos a pular. | In the mangrove, there is everything To delight us There are crustaceans, there's <i>turú</i> There are monkeys jumping. |
| No Mangue tem de tudo | In the mangrove, there is everything |

Na Maré da preamar
Tem peixes e revoadas
Precisamos preservar.

In the high tide
There's fish and flock of birds
We need to preserve.

No Mangue tem de tudo
Tem bela vegetação
Siriubeira, tinteira e mangueiro
Abrigo para reprodução.

In the mangrove, there is everything
It has beautiful vegetation
Siriubeira, tinteira and mangueiro
Shelter for animal breeding.

No Mangue tem de tudo
Dia e noite, noite e dia
É sustento das famílias
É comida com alegria.

In the mangrove, there is everything
Day and night, night and day
It's support for families
It's food with joy.

No Mangue tem de tudo
Tem a biodiversidade
Da fauna e da flora
A natureza é liberdade.

In the mangrove, there is everything
There's biodiversity
Of fauna and flora
Nature is freedom.

No Mangue tem de tudo
Vamos todos preservar
Explorando com respeito
Para nunca acabar.

In the mangrove, there is everything
Let's all preserve
Exploring with respect
To never end.

Poem 2: **Introdução em poesia**

O mangue é tudo de bom
É fauna e vegetação
Biodiversidade com fartura
Não é brincadeira não.
Tem caranguejo, tem peixe
Tem até camarão,
Já vi até sururu
Brincando de ser mexilhão.

The mangrove is all the best
It's fauna and vegetation
Plenty of biodiversity
It's no joke.
There's crab, there's fish
There's even shrimp,
I've even seen *sururu*
Playing mussel.

O mangue é tudo de bom
Pra toda população
Com raízes entrelaçadas
Muita lama no chão
Tem pássaros trabalhando
Querendo alimentação

The mangrove is all the best
For the whole population
With intertwined roots
Lots of mud on the floor
There are birds working
Wanting food

| | |
|---|---|
| O guaxinim despreocupado Com o caranguejo na mão. | The carefree raccoon With the crab in hand. |
| Aqui vamos começando Com o nosso projeto legal “O que o mangue nos oferece” É muito sensacional Viva o nosso sistema Que se chama manguezal. | Here we begin With our cool project. “What the mangrove offers us” Is very sensational. Cheers for our system That is called mangrove. |

The poems read in the classroom were very important for students to develop oral skill and, through orality, they exposed their opinions about the constitution of the mangrove, the names of the animals they knew and other features of this ecosystem. After the students' inferences, another panel in which students could express their memories through drawings was built (Figure 3). The panel is entitled *No mangue tem...* (In the mangrove, there is...).



Figure 3. Panel elaborated using students' drawings. (Source: Authors' photo collection).

After the previous activity, there was another discussion of the poems with the students, highlighting the animals existing in the mangrove ecosystem, such as crab (*Callinectes sapidus, sp.*), uçá-crab (*Ucides cordatus*), sururu (*Mytella charruana*) and turu (*Teredo sp.*). Students performed paper folding activities, having in mind the colors previously set for each of them, (Figure 4). They also learn the song *Caranguejo não é peixe* (Crab is not fish)



Figure 4. Panel elaborated with students' paper folding activities representing the mangrove animals. (Source: Authors' photo collection).

Another activity carried out was the display of videos about the main birds that inhabit the mangrove ecosystem in the region: *guará*, heron, *taquiri*, among others. At this moment, we talked about nature, in order to raise awareness of the importance of preserving and conserving this ecosystem, and then there was the activity of cutting and pasting figures related to the theme exposed.

There was another class trip to the mangrove and the teachers and students debated about the importance of preserving and conserving the environment free from solid waste left by humans and the study of the soil (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Class trip to the mangrove (Source: Authors' photo collection).

Finally, the project culminated in a pedagogical projects exhibition carried out by the educational agents of Maria Benedita Mota School along with all the students. In the presentation, the students who participated in the project were representing the mangrove animals, and each student recited a verse from the aforementioned poems. The poem *Introdução à poesia* was recited at the beginning of the presentation. Then the students explained to the visitors about the mangrove using a model, they showed videos about the uçá-crab, and exposed the panels made in the classroom. In the end of the presentation, each student recited a verse of the poem *No mangue tem...*

The project “*Meu Amigo Manguezal*” was meaningful for the students, since we noticed the direct involvement and the awakening of the feeling of belonging to the community, especially when they were encouraged and provoked to reflect on their own realities.

Finally, it is clear that the project developed at the school, based on meaningful school curriculum, took into account the everyday life of that school and that community, since students' realities were represented and reframed as the teachers emitted stimuli from their daily experiences.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we reflected on the meaningful curriculum, which is often denied and silenced by schools. Nevertheless, some teachers dare to reflect and break the impositions of the hegemonic curriculum present in most Brazilian schools. When this happens, education is no longer treated in a marketing view, but becomes meaningful since it concerns about diversities existing in the knowledge of traditional communities, that is, it forms individuals considering local specificities.

The autonomous teacher, being responsible for the education of these children, must seek strategies to innovate the school environment, and projects with different pedagogical practices are forms that represent the reality of the students and can be modified according to the needs of the group of students.

The result of this study shows us other possibilities for future studies. Some of them are: the relationship of biodiversity and its specificities with the curriculum in the school context; the knowledge related to fish, crab, shrimp, *sururu* and other possibilities to teach through theory and practice; the effective incorporation of local culture in the school curriculum; the breaking of ideologies that deny and silence the

presence of traditional communities in the curriculum, among others. All of these study possibilities motivate us, since they are broad and meaningful themes.

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