



# Educational Practices in Teaching Work in Multigrade Classes: Ways of Dealing with Differences in School

de Almeida Mota CM<sup>1</sup> and Oliveira da Silva F<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doutorando em Educação e Contemporaneidade, Universidade do Estado da Bahia – UNEB, Brasil

<sup>2</sup>Doutor em Educação e Contemporaneidade, Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana – UEFS, Brasil

**\*Corresponding author:** Fabricio Oliveira da Silva, Doutor e Pós - Doutor em Educação e Contemporaneidade, Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana – UEFS, Departamento de Educação – UEFS, Feira de Santana, Bahia – Brasil, Email: fosilva@uefs.br

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## Abstract

This article presents discussions and results of a research that aimed to understand how the teachers of the multi-series schools conceive the differences and how they deal with them in the classroom. In the course of the study, we used qualitative research based on the (auto)biographical approach. In this way, I take the narratives as a device of investigation, because I understand that the narratives of formation-profession bring with them elements overloaded with subjectivities and, therefore, favor productions of meanings about the formation. To this end, we have used the formative workshops, inspired by the biographical workshops, with six teachers who work in multigrade classes of rural schools, in the county of Várzea do Poço, in the interior of Bahia-Brazil. We can perceive with this research that the differences are being demarcated specifically by the social factor in which their students are and by the learning difficulties that some of them present, triggering the perception that the difference is still associated with the absence of normalizing elements of the subjects. Thus, the study evidenced that the differences are taken as something segregating the subjects, in which the solution is to homogenize the subjects, in a perspective of not recognizing the differences in the cultural and social dimensions.

**Keywords:** Differences; Teaching profession; Teaching in multigrade classes

## Introduction

Thinking about the fields that are inherent to differences in multigrade schools requires some positioning in the face of contemporary debates about identities, which are conceived from the interactions that subjects establish with their peers, as well as with the reality in which they are inserted, marking and demarcating its place in the world.

From this perspective, we cannot separate identity

from difference, since in order to identify ourselves we must differentiate ourselves from others. In this process, we end up looking for elements, material and/or immaterial, responsible for the relation that are present in the symbology that is built through the woven networks, between the self, the other and the reality in which they are inserted.

In this reality, in which political, economic and sociocultural relations, are established as a spatial reference, through the mobilization of meanings, an idea of spatiality

can refer to a space in which relations demarcate the characteristic positions of a situational context in which they are inserted. Thus, we understand the space as being the place where various interactions that involve the self and the other in a given reality happen, especially in the educational one.

We know that clashes of all kinds have been recurring in the educational field, especially at the beginning of this millennium, as they bring up a series of questions and problems regarding diversity, especially in the spaces where multigrade schools are located. In this sense, these stand as indicative of reflections on the various aspects, which have a direct and indirect relation with the teaching work. This fact has driven the resizing of the conceptions about the social function of the school, regarding the historical, political, economic and sociocultural factors.

The teaching practice, based on the principles of a formation based on a curriculum that seeks to comply with a dominant ideological standard that, for a long time, considered scientific knowledge as unique and homogeneous, has become unable to bring to the center of discussions inside the school, the issues of differences and the local knowledge and practices.

Rural schools in their specificities are presented as a space, as a territory of difference because it is permeated by the most varied cultures represented by the different ways of being/thinking/living proper to each subject that attends the multigrade schools [1]. Thus, teaching in rural contexts often disregards these different ways of being/thinking/living because it does not give visibility to the local reality and the knowledge inherent to rural spaces as a driving way of teaching and learning.

By dealing with the multigrade classes as a locus of concern and, therefore, of study, we are giving centrality to a teaching practice based on other conceptions that are based on a heterogeneity of the subjects that constitute it, focused

on their life histories, their rhythms and the meanings attributed to the context of their lives. Therefore, thinking of the teaching profession from these conditions leads us to take the difference as a fundamental element for the teaching work in these schools. Considering this argumentative logic, this paper sought to understand how teachers in multi-grade schools conceive of differences and how they deal with them in the classroom, from their narratives of training and performance in the teaching profession.

### Methodological Path

The study involved six teachers from the municipal school system in the municipality of Várzea do Poço, a city in the interior of the state of Bahia/Brazil. They are teachers who work in multigrade classes in rural areas. For taking into account the meanings that participants give about how they deal with differences at school, the study was anchored in the qualitative approach with a focus on (auto)biographical studies.

In the specific case of this work, the research was organized in two phases, the first being developed at the Pedagogical Support Reference Center for pedagogical monitoring of children with learning difficulties, using document analysis, based on the students' files. At that time, it was possible to see that most of the referrals made to pedagogical monitoring were indicated by the three rural schools in the municipality and, in most of the records of these rural students, there was no record of the complaint, but only the student's name, his parentage, age and grade. This phase of the research had great relevance for the selection of research collaborators, since only teachers who worked in one of these schools were selected, and who had sent students to the Pedagogical Support Reference Center. In this case, the research had the participation of five collaborating professors. With that, we present below the research subjects from the biographical profile constructed through the narratives of themselves and the characterization of their place of speech.

Colaboradores	Perfil biográfico
Pedro	Born in Farm Limão located in the municipality of Cícero Dantas – BA, he is 43 years old, currently lives in the seat of the municipality of Várzea do Poço – BA, in addition to teaching, he develops activities as a farmer and rancher. He has been a teacher for 20 years.
Clóvis	Born and residing on the Jenipapo Farm in the municipality of Várzea do Poço – Ba, he is 48 years old, in addition to teaching, he works in the countryside as a farmer. He has been in the profession for 29 years.
Rafaela	Born on the Pau do Angico Farm located in the municipality of Várzea do Poço – BA, she is 39 years old, currently resides in the village of Nova Esperança in the same municipality, in addition to teaching, she develops activities as a housewife. She has been a teacher for 24 years.

Ester	Born in the community of Barra Nova located in the municipality of Várzea do Poço – BA, she is 49 years old, currently lives in the village of Nova Esperança in this same municipality, in addition to teaching, she develops activities as a farmer. She has been a teacher for 33 years.
Edson	Born on the farm Papaguainho located in the municipality of Várzea do Poço – BA, he is 49 years old, currently resides at the Fazenda Pau do Angico in this same municipality, in addition to teaching, he develops activities as a farmer. He has been a teacher for 29 years.
Marta	She was born on the Abóbora farm located in the municipality of Mairi – BA and currently resides at the Fazenda Caraibinha which is located in the municipality of Várzea do Poço – BA, she is 51 years old, in addition to teaching, she develops activities as a farmer. She has been a teacher for 36 years.

**Table 1:** Biographical profile of participants.

The second phase of the research consisted of the Pedagogical Workshops, which enabled the production of training proposals elaborated with the teachers of rural schools, and carried out in the development of the training research.

The study was based on the principles of qualitative research, defended by Minayo [2], through which the importance of the production of meanings and the subjectification process is highlighted. In this type of methodology, the production of meanings that the subject makes when giving meaning to the experience, to what he is involved with, is valued. Therefore, the study brings to the scene narratives of teachers who work in multigrade classes, revealing the meanings produced about the work with the difference in the classroom. In this direction, we anchor the study in the (auto)biographical approach in which the narratives gain centrality because they constitute powerful devices through which the collaborators signify their doing in teaching and, in the case of the present study, in teaching in multigrade classes. For during scientific research it is necessary to recognize that the subjects produce meaning when narrating.

In qualitative research, the study of the senses about human experience must be done understanding that people interact, interpret and build understandings about what they are and what they do. In the case of this work, the qualitative approach helped us to understand, through the narratives of teachers in exercise in the multigrade classes, the practices with diversity, as well as the meanings attributed to them, in order to understand how the teachers of the multigrade schools conceive the differences and how they deal with them in the classroom. Thus, we use a phenomenological approach as a basis for understanding the narratives.

As a research device, narrative interviews were used, which were produced in individualized moments. Due to the need to maintain the anonymity of these participants, fictitious names were used. It is a device used to collect information, in which the subject explains his experiences

in teaching, building, at the moment he narrates, meanings for the lived. Narrating emerges as a formative possibility, as it allows the narrator to weave reflections about himself and his practice, in order to become aware of his deed. It is from this condition that the teachers narrate and signify their experiences, arising from everyday situations in which they get involved in the school, consolidating practices and experiences that they themselves choose to narrate and assign meanings.

The narrative interview genre has a structure of not necessarily having questions, but only a contextualization of the situation to be narrated, a fact that allows the narrator to flow freely about the experiences he decides to bring up. A condition is created for the participants to talk about the chosen subject autonomously, being able to explore and further deepen his ideas. Thus, Jovchelovitch and Bauer [3] state:

Through the narrative, people remember what happened, put the experience in a sequence, find possible explanations for it, and play with the chain of events that build individual and social life. Storytelling implies intentional states that relieve, or at least make familiar, events and feelings that confront normal everyday life. (Authors' translation).

In this perspective, Jovchelovitch and Bauer [3] conceive that the narrative is a device that favors the meanings of the lived, the remembered, the happened. Such authors consider that the narrative interview is constructed through four phases:

The initiation, narration, tension of the narrator himself and conclusion. Therefore, this device allowed teachers to remember and signify what was experienced in the multigrade classes, with a special focus on issues of how to deal with differences.

To carry out the analysis of the information, we are inspired by the comprehensive and interpretive paradigm. Thus, the categorization process was constituted from the thematic nuclei that emerged from the narrative itself,

observing the focus that each collaborator produced when narrating the experiences in the multigrade school. Therefore, the analyses were based on the contributions of the comprehensive-interpretative method. It is an analysis, which for Ricoeur [4], is constituted from the effects of understanding, which is the result of an explanation that occurs for human and also non-human things. This suggests that explanation, before understanding itself, is a mechanism by which the narrator is used to produce meanings.

In this logic, the categorization emerged from the narrated itself, in the way that each subject was entangling the senses for work with the difference at school. Thus, the categorization takes into account the meaning as a block of meanings that rises from the narrative and explanatory plot that each teacher makes when bringing up how they conceive the differences and how they deal with them in the classroom. It is an analytical paradigm that is consolidated in what is said, in what is understood by the subject who narrates. Hence, a comprehensive and interpretive movement that is woven into the reflection that the narrator himself makes of himself and in the way he deals with the simplifications that he attributes to the lived. Such movement enhances the understanding around the issues of difference, a concept that gains visibility in discussions about identity, themes that will be approached in the next section.

It is important to mention that the autobiographical narratives were presented in this study as a training device for highlighting the teaching practice in an aspect of valuing the subjects of rural communities and their living conditions. Likewise, it allows us to analyze how teachers make teaching happen in these spaces, seeking to understand a multidimensionality that contemplates their ways of being/thinking/doing. This narrative movement directs them to the projection of themselves, (re)orienting them to a (re)position that takes as a motto the future perspectives that they think for themselves, and which in the movement of formation are (re)thought, (re)evaluated, (re)considered, as the founding element of their existences and of teaching.

### **Identity and Difference: Other Senses of the Teaching Practice in Multi-grade Schools**

From the studies on identity [5-8], human relations began to be perceived in another light, which helped us to overcome the condition of those who believed in a fixed, unified identity, devoid of all the elements of subjectivity of a subject who presents their differences as elements that individualize him, but also constitute him as a plural being.

In this case, identity and difference have been reemerging from a constant tangle, demanded by the changes and uncertainties of a context permeated by

situations that Bauman [5] called “liquid life”, to refer to the way things change at a shifting speed, bringing to society the changing conditions of a time devoid of elements that offer the consolidation that, previously, this society would need to solidify.

This brings us to a new way of thinking about the relations we have established with each other, in which decentralizations are necessary, leading to a multifaceted and multi-referential understanding of society, which favors the understanding that everything is unfinished and subject to (re)constructions and resizing.

Hall [8] presents another understanding of identity in postmodernity, because according to this author, there are historically three basic conceptions of identity: the identity of the subject of the Enlightenment - founded on a human subject, formed by a centrality constituted solely within it - which becomes an individualistic view; the identity that presents itself as the identity of the sociological subject, by which the view of centrality was no longer preserved, since it was understood that the relations external to the subject would be the basis for the construction of identity. In this approach Hall (2003, p. 11-12) emphasizes that:

Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ - between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project “ourselves” into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them ‘part of us’, helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. (Authors’ translation)

Moreover, there is the third conception of identity, from the understanding of the existence of a postmodern subject evidenced as the result of the interactions made between this interior and the exterior, in which its identity reveals itself with a sense of mobility and flexibility, always being in an open process and subject to reformulation.

Resuming this process on the three conceptions of identity enables the understanding that social dynamics permeates various aspects that direct our relations with each other, as well as with our worldview, being necessary to pay attention to the demands of today, regarding the understanding of our condition as subjects immersed in the most varied inter-relations.

The paradigm changes in contemporary times have required new attitudes, new thinking and, consequently, new deeds, which must be in line with a position that allows us to assume different identities, because, as Silva (p. 32) [9] says, “[...] we may experience tensions between our different

identities in our personal lives when what is required by one identity interferes with the demands of another” (Authors’ translation).

This gives flexibility to the understanding of the complexity in the relations we establish with each other, so as to overcome polarities and binarisms, in which, to praise one, one must inferiorize the other. To present this idea of binaryism, Bhabha (p. 126) [8] discusses the productivity of the Foucaultian concept of power and knowledge, saying that “Pouvoir/Savoir places subjects in a power and knowledge relationship that is not part of a symmetrical or dialectic relationship - me/another, master/slave - which can then be subverted by inversion” (Author’s translation). In this aspect, the feelings that emerge from these relationships involving the subjects are fed from an unfair comparison, which values a disproportionality in these relationships.

Considering the reflections on identity woven by the mentioned authors, it is evident that when a system of dominant ideology seeks its strengthening, even realizing that it may be weakened and replaced by new systems, it causes the inversion of the social principles of a community with the imposition of identities that are based on negative forces, causing the weakening of those who are in a situation of vulnerability, not only socially, but also culturally. Complementing this perspective Bauman (p. 44) [6] reiterates that:

“Most of the time, the pleasure of selecting a stimulating identity is corrupted by fear. After all, we know that if our efforts fail due to lack of resources or lack of determination, another unwanted and intrusive identity can be embedded in the one we choose and build” (Authors’ translation).

The understanding of identity forged by Bauman [6] leads us to think about the process of constructing subjectivities, because as stated, it occurs through our interrelations in the collectivity, however, without disregarding the process of individuation which we live. Thus, it should be mentioned that subjectivity, such as identity, may also be conditioned by interests and intentionalities in tune with a particular ideology. Thus, by communing with the elements that are linked to the process of constructing subjectivities, we can process them so that they remain as they were conceived, and we can also develop ways of recreating and resizing them.

The emphasis that subjects bring to their groups, through a process of self-knowledge and self-assertion, overcoming the condition of subjugates, because they do not fit the mold of a society that, for a long time, still holds a stereotyped idea, favoring with such posture the occupation of the subjugated of a non-place [8], a territory denied by

the law, but dominated by an imaginary of freedom, fed by dreams, longings and becomings.

It must be at stake when we present the strength that a group has, the capacity to reinvent reality, as a way of creating a process that is sustained and nourished by all the elements inherent in the production of subjectivation, the difference that constitutes us as a being of individuation and the identifications necessary for the production of social identities. Such strands are complementary and are in a relation that happens across the board. In this perspective, not only the aspects related to what collectivizes us, but also the aspects of the subject itself.

We must not forget that the transformations of a social, political and cultural nature that have happened in the last decades can be characterized as devices for new positions, rediscovering the potential of reinvention of reality, as a way of confronting the ruling classes that for a long time shattered individuals and groups who were able to demonstrate a position contrary to the “order” established by the nation.

In this perspective, we link as impulses for these transformations, the assumptions that allowed reflections and, consequently, much struggle for the subjects to recognize themselves as part of a world and, given that, mobilize efforts to transform this world. In this movement, we awaken to the self-affirmation and the recognition that we are experiencing a moment that Bauman [6] refers to as uncertain and transitory, in which social identities can (could) no longer be understood as solid elements, mentioning then the term “Liquidity” to portray a society in crisis, chaotic and destabilized by micropolitical pressures.

This all led to the abandonment of some principles and the resignification of others, which could be consistent with this moment of uncertainty and transience, resulting in the instability of social identities. In this context, Bauman (p. 31) [6] understands that identity, by “losing the social anchors that made it seem ‘natural’, predetermined and non-negotiable, ‘identification’ becomes increasingly important to individuals who desperately seek a ‘us’ to which they can request access” (Authors’ translation).

However, the need to revitalize and anchor our references in groups that allow us to share our positions, acquiring means that can contribute to the process of construction and reconstruction of our identities, enabled us to deal with the dynamics of changes that intimately interfere in social, cultural and economic life aspects of contemporary social subjects.

The different forms of social organizations support the principles that guide the construction and reconstruction

of social identities, which permeate the “celebration of the cultural uniqueness of a particular group, as well as the analysis of their specific oppression” [9] (Authors’ translation). Thus, it is evident that the best conditions linked to the processes of cultural singularization and social identification require the subjects to be permeated by a consciousness that considers their conditions of being and remaining acting in the world in general and, in a particular way, in their communities and the groups to which they belong.

The conditions of existence of these social groups constituted by identifications, differences and subjectivities, have been seeking ways, strategies to resist and survive, in the perspective of finding moving meanings that are linked to the ways of reinvention of reality and social organization to contend with this type of structure, and therefore to make the invisible visible, in this case the differences.

In the midst of these contributions, there is a moment of effervescence and clash in the discussions about values, principles and meanings of social subjects’ ways of life. It is worth noting that such perspectives “require forms of dialectical thinking that do not refuse or deny the otherness (alterity) that constitutes the symbolic domain of psychic and social identifications” (p. 279) [8] (Authors’ translation).

It is appropriate to mention the complacency in the relations between the self and the other, in a plot that requires one to face the other/ to the other/ with the other, so that a process of resignification, from an encounter of cultures, through which new structures that embrace those that were, and still are, relegated to a non-place can be produced.

Based on all the assumptions raised and discussed here, it is worth mentioning some anxieties and concerns about those who are within the scope of the school and who are or have been excluded, composing a “between-place”, but who try to mobilize mechanisms that are available to them, as a survival factor in an environment, often inhospitable, in other words, with standards imposed by a conception of education and school that does not conceive of differences as a structuring element for another to think about teaching and doing the teaching.

In the classroom routine, some situations show the marks of the difference that each subject brings, because when they are not invisible, they are treated with indifference and prejudice. At such times, it is the teacher’s responsibility to intervene in order to give situations such as these other possibilities of respecting differences and living with diversity, as we can infer from Esther’s narrative<sup>1</sup>.

[...] when the boy talks thin in the room, they say: you are like a “fagot”. [...] I’m referring to their body parts, so it’s a different way of being, that you will respect, when you need to [...] to be serious, I say it, because I think so, I go to all this difference and they keep going, “it’s a fagot”, “it’s a fagot that talks thin”, I tell them, talking is his way and respect is your action, and you need to respect, I’m going all this way from behind, when is possible and when is not, I sit down and start serious, imposing my conditions. You won’t talk that way to your classmate, your classmate needs respect. As you also need respect, everyone needs respect for what they are. Here we’re not all the same and no one is different, because by your actions you are different, but by your body you are equal to him, everything he has you has, unless he is a man who has an genital organ different from the woman. And then I’ll show him also the difference they have is just that one, and the rest everything they have the same. (Esther, Narrative Interview, 2016).

We understand that the interventions that each teacher makes in the classroom, facing situations that reveal the marks of the difference and the students’ identity, are conditioned by their conceptions of identity and difference, as well as by the way they think the relations between these students in contexts of diversity. With this, we see the need that we have as teachers of Basic Education, to discuss and consolidate formative moments that guarantee the (re) construction of conceptions, in a work that highlights the differences in the classroom, as constitutive elements of our identities and not as something that undermines us or causes our exclusion.

The questions about the identities brought and produced by individuals, which are immersed in the many different groups that make up the school community, have always been in the background, when they were not camouflaged by attempts to subvert them. It is in this context that we begin to realize that, as teachers, we need to pay attention to the intrinsic aspects of differences, as these are major factors for the construction of autonomy and the pursuit of freedom of the different groups that make up the school.

We believe that if we pay attention to the intrinsic aspects of the issues of difference in the classroom, this will require us, as teachers, the ability to visualize, beyond the social and economic conditions of individuals, a proposal based on interculturality, as we understand that its principles are built from the cultural interactions between the subjects and according to their way of life. According to the narratives of

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method, the names of the collaborators are fictitious in compliance with the recommendations of the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings - CEP, regarding the obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the research collaborators identity.

1 Even in the case of a research that is based on the (auto)biographical

Edson and Clovis, the differences that appear in the classroom have a major focus on social and economic conditions.

[...] the teacher in the classroom faces these differences. We find children from parents who do not do the monitoring they should with their children, especially in the classroom. We also find children who come to school who do not have good feeding at home. (Edson, Narrative Interview, 2016)

We realize that there are children who come without adequate food and we try to handle it in a different way, [...] sometimes someone can be late because Mom took too long to make the breakfast, often realizes that there was no breakfast at home, [...]. (Clovis, Narrative Interview, 2016)

Otherwise, in Marta's narrative, there are other elements inherent to the matter of difference, but which encompass aspects beyond the social and economic condition.

In the classroom, every day [...] there is difficulty, that student who has not had breakfast who has learning difficulties appears, so that student who struggled with the father at home. There are those who have disabilities that when they have group work they don't want to do it together. There is that one who has learning disabilities. There are several factors that appear in the classroom and, as a teacher, I have to have that discernment to understand each difficulty of each one of them and try to work on that difficulty for everyone to win. (Marta, Narrative Interview, 2016).

Teachers in multi-grade schools understand differences in different ways, sharing opinions that express their views on this matter. Thus, it is possible to understand that, in some moments, these teachers emphasize the difference, in terms of the lack or absence of elements intrinsic to the social and economic condition that their students live, linking to these conditions the learning difficulties that arise in the context of classroom. These conceptions are being covertly constructed from comparisons between the students themselves, in which some patterns established by a model of society founded on the white, heterosexual, male chauvinist, patriarchal and elitist ideal are taken as reference.

It is noteworthy that, even relating the differences to the students' socioeconomic conditions, these teachers understand that the classroom is permeated by a variety of factors that require them to respect and welcome, seeking to understand their students' life situations and their possible difficulties in establishing a work that takes this as a precondition for the development of the teaching-learning process.

With this approach, it should be mentioned that difference requires ways of understanding deeper meanings

in which weird and binary comparisons are avoided. This attitude is not seen as something inevitable, but as a preponderant element of identity construction, in which individuals can lean on each other, through these elements inherent in the differences that integrate each one of them.

Difference as a field that makes identifications resurface, emphasizes a movement that takes place in a constant coming and going, which enables the understanding that identity is performative<sup>2</sup>, and shifts in the sense that puts us in the condition of be-coming [9]. Therefore, it is evident that it is from the elements of difference that the subjects construct their identities and establish their relationships with others, for which each becomes responsible for the act that evokes this demand for the coming and going, seeks to get closer of the condition of be-coming.

To assume difference as a beacon of this process of identity construction is to offer it its true meaning, since it is largely responsible for the agreements and disagreements in the relationships established between individuals, giving them mechanisms to interact with their conflicts and clashes, restructuring a new thinking. This is possible from the warp and woof that form in the meeting of languages, positions and attitudes, because "[...] we are the ones who make them, in the context of cultural and social relations. Identity and difference are social and cultural creations" (p. 76) [9] (Authors' translation).

Identity and difference may bring a univocal and interdependent sense, in which one complements the other, because in order to "identify with" one must "differentiate oneself from". Apparently we can make a shallow interpretation of this sentence and not connote the meanings that emerge from it. But if we seek a certain exploration of its meaning, we will notice the overload of its semantics as triggering a process that is established and reestablished in the light of interrelationships.

Thinking about the politics of meaning, in the field of education, is therefore urgent, since it is composed of multiple cultures and is in a context that no longer allows the standardization, much less the silencing and invisibility of the subjects who, for a long time, were considered "strangers" because they did not fit the standards set that the school has always disseminated, rejecting the access of its culture. When not rejected, relegated them to inferior conditions.

This movement has always given rise to stigmas and stereotypes, placing the school on the same level as an

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that we see here the semantics of the word "performative" - adjective whose meaning for linguistics is a simultaneous act of the speaker and the action it evokes.

exclusionary and perverse institution, since all that was composed was formatted to meet another social logic that did not claim to value subjectivities. We know that the educational reality is not yet very different from what was previously reported, but we have already glimpsed other perspectives and new directions, which are inspired by the conceptions of identity and difference as complementary aspects to each other.

Of course, “reconstituting the discourse of cultural difference requires not only a change of cultural content and symbols; [because] a substitution within the temporal frame of representation is never adequate” (p. 276) [8] (Authors’ translation). Considering this approach, we must be clear that these new perspectives and intentions require a profound revision in the social organization, including the school, in order to make possible reformulations of meaning that enable a rereading of social reality, through which temporality and spatiality denote other meanings.

From these perspectives, the social and cultural dimensions should be viewed through a prism that may characterize them, not only as contemplation of reality, proposing only a review of postures and profiles, but also for a serious and profound reconstitution of social reality. In this sense, the teachers of multi-grade schools participating in the research understand that the social and cultural dimensions are preponderant factors for the development of teaching practices that give centrality to the social reality of their students, as a way to reconsider the ways of life of these subjects in their contexts.

### **Differences in Education: (re)thinking relationships from the perspective of horizontality**

Educational debates have intensified, making us think of education in other perspectives, which are linked to the social moment lived, as a way of redirecting actions that can broaden the horizons of education.

Education has been presented in a scenario of diversity, in which various cultures meet and interrelate, in a context of tension and negotiation, tensions more often than negotiation, reviving attitudes of prejudice and stereotypy. Such attitudes have been reinforced by the existing curricular structure, which is based on the ideologies of hegemonic groups, proposing appeasement devices that lead to the policies of a supposed democracy, still overloaded with intentionalities that reinforce the context of inequality rather than promoting equity, disregarding differences and subjectivities.

Differences in the field of education do not have a marked place, either in the official curriculum or in the actions and positions that are revealed through the pedagogical activities that occur in the school routine. With this, we experience a condition of estrangement from the other, because they trigger ways that lead us to an individualistic and egocentric thinking, which is revealed in the relationships established in this space, in which the self is better than the other, generating a situation of conflicts and exclusion, since this way of being and acting is based on the propositions of a white, heterosexual and male chauvinist ideal.

In Rafaela’s narratives, students’ attitudes present the remnants of a thought based on the overlap of these ideals spread in society, which reinforce prejudice and cause exclusion.

We went to the field, dressed the girls in shorts, ordered to come wearing socks so we could get our soccer cleats on, we played soccer, we had a lot of fun, when I got here we went to discuss it. You see the girl can play soccer. She stopped being a girl? No. So why girl can not play soccer? There were girls who played better than boys, there was a boy who played better than a girl. So, soccer was very good to work with them on gender issues. The girls said that in their house their father would not sweep a house, do not wash dishes, because their father said that who does this is a woman, that the role of man is not this, that the role of man is to go to the fields to work. (Rafaela, Narrative Interview, 2016)

According to the excerpt from Rafaela’s narrative, besides realizing the strength and frequency with which the social patterns responsible for the different ways of exclusion, invisibilities and attempts to mask differences prevail, we realize that the teacher has already been inserting in her practices in the classroom, discussions that favor another direction, as a way to complement the gaps that the official curriculum presents and that ultimately empty the senses of differences. The teacher conceives of differences as an important element that should be addressed at school.

In the speeches that empower the school institution as responsible for the formation based on the social and political pillars of society, there are the dominant ideologies, embedded in this official curriculum as a way to disseminate silencing practices, making the school a homogenizing apparatus. Given these assumptions, what is the place of those that the school cannot fit in this official curriculum? Rios (p. 155) [10] argues that “all marked (demarcated) differences are made invisible in an attempt to normalize these subjects” (Authors’ translation). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the search for autonomy



becomes possible through ethical and political commitments acquired in the teacher's formation, as a transgression of these practices that try to normalize the subjects.

In order to guarantee a school space that complements the proposals of the official curriculum, to give it the deserved place, and that is the right of any subject that is inserted in the school, it is necessary to develop proposals that are in line with the demands of contemporary diversity, subverting the logic presented in the official curriculum.

It is therefore necessary to rethink our existing educational structure so that we do not continue to perpetuate a unique and standardized cultural curriculum idea. For this, it is important to understand difference as an element that mobilizes us for the construction of our identities. For Bhabha (p. 261) [8]:

The aim of cultural difference is to articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the minorities meaningful position, which resists totalization - the representation that will not return as the same, the less-in-origin that results in discursive political and political strategies which add not sum, but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern significance. (Authors' translation).

It is evident that the difference follows a logic of subversion, requiring a negotiation and not a confrontation, because the groups are also formed by the differences that the subjects bring, enabling the production of subjectivity that strengthens them to cope with situations of inferiorization.

Differences in education have caused conflicts, impacting the format of educational proposals that no longer match the current reality, and consequently generating a series of new issues to be discussed and rethought. Thus, we seek a direction that favors the construction of an educational project that gives centrality to issues related to interculturality, as a way of valuing the various cultures that permeate school spaces, founding a practice that uses mechanisms that understand that The subjects involved in these contexts have a life and a history that may be the starting point for the production of new knowledge and, in turn, for the construction of new educational practices.

It is important to consider that the relation of alterity is a strand that enables another dimension, in the context of differences in education, because it is in the interrelationship with the other that the principles of respect and reciprocity are incorporated, and in this case, they replace the difference in a deserved place. This place is that of valuing the knowing-being-making of each one in this educational process.

Discussions about differences have permeated the most varied fields of education, where you can notice the great difficulties existing in the process of understanding a natural manifestation of each and every subject, and can attribute such difficulties to a history of denial of differences through the attempt to normalize/frame the subjects, in a perspective of homogenizing their characterizations and social actions, as if they should all be equal and framed in social standards advocated by the ruling class.

It is necessary to recognize that there is interest in teachers to develop school pedagogical proposals that ensure the appreciation of diversity, but this has focused on speeches and some specific actions. Those who have dared to implement ways of valuing the different in their classroom practices, respecting and understanding the student as a cognitive, social and cultural subject, have come to realize that learning difficulties must be faced according to the multiplicity of causes involving this subject. In this logic, it also involves the culture in which it is inserted, its level of cognitive development, the relationship between thinking and acting of this subject, as well as the link that he establishes with the learning moments.

Pedro's narrative (2016) highlights his way of working, considering the different cognitive levels that exist in his classroom, and the importance of valuing each subject and the way each one learns.

[...] We notice the boys who are advanced and those who have learning difficulties, [...]. I give an activity to everyone, with the same subject, then we will do the individual activity according to the series, [...]. Those who do not produce sentences produce words and then, according to their learning, we work [...] the orthography, [...] some that are already advanced I had a text to produce, others chose those words and produced phrases about those words and others we circulated only the letters V and F that had in the words. So this difficulty, if you know how to work in the classroom, with the same subject and different activity [...] they go a little further. (Pedro, Narrative Interview, 2016).

The inherent aspects of the differences, present in the education contexts, and that emerge in the most varied ways, offer conditions for the construction of relationships that, established from the meeting of cultures, allow us to glimpse a panorama of possibilities for the valorization of the alterity. In this sense, the gap between the "I" and the "other" may cease to exist according to the verticalized mode of visualization of each other; considering a horizontal relationship that allows a view of respect and co-responsibility, which implies a simultaneous negotiation about the connotations of estrangement that are proper to the meeting of differences.

Considering these aspects, we realize the need to resize educational proposals so that they contemplate perspectives based on the issues of difference and subjectivity, and which pose a major contemporary challenge. This requires a concentration of efforts (possibilities) centered on a collective production that involves teachers and students in the same direction.

### **(Re)thinking the Meanings of Difference in Multigrade Schools**

The dominant focus on educational normative standards has been viewed as exclusionary, especially by those who for a long time suffered from the impositions contained in the dominant political structures [8], being compelled to survive in unworthy living conditions, as they bring explicit the positions and behaviors of the stranger [6]. Thus, even noting the transiency and flexibility present in the meanings of experiences, currently, the school, as a space for welcoming the various ways of being and living, has not demonstrated a position consistent with this dynamic.

Some guiding points of this reflection should, therefore, have in view the comprehension of how the school, in contemporary times, has approached interculturalism, and if the teaching practices have offered elements that create conditions of valorization of the identities and differences of the students, as an attempt to mobilize elements that can meet the strings that still permeate the school spaces.

The support material provided by the national agencies responsible for education intends to provide guidelines for working with cross-cutting themes. This can be evidenced in what is advocated by LDBEN [11], but we can note that such themes are dealt with tightly, revealing dichotomies and addressing the terms that reinforce old antagonisms. Thus, we can mention the term *tolerance*, which is presented in Art. 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [12], as respect for differences, but, when analyzing the policies of meaning and semantics of the word, we understand that this term triggers the intention to bear the differences and not to live and respect the different ones, in order to guarantee public policies that can offer conditions of equity. Moreover, the term preserves, semantically and politically, hierarchies related to what is hegemonic, presenting diversity as something comprehensive, but totally devoid of meaning, since it is remarkable that most public policy proposals in the field of culture goes in the opposite direction of the intrinsic relations of identity and difference in an attempt to fabricate identity and impoverish the meaning of difference.

The compartmentalization that is done to think about identity and difference can be a way of weakening the true

meaning present in the context of their interrelationship. Therefore, efforts are needed to counteract policy intentionalities that use broad concepts but are taken in a simplistic and inaccurate character. Thus, when used indiscriminately, this “can be restricted to simply praising differences, pluralities and diversities, becoming a conceptual trap and a political strategy for the emptying and/or appeasement of differences and inequalities” ([13] p. 17) (Authors’ translation).

It is then important to understand the politics of meaning that are involved in the conceptions of a proposal based on a thought inspired by interculturalism, as well as its contribution to the educational field, since society changes dynamically, requiring a new position that converges with the values currently adopted. The term interculturalism refers to the meeting of the various cultures that permeate a society, being a validated sentence in several discussions and the deepening that has been given around this concept and, notoriously, has caused a rethinking about a teaching practice that can consider the classroom as a privileged space for the blossoming of these varied cultures.

Interculturalism can be taken specifically as a way of conceiving the relationship between the cultures that permeate the same space, and therefore, in the midst of such relationships, clashes arise from the conflicts generated there. Given this aspect, we can emphasize that an education based on the conceptions of interculturalism must use a thinking that is guided by a posture of inclusion.

From this premise, it is clear that a thought based on interculturalism should contribute to a teaching that values difference in difference, with grounds for questioning the unique truths and established from dominant fundamentalisms and structures, thus offering bases so that the school can deal with the conflicts and clashes that emerge in the encounter of cultures, overcoming essentialist views and tight speeches about cultural diversity, identity and difference. Such perspective is perceived in Marta’s narratives.

The classroom is made up of people with differences. Each person has their differences, no one is the same, and in reality, in the classroom, we have to welcome each other the way they are. Each has their own financial condition, each has a different way of learning, and the teacher has to be prepared to deal with these differences, to respect each other’s ways of learning, their culture, their way of life, the financial condition of each one, the classroom has to have all this preparation and, as a teacher I have all this care of always respecting and trying to take care of each one just the way they are. (Marta, Narrative Interview, 2016)

According to the above, we realize that the differences make up the classrooms of the multigrade schools, from a meeting of cultures, being evidenced by Marta, as something that requires preparation and understanding, to know how to deal with all these issues inherent to differences. Thus, we understand that the intersection of differences is the hallmark within the group that makes up this classroom, demanding from the teacher a knowledge that emerges from her life-training experience to deal with the differences that permeate this group, as well as to mediate and intermediate the interrelationships that happen between the subjects.

The proposals contained in an educational project, in line with the realities of the subjects that make up the school institution, clearly state that a formation based on the relationships of various cultures for intercultural coexistence requires not only addressing other cultures, or other points of view and positions, of different realities, but dealing even with the conflicts that arise when these different positions are confronted. Thus, recognizing how the rights of others and their own rights have been historically understood and how they can be understood from the relations between cultures, a critical and transformative posture is stimulated [14].

An intercultural education proposes, therefore, to consider the differences and subjectivities of the subjects that make up the social groups, so it is important to appropriate affirmative public policies as a guarantee of access to a right that has long been denied to political minorities. Therefore, it is evident that the educational proposals that persist in our country do not value unity in diversity, much less unity diversity, disregarding the complexity paradigm [15], and reinforcing disjunctive thinking. Thus, it distances itself from the possibilities of developing actions of real dialogue between cultures, according to the principles and foundations of connective thinking. Rodrigues and Abramowicz [13] (p. 22) point out that:

An education focused on the incorporation of cultural diversity in the pedagogical daily life has emerged in national and international debates and discussions, seeking to question theoretical assumptions and pedagogical and curricular implications of an education focused on the valorization of multiple identity in the context of formal education. (Authors' translation).

Such incorporation is still one of our great challenges in education, requiring the mobilization of various elements that can validate a pedagogical practice based on the appreciation of identities. Thus, in this context, it is urgent to confront stigmas and prejudices about the different ways of life of underprivileged communities.

It is quite true that the confrontation of hegemonic structures is necessary and may diminish the impacts of the forces of an exclusionary cultural logic, because, in parallel to this movement, the microstructures are gaining immunity to these aspects and reestablishing, in the sutures existing in social structures, the affirmation of a collectivity willing to seek dignity and appreciation [16].

### Final Considerations

With the development of this study, we were able to deepen, significantly, the questions about identity and difference to understand the other meanings of teaching in multi-grade schools, using (auto)biographical narratives as assumptions of teacher education based on the proposals of research-training. With this, we realize the potentialities that the trajectories of training-profession have for the resizing of teaching in rural schools, with a view to local appreciation and due attribution of the place of difference in these spaces.

It can be emphasized that in the development of research-formation, the lack of knowledge and understanding of the meanings of identity and difference from part of the research collaborating teachers was given as constant evidence, as they did not have, throughout the profession, specific moments destined to discussions and / or formations that deal with this theme, in depth. Thus, when discussing issues related to diversity was based on didactic guidance material, which always permeated the educational spaces and, in turn, emptied the true senses of difference.

The difference appears in research with varied meanings, sometimes as characteristic of each subject, sometimes as an element that needs to be masked, from the attempts to homogenize the students. The differences are being demarcated, from the teachers' narratives, specifically by the social factor in which their students find themselves and the learning difficulties that some present, triggering the perception that the difference is still associated with the absence of any normalizer element of the subjects.

It is noteworthy that the differences in the classroom are conceived by the teachers of the multi-grade schools, from the perspective of the existence of remnants of a thought that binds to the difference the character of something that needs to improve or adapt to the norms standardized by society. This perspective favors the teacher's didactic-methodological positioning to approach some model, through the fading, so that it does not meet the standards established through the ideology of the dominant groups, which occurs through the dissemination of a discourse that places difference as an element that needs to be overlapped by sameness. And in this same context by treating identity as a fabrication,

minimizing the meanings of differences in the construction of identities.

This leads us to think that school spaces are permeated by standardizing forces, which impose the ideology that favors the senses of emptying the real meaning of difference. Even with these ideological rancors, inside schools the teachers are still developing teaching practices that value the way of being of students and seeking, in their own way, to mediate the processes of conflict, tensions and negotiations inherent in meeting cultures in the school. In this sense, it is evident that working in the classroom, with differences, depends a lot on the education that the teacher has, the conceptions he brings about the difference, how he sees life and how life touches him.

Thus, we understand throughout the discussions that teaching profession in multi-grade schools gain other meanings triggered by movements related to being and doing teaching on these spaces, where experience becomes one of the main elements of teaching production in rural schools, because it shows from other perspectives also responsible for the construction-deconstruction-reconstruction of identities and subjectivities intrinsic to the interrelation process, as prerequisites of a teaching based on the principles of reciprocity and coexistence between the subjects living in these spaces.

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