

Indigenous school education and community projects for the future

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Abstract

This article reports on a study on the school of an indigenous community and the aspirations for the future of the people who are part of it. The main problem we sought to address focused on the distinguishing characteristics of indigenous school education and conventional school education in Brazil. Our background concern was to bring elements that could elucidate to what extent indigenous communities have autonomy to define school processes that overcome the colonialist character of conventional education. Therefore, we looked for a type of school that intervenes directly on the living conditions of the people it provides educational services with. The main ethnographic work was conducted at Khumuno Wutã Kotiria Indigenous Municipal School, in the territory of the indigenous Kotiria, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira municipality, Amazonas state, Brazilian Amazon region. The information was collected mainly through direct observation and records of informal conversations over a period of four months in Caruru Cachoeira, the largest Kotiria community in Brazil. The results consist of the description of the remarkable characteristics of school practices, and lead to the conclusion that this local group, when planning their school objectives, reflects on what they want for their future and the future of their community, which makes their school the main space for community meeting, debate and intervention in current and future living conditions.

Keywords

Indigenous school education – Kotiria (Wanano) – Community projects for the future.

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Educação escolar indígena e projetos comunitários de futuro

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Resumo

Este artigo reporta uma pesquisa sobre a escola de uma comunidade indígena e as aspirações de futuro das pessoas que fazem parte dela. O principal problema que se buscou enfrentar esteve voltado a aspectos distintivos entre a educação escolar indígena e a educação escolar convencional no Brasil. A preocupação de fundo foi trazer elementos que pudessem elucidar em que nível as comunidades indígenas têm autonomia para definir processos escolares que superem o caráter colonialista da educação escolar convencional. Para tanto, buscou-se um tipo de escola que intervém diretamente sobre as condições de vida das pessoas a quem presta serviços educacionais. A principal base etnográfica do trabalho foi a Escola Municipal Indígena Khumuno Wu'tu Kotiria, situada no território dos indígenas Kotiria, no município de São Gabriel da Cachoeira, estado do Amazonas, Amazônia brasileira. As informações foram coletadas especialmente por meio de observação direta e registros de conversas informais durante um período de quatro meses em Caruru Cachoeira, a maior comunidade Kotiria no Brasil. Os resultados consistem na descrição de características marcantes da prática escolar, levando à conclusão de que aquele grupo local, ao planejar seus objetivos escolares, está refletindo sobre o que quer do seu futuro e de sua comunidade, o que faz de sua escola o espaço principal de reunião comunitária, debate e intervenção sobre as condições de vida atuais e futuras.

Palavras-chave

Educação escolar indígena – Kotiria (Wanano) – Projetos de futuro comunitários – Noroeste amazônico.

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Introduction

The current debate about schools in indigenous communities has focused on the observation of aspects that can affirm or not the diversity and specificity of school content and the organization of time and space (COLLET, 2010; FRANCHETTO, 2008), policies on school services and teacher education (SILVA, 2002; BRUNO, 2011), and the appropriateness of these aspects to current legislation and educational guidelines (GRUPIONI, 2008; TASSINARI; GOBBI, 2009). In general, research in this field informs that indigenous communities are conducting their schooling through paths that can be defined as a synthesis of non-indigenous elements, such as the idea of school, with elements of indigenous communities, such as their specific forms of intergenerational relationships, of obtaining food, and of communication.

Studies such as Gow (2006) have proposed new approaches to what was often interpreted from the point of view of the destruction or disintegration of culture. The search for approaching the opinions that the indigenous people had on their school experiences shed light on native explanations of the meaning of school and literacy processes. Even in studies of schools for the indigenous, framed according to the religious doctrine that one intended to propagate, what comes up is that approaching the schooling also meant to seize mechanisms that could help those peoples to have some control over the course of their own history, as Lasmar (2005) proposed.

Although this occurred in contexts where the education of indigenous people was aimed at their transformation into national workers or the salvation of their souls, the legal arrangements that enabled the creation of the categories indigenous school and indigenous teacher made possible and expanded educational experiences that took into account cultural specificities and the improvement of local living conditions.

In this regard, this article focuses on the relationship between a school of an indigenous

community and the aspirations for the future of the people who are part of it. It aims to bring elements to the debate on educational experiences that may be considered innovative, not because they are completely original or unprecedented, but because, as proposed by Ghanem (2006), they are different from the customary practices in a certain place. More specifically, the article addresses a type of school that intervenes directly on the living conditions of the people it provides educational services with. The case presented here is that of Khumuno Wt'u Kotiria Indigenous School, located in the Brazilian Amazon region, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira municipality, in Amazonas state. This school provided the main ethnographic basis of the research that culminated in a doctoral dissertation, whose objective was to define the relationship between school education and the community aspirations for the future (ABBONIZIO, 2013).¹

Although we are dealing with the case of a school only, research on the educational initiatives in Brazil which are distinctively understood as indigenous have, in the educational experiences of São Gabriel da Cachoeira – a municipality that has the largest public system of indigenous schools in Amazonas state (INEP, 2014) –, a vast field of research. São Gabriel has a number of unique characteristics: It is Brazil's third largest municipality, it borders with Venezuela and Colombia, its population is mostly indigenous and is very ethnically diverse. But what makes São Gabriel especially relevant is the type of educational experimentation that originated in some schools, in parallel with a larger process of reform of the schooling of indigenous people at municipal and national levels.

The nature of the educational experimentation that originated there makes the case of Khumuno Wt'u Kotiria School relevant not only to enhance the broader debate on the

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schooling of indigenous people in Brazil, but also and mainly to give other and perhaps new meanings to regular public schooling.

Conventional or consummated traits of school education that allow generalizations and contrasts are proposed. To grasp innovative aspects in indigenous school education, both in relation to the schooling aimed at the indigenous since the colonial period, and in relation to schooling in Brazil in general.

Among many traits, three stand out: (i) the school is usually a confined space and most of the activities called class take place within the school building; (ii) the school often remains oblivious to the conditions of the current life of the people affected by its actions, and concentrates more in a preparation that will supposedly be taken advantage of by each individual in the future than in the intervention on current living conditions; (iii) the school deals with knowledge whose legitimacy stems primarily from the fact that it is considered universal, which distances the school from specific aspects of the social group from which its students come.

Linked to these traits, other signs mark schools, making their appearance very similar, despite the immense diversity of social contexts of a country or municipality. The following is very similar: the ways of organizing physical space (within classrooms and common areas), how different people occupy such spaces according to their category (students, teachers, other professionals, and families), and the idea that school knowledge is necessary for the student's life, especially for future life, even when such knowledge is mobilized only in the school environment.

Overall, among the aspects that differentiate indigenous school education from conventional schooling, the following aspects are preponderant: community participation in the definition of educational projects and in the choice of the teacher; the preparation of teaching materials taking into account the reality and needs of the community, with great attention to

the language issue; a predisposition for teaching and learning to take place based on activities of research linked to the notion that teachers are researchers; and, finally, the intention that the school contributes to the achievement of community projects for the future. We shall give priority to the fourth aspect, taking into account the case of Khumuno Wt'u Kotiria School.

Khumuno Wt'u is a public, municipal, indigenous school, coordinated and managed by indigenous teachers, mostly of the Kotiria ethnicity, also known as Wanano, in Brazil, and Guanano, in Colombia. Much of the information presented here was collected in the largest Kotiria community on the Brazilian side, Caruru Cachoeira, where there are thirty-three families, about 160 people.

Preliminary information on the educational context of the region, obtained from people who knew the school, Kotiria leaders, and the political-pedagogical project (2006), presented strong evidence that Khumuno Wu'u was an exemplary case of a school that acts as a center that promotes and articulates actions to improve local living conditions. After two periods of living together with the Kotiria, combining research activities with collaboration and educational support, it was possible to perceive that, when reflecting on what they want from their school, the Kotiria develop and implement their life plans for the current context and for new generations.

São Gabriel da Cachoeira

In the areas of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Santa Isabel do Rio Negro (municipality east of São Gabriel) and Japurá (municipality south of São Gabriel), six contiguous indigenous lands have been demarcated since 1998 (FOIRN; ISA, 2006, p. 9). In São Gabriel, most of the population consists of indigenous people from that region, as well as Catholic and Protestant missionaries, army military personnel and, more recently, migrants

from the Northeast and the Amazon state (AZEVEDO, 2003, p. 32). In 2010 Demographic Census (IBGE, 2010), São Gabriel stands out as the municipality with the largest indigenous population in Brazil, around 29 thousand people, eighty percent of the total number of inhabitants. Eighteen thousand of them live in the countryside, i.e., in communities and small riverside villages. The indigenous population is identified in twenty-two ethno-linguistic groups whose languages belong to four language families: Eastern Tukano, Aruak, Maku, and Yanomami. The first three groups live in the region known as Vale do Alto Rio Negro, have cultural patterns in common, and a historical and intense interethnic interaction (FOIRN; ISA, 2006).

As defined by Chernela and Leed (2002, p. 469), the Tukano group consists of named patrilineal descent groups, which are part of a single network, integrated and united by kinship and marriage ties, and made possible by a rule of linguistic exogamy.

Besides exogamous marriage, two characteristics are essential to understand the system of social relations of Upper Rio Negro: ethnic descent is transmitted by the father (patrilineal) and the residence pattern is virilocal, that is, after marrying, a man still lives in the same community where he was born. A woman, after marrying, leaves the community where she lives with her mother family and moves to her husband's community (CHERNELA, 1986; AZEVEDO, 2003; LASMAR, 2005).

This shift of women from different ethnic groups implies, among other things, exchange of cultivars, generally between female relatives (CHERNELA, 1986). Lasmar (2005, p. 116) emphasized that "becoming a woman in Uaupés means first of all to become the owner of a field of wild manioc".

Another element that interconnects those people are the stories about their origin and territorial occupation. Chernela and Leed (2002, p. 473) indicate that several Uaupés groups have many myths in common. One

of them describes how the region was first populated: "The first people emerged from an ancestral sucure snake who swam Rio Negro to Uaupés, following the flood. Arriving at the headwaters of the river, the ancestral canoe, as the sucure is called, turned and from its body came the ancestors of each linguistic group". The journey of the ancestors of future humanity, explains Andrello (2006, p. 353), is qualified in the anthropological literature as a pregnancy and is taken as the key event of the mythology of the Uaupés peoples, since it "originates them and allocates them in their respective territories".

The first to emerge, the founding ancestors, are considered the elder brothers of all. As Chernela and Leed (2002, p. 473) explain, they are also referred to as "head", that is, the part of the body that speaks. In the history told by the Desana, humanity originated in a single trip (BUCHILLET, 2004). In the story that the Tukano tell, reproduced by Andrello (2006, p. 388), the "snake of transformation" becomes the "canoe of transformation" in a second trip. On this canoe trip, commanded by Tukano and Desana leaders, all the ancestrals go, giving sequence to other transformative processes and thus reaching "the final passage to their current condition". The Kotiria, for instance, appeared on that occasion. Back to the Uaupés, the canoe returned to the house above the hole of the emergence. There, the Akotikãhara, the Kotiria, appeared. "They flew down like birds, turning into people when they crossed the smoke of the cigarette of the ancestor of the Tukano". The canoe continued up the Uaupés River, taking the ancestors of the Desana, Kotiria, Pira-Tapua, and other Tuyuka who had not stayed at the Upper Tiquié. It went up to Cachoeira Jurupari, in Colombia and, on its way back, it left the Kotiria at the Upper Uaupés, where they have been until today.

The Kotiria and their school

The Kotiria are one of the twelve peoples of the Eastern Tukano linguistic family who live in Brazil. Their territory, part of São Gabriel da Cachoeira municipality, is located in a region known as Alto Uaupés, where this river marks the exact line of the border between Brazil and Colombia. On the Brazilian side, the Kotiria are distributed in ten communities; on the Colombian side, in about thirteen. The headquarters of Khumuno Wt'it Kotiria School is located in Caruru Cachoeira. It offers from early childhood to secondary education. In three other smaller communities, Ilha de Inambu, Jutica and Taracua Ponta, there are also school services corresponding to the first four years of primary education. In this regard, Khumuno Wt'it Kotiria School should be understood as a network of four schools, established in four of the ten Kotiria communities of the Brazilian bank of the Uaupés River.

The first school was established in Caruru Cachoeira community, in the early 1960s, and was named São Leonardo. All the schooling available in the region at that time (and until the late 1990s) was managed by religious of the Catholic Salesian Order, who, since the beginning of the twentieth century, had established multigrade schools in indigenous communities, with schooling corresponding to the first four years of primary education. In the municipal headquarters and missionary centers, the religious established large schools, which operated as boarding schools and worked with what today amounts to primary and secondary education. In the communities, schools were officially rural and known as "sisters' little schools". The teacher of those little schools used to be some indigenous of the region who had already completed secondary education in a missionary school. The educational concepts of the Salesians, thoroughly studied by Albuquerque (2007), revolved around a few key guidelines: schooling primarily directed to children and young people, imposition of Portuguese and prohibition of communication in mother tongues, catechization with strong

indication of conducts considered moral, and the construction of schools that operated as boarding schools, separating the children from the community life.

Recent activism for the rights of indigenous people, triggered by the indigenous movement and by indigenous actors and organizations, mainly in the 1970s, led to major provisions in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988). From those provisions, the foundations for building a new school model in indigenous areas were created. Such model was intended to be the opposite of the missionary and civilizing one. According to Grupioni (2008, p. 34-37), as opposed to a school that was constituted by the imposition of teaching Portuguese, by the access to national culture and the prospect of integration, another model of what an indigenous school should be was then designed: communitarian (where the indigenous community should take a leading role); differentiated from other Brazilian schools; specific (typical of every indigenous group where it is established); intercultural (with dialogue between the so-called universal knowledge and indigenous knowledge); and bilingual (with the consequent appreciation of mother tongues).

These new guidelines for the schooling of indigenous people began to be implemented in São Gabriel da Cachoeira since the enforcement of Municipal Law. 87, of May 24th, 1999, when the Municipal Department of Education created the municipal education system, including indigenous subsystems with different levels of education. This law expresses the possibility of each people or group of peoples, by riverbeds, organizing their own subsystem, assuring the link of school education with their own forms of social organization, cultural values, traditions, and ways of being of each people, and their productive activities and elements for a positive relationship with other societies (ALBUQUERQUE, 2007, p. 63).

In this new context, some indigenous schools started to organize themselves by ethno-linguistic territories, that is, where different

ethnic groups and languages predominate. Some schools include communities and territories where there is a predominance of a group, such as Utapinozona Tuyuka Indigenous School and Khumuno Wã'ũ Kotiria School. Others cover sub-regions that include neighboring communities of different languages and ethnic groups, such as Pamáali Baniwa-Kuripaco School, in the Middle Içana River and Tukano Yupurib School, in the Middle Tiquié River (CABALZAR, 2010, p. 8).

To support this restructuring process, Federação das Organizações Indígenas do Rio Negro (Foirn – Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Rio Negro) – in partnership with non-governmental organizations Instituto Socioambiental (ISA – Socio-Environmental Institute) and Rainforest Foundation Norway – prepared Programa Educação Indígena no Alto Rio Negro (Program of Indigenous Education in the Upper Rio Negro). This program, which started in 1998, operated with actions complementary to those of the town hall, supporting the reformulation of experimental educational projects in communities that were previously articulated around social projects, so that the actions of schools gave support to community projects. The pilot schools, as they became known, were created as a demonstration, with the intention of disseminating the concept of a differentiated indigenous school (FOIRN; ISA² apud ALBUQUERQUE, 2007, p. 2011).

Among the Kotiria, in 2002, an intense process of community reflection on the school was triggered, during which they started to think about their life projects from what they expected from their school.

As the political-pedagogical project of Khumuno Wã'ũ School states (PROJETO, 2006), in that year, Kotiria teachers, including participants of the first class of the indigenous teacher education course, took the initiative to create a specific school, which respected their ancestral culture, because they were concerned

about the fact that the existing schools in the region prepared students not to contribute to their communities, but to hypothetically work in urban areas. Thus, schools were distant from both the demands of the community and the professional demands of the urban headquarters of São Gabriel. Therefore, they looked for partners to construct a new school that valued their culture and especially their language.

Until that year, São Leonardo School was officially rural, had only one teacher and a multigrade classroom equivalent to the first four years of primary education. In the process of reform of municipal education, it was recognized as an indigenous school, started providing all primary education, and its teaching staff greatly expanded, with five new teachers (OLIVEIRA; TRINDADE; STENZEL, 2012).

When São Leonardo School was still a “little rural school”, its only teacher had already been following the news about the implementation of experimental school projects in the schools of the Baniwa and Tuyuka. He attended some presentations of works of students in São Gabriel and thought about the possibility of doing something similar in Caruru. At the same time, new teachers who came to the community shared new ideas about differentiated education, which grounded the first course of indigenous teacher education in the region, which was attended by more than two hundred teachers between 1999 and 2002 (BANIWA, 2012, p. 364).

There was, therefore, a combination of factors: teachers interested in new educational practices; a municipal policy which, despite numerous discontinuities, had instituted some irreversible arrangements; and the possibility of counting on financial and technical support from partner organizations such as Foirn and ISA. What matters primarily here is not whether the indigenous changed or not classroom didactics; it is not a matter of curriculum or aesthetics either, although in these fields indigenous schools also have much to teach. What is of particular interest is who

2- FOIRN; ISA. *Programa Educação Indígena no Rio Negro*. ISA, 2007.

took the initiative to reorient the school. It was the Kotiria community – teachers, parents, grandparents, and students – that decided that the change from a rural school to an indigenous school would not be of bureaucratic order only. It was the community that understood it made sense and it was preferable to consider that the knowledge of the people of that place was school knowledge. Therefore, they were the ones who devised a school for themselves, their own specific school.

In 2003, the school was renamed Kotiria. It was no longer São Leonardo and was renamed Khumuno Wᵗ'ᵗ Kotiria. But the school coordinator and former teacher of the “little rural school”, even without the decree of the town hall, without support and without knowledge, already thought of São Leonardo as Kotiria School.

Khumuno wᵗ'ᵗ means house of the pajé, or witchdoctor (house: wᵗ'ᵗ; witchdoctor: khumuno). One of the stories of Kotiria origin, like the one Stenzel (2013, p. 12) recorded, explains this choice a little. According to it, after the different Tukano groups were created, there was a great celebration and dances were distributed to each group. The ancestor of the Kotiria, Muktiro, called the most beautiful dance and traveled upriver, to the large waterfalls where Caruru is currently located. There he stood on a rock called Khumuno Wᵗ'ᵗ and announced that the stone and the area around it would be the home of the Kotiria.

Besides being the name of a rock that defines the Kotiria territory, the word *khumuno*, which, in that context, is translated as *pajé* (witchdoctor), is the name of one of the ceremonial instruments of the Eastern Tukano, the Tukano stool, called *kumurō* (in Tukano) or *khumuno* (in Kotiria). According to the tradition of those peoples, the stool and other sacred instruments such as the bowl and the cigarette holder, made up the body of the Universe Grandfather, and gave him power to create the universe which we live in:

The Universe Grandfather, Umuko Ñeku, has always existed in this world, and lived at Maloca of Heaven. There there was day and night and there was earth on the floor. The parts of his body were the stool (*kumurō*), the bowl support (*sārirō*), a bowl of ipadu (patu waharo), a cigarette case (*muro pudupu*), a rattle-spear (*yaigu*) and an adze (*sioyapu*). These were his tools and his power. Sitting on his stool, eating ipadu [coca] and smoking, he thought about how he would transform this empty world, how he would create mankind and animals, land and water. (FOIRN; ISA, 2003, p. 8).

Carved in a single piece of wood, it is on this stool that the witchdoctor sits, *kumu* (in Tukano) or *khumu* (in Kotiria). As Castro (2012, p. 127) explains, the *khumu* figure is associated with healing practices. A *khumu* is a pajé, a witchdoctor, a healer. The semantics of the word points to this characteristic, since the word *khumu* is related to the word *khumuno*, which means stool. The stool is associated with life, because it is one of objects obtained by the ancestors in their progressive journey to the human condition. It is also linked to the name that gives a seat or support to the soul, and to reflection and introspection, two remarkable characteristics of the *khumu* practice.

From 2003 to 2005, Kotiria communities, after several meetings between teachers, leaders, parents, students and elders, proposed the changes that they considered necessary for school improvement. From these discussions, the political-pedagogical project (PPP) was prepared and, in 2006, was delivered to the Municipal Department of Education. This document sets out a number of approaches that enabled Kotiria School to combine elements that defined their indigenous culture with non-indigenous knowledge. Such approaches revolved around priority issues such as language, the learning of traditional techniques and the knowledge that were necessary for community life and vocational

education in areas and activities that contribute to the improvement of the communities.

In the previous period, children learned how to read and write only in Portuguese, the teachers were from other ethnic groups, and the curriculum was based on the so-called basic content of national education. In contrast to that period, new attention to Kotiria language emerged. This should be the language of the largest possible number of teachers and, when it were not (since at that time there were not many Kotiria qualified for teaching), it should be learned by those teachers. Furthermore, after several linguistic workshops, writing in Kotiria language began to be taught and prioritized in the first grades of primary education. Textbooks to support literacy in that language were also produced (KOOTIRA, 2004).

The preparation of the PPP also considered the possibility of the school's contributing to learning a profession, which refers to the acquisition of knowledge that potentially improves the community's living conditions. At the same time, the school should value and also teach the traditional techniques of food and beverage preparation, agricultural management, and the arts of dance, music and basketry objects.

There was a strong intention that the school focused especially on the knowledge considered specific of the Kotiria culture. Such knowledge, in turn, could only be acquired through research with people who gave information, for example, on the stories of the origin of the Kotiria, their holy places, the history of the various clans and the hierarchy between them, the various types of healing rituals, and the manufacturing of tools and hunting and fishing techniques.

To research on the culture, students began to seek information with the elderly on medicinal plants, fishing techniques, hunting tools, Kotiria sacred mythology, their musical instruments, and the history of contact with the whites, for example. Based on this research, the students began to write formal essays on the

subject they had chosen to present them to the community at the end of the school year.

In addition to linguistics workshops and "research on culture", the Kotiria included agroforestry as a curricular component. The school's educational coordinator says that the teachers dedicated to the construction of the new Kotiria School thought that, for the school to be indigenous, it would have to be adapted to the pace of life of the community. For example, if the ants they usually eat, such as *içás* and *saúvas*, were flying, and if it were the time of *tinguijar*³ the river, students would be free to go after the ants and fish.

But it was not quite so. There was a great fear that the indigenous school proposal might lead to a setback of the indigenous in relation to the whites' knowledge. The idea of teaching how to write in Kotiria language, for example, was and still is, for some parents, less important than that of mastering Portuguese.

During the lessons, instructions and definitions that are taken from textbooks are immediately translated into Tukano or Kotiria languages. For the educational coordinator, really mastering Portuguese is very difficult. He says that as a young man studying in a large school like Colégio São Miguel, in the missionary center of Iauaretê, he did not speak Portuguese well. He learnt gradually as he began to attend the meetings of the indigenous movement and have contact with those who only spoke Portuguese. For this reason, for him, to prepare people for life, to give good advice, is more important than teaching Portuguese.

Linguistic studies, supported by linguist Kristine Stenzel, involved – besides students and teachers – parents, the elderly and also the Colombian Kotiria. This type of community participation emerged and intensified during the school's restructuring process and is still largely present. Before, parents received only reports with students' performance. Then they began to meet leaders, teachers,

3- Launch the poison of timbó liana into the water to poison and catch fish.

students, former students and elders to assess the progress of the educational process and recommend new approaches. In these large assemblies, the opinions on educational performance, the dedication of students and the support of families are shared. Teachers who are doing secondary teacher education courses or undergraduate courses speak about what they have learned and, at the end of each school year, the assembly discusses the continuation or not of teachers' contracts.

In the early years of the project implementation, people of the community were invited to act directly on the educational process, sharing their knowledge. A theme was chosen every two months, and, in the morning, parents and grandparents sat with the students, who interviewed the guests, in a "learning together" process. Then students went to their classroom and worked on the information gathered in the interview, producing texts, posters, drawings: "Everyone participated, it was exciting", the coordinator recalls.

The *bagaroa* – masters of ceremony who specialize in dances and songs – also participated in the meetings with young people, teaching them how to dance and sing. In other meetings and parties, students performed, showing what they had learned from the masters.

The problems that the community had been facing, especially in relation to food and income generation, were then debated by the school, rather, were discussed on several occasions when they thought what the school was for, what its goals should be, or what the school lacked. The debate about community problems and the search for solutions was directly linked to the meaning of schooling.

A magnificent solution, which had been found a few years before, tackles both the problem of school meals and the need to harmonize new agricultural techniques with conventional practices of farming and processing manioc. Therefore, thanks to community task forces, a wood was cleared and a field was planted in the school. It produces especially cassava, but it

also had pineapple, yams and other roots. Every Friday, students, along with their teachers and sometimes with some parents and grandparents, keep the field. This is called agroforestry class.

From Monday to Thursday, most primary education students go to school in the morning and the secondary ones do it in the afternoon. But, on Friday, all gather in the morning and carry machetes, knives and hoes. Only a few wear hats and more closed shoes. Most of them wear flip-flops, walk fast, playing, laughing a lot. Before leaving, each class waits in line, teachers do roll call and then talk a little.

All classes and ages are gathered and specific issues (the need for a document, the explanation for someone's absence) are addressed and behavioral advice is given. It is not a conversation during which everyone speaks, but a respectful lecture given by adults to students, ranging from the little ones to those who are married and have children. Teachers always talk in low smooth voice, even when what is being said is some kind of reprimand. After the conversation and agreements, all follow to the field, where they do a very tough job. There is almost no instruction about it: apparently everyone knows what to do. The boys clean the heavier vegetation with axes or machetes and make a lot of clatter when a tree falls. The girls, all wearing flip-flops, shorts and T-shirts, walk crouched pulling everything that is not cassava, cleaning. Others make a fire and burn what was already dry, while others harvest cassava, clean and cut it into smaller pieces to fill the baskets (*aturá*). The work is heavy for all of them, who get tired, wipe the sweat off, escape a little to the creek nearby to drink water, sit in the shade for a moment. The boys take smoking breaks. But they all remain completely focused on the job, talking quietly and laughing out loud. Other times, they plant the manioc cuttings. Suddenly, when they have worked a lot, more and more people stop, sit down, and some begin to speak louder: "we're done!". They stop, get together, take what they have brought, something they

reaped, and wood for home or the school. With their backs arched forward, the girls carry very heavy baskets during a long walk, which are attached to their foreheads.

All come back from the field and go straight have the school lunch. After lunch, depending on the day, the whole group goes to the kitchen to process cassava, or has a soccer, basketball or volleyball game. Sometimes the afternoon is free, or there is a meeting of school staff only, with or without the leader of the community. While the older students are in the field, younger students usually stay in the community, cleaning the front of the school or the courts, which are full of manure from cows. They pull the tall grass, get the trash from the floor. Sometimes, they play with some teacher.

The processing of cassava to make cassiri (a fermented beverage) also occurs with nearly no instruction from adults. Groups organize themselves, all work and rest for a while. They continue working and playing, but hardly anyone is injured, although they deal with a lot of weight, heat, hot cooking pots, huge graters, and knives which are disproportionate to their small hands. Sometimes, the kitchen is full; in others, there are only a few girls, sometimes only female teachers, some female students and some mothers. If the caititu, a large mechanical grater, is working, a male teacher begins operating the machine and boys approach, help, learn, take care of the power generator, and fetch fuel. Boys do not stay all the time, nor do younger girls. But the girls aged 15 to 17 years and female teachers are always around. As it is a process of production and fermentation that lasts at least two days, in the evening, there are always some people who continue working until late at night and others who arrive before sunrise.

When they are in the classroom, during the classes considered normal, they make calculations and solve equations in math classes, lists of words in Portuguese translated

into Kotiria, physical education, produce crafts, and learn Spanish with the Colombian Cubeu teacher. They learn to do research projects and essays on regional history or good habits of community life. The younger children, aged seven to eight years, read aloud phrases from a literacy primer in Portuguese. Younger children initially learn to read and write in Kotiria in the maloca, since there is no room available in the school. For the same reason, children even younger stay with the teacher in the chapel, playing and drawing. If the current of the river is not very strong, the teacher takes them to bathe. In one room, a teacher dictates and the students write in their notebooks a summary of the life of marine sponges and coelenterates. Another teacher dictates some information about Africa and suggests that students draw maps in their notebooks. Another explains what monozygotic twins are and another what development, economic growth and developed countries are. At various times, students leave the classroom and go to the library, take some of the textbooks and leaf through them, looking for a specific subject in chemistry or mathematics. At other times, they present their work to their peers. They write texts on health, mixing information of the books about microbes and local practices of body care such as bathing in the river at dawn.

In many respects, the school is multilingual. All greetings, instructions, and explanations are given in Kotiria or Tukano languages, which all understand. The so-called disciplines, taken from textbooks, are communicated in Portuguese, interspersed with observations in indigenous languages. Some teachers complain that students are still very shy, that they ask few questions. But they always say they are very intelligent, interested, hardworking. The relationship is always very respectful.

Secondary education started to be provided in Caruaru Cachoeira in 2007, after teachers' intense mobilization. While it is also aimed at producing research on

culture and agroforestry, it seems to be specifically dedicated to ensure the learning of knowledge that may be necessary for students to have access to higher or technical education. And the only instruments that they may resort to for such training are a few textbooks sent by the Municipal or State Departments of Education. Teachers say they get some information from a book, a little from another, write summaries to facilitate understanding, dictations, and ask students to copy some excerpts. Students interact with that information, go out and research a little, present work, produce posters, and appropriate that type of language.

The prioritization of the so-called Western, scientific knowledge meets the aspirations of a generation that was raised mainly in communities and that, in an unprecedented manner, completed secondary education living with their parents and relatives, without having to face the harsh logic of life in the city, of family separation, as it happened when higher levels of education were available only in the urban headquarters or in missionary centers. This generation has not had to subject to the missionary school either, which did not consider indigenous knowledge to be knowledge. The school, which has been learning to introduce indigenous knowledge in its activities, tries to deal with the desire of young people and their families to continue studies that allow or contribute to some kind of professionalization. What makes the coordinator “rack his brains” is the fact that today the young who complete secondary education go to the city to learn a profession and to continue studying, which, unlike what their parents dreamed of, takes the young, sometimes permanently, away from the community, “and our land is so big, so beautiful”, he laments. Teaching is the most available profession and most of the opportunities of higher education in that region are concentrated in undergraduate courses for future teachers, which not

infrequently are chosen regardless of their aptitudes and interests. In spite of that, studying mathematics when they wanted to study education, sociology when they would have preferred chemistry, twice a year, the teachers leave their communities, with their own resources and possibilities to attend college classes in the urban headquarters or in a regional center.

By understanding that the school should combine two types of knowledge – the knowledge that allows living well in the community and the one that allows learning other knowledge to improve community life –, the Kotiria design for the future of their children a path that, for the time being, cannot be achieved without their leaving the community and moving to the city. But leaving is repeatedly idealized as transient or temporary.

To take a path that involves the acquisition of community knowledge, conventional school knowledge, and professional education in the city, for the young to return later and help the community has been one of the biggest challenges for Kotiria families.

Conclusion

This article is devoted to defining the relationship between school education and aspirations for the future in an indigenous community, with the intention to contribute to the broader debate on the schooling of indigenous people, as well as to the search for new meanings for regular public schooling. In São Gabriel da Cachoeira, the progress made in terms of the expansion of the coverage of education services, teacher education, and emphasis on the appreciation of indigenous languages and cultures, still unprecedented in other Brazilian cities and states, points to new challenges, now linked to the professionalization of indigenous people in areas other than the educational one to improve the living conditions of communities and urban centers in their surroundings.

For these reasons, rather than comparing indigenous school education to conventional school education based on the existence of bilingual education, diversification of content, schedule, appearance and routine of the schools, what matters is whether those peoples have the possibility of deciding on their own education, or, in other words, on what remains or is transformed in their own culture.

In this regard, the indigenous school education has different characteristics from those that prevail in conventional schooling. First, because one of the elements that make schools resemble other schools so much is the pursuit of universalism, as opposed to what is specific. At the same time, transmitting the so-called universal knowledge, what “everyone-needs-to-know” means, to a great extent, to transmit a school content chosen as essential, usually by teachers. By keeping oblivious to the current living conditions of the students, the conventional school still bets on a formula that made sense while a strong social inequality between teachers and students, or a rigid hierarchical relationship between adults and the immature predominated.

Although weakened, hierarchy between adults, children and youth in the indigenous community still remains. Ethnographies of the northwestern Amazon and the experience of living with its residents show that having accumulated knowledge still has a lot to do with age and old age. In the Kotiria school, in the research on culture, the teacher guides, but the old man teaches, the old man knows.

At the same time, the relationship between adults and children, both at school and outside, rarely involves physical violence, reprimands with voice change, or humiliation. Very young children take care of their younger siblings and their mothers need not worry

about it or watch them. At school, teachers educate their own children, their younger siblings and sometimes their wives. The gentle way of living prevails during school routines. Teachers complain about students who miss a class, students who are often absent, but they do not mention students who find it difficult to keep up with the class, who do not understand the content, who are unruly or who failed. They praise more than depreciate and take into account the efforts and difficulties of each one to study.

What we have realized is that, at first, the Kotiria School is structured from a clear demand for incorporating cultural elements to the learning process. This demand fits in well with the municipal education reform and the support projects of non-governmental organizations. Despite the discontinuity and interruption of municipal policy and external support, the Kotiria reformulate that initial purpose, dialoguing more strongly with the needs for increasing the levels of education and access to the knowledge which seems useful to them. This leads them to envision new types of professional education other than the teaching one and a community organization to absorb this new qualification.

Therefore, the Kotiria have built a school founded in community standards of relationships based on kinship and common interests. Such interests guide the production of knowledge and how this production may impact on local living conditions. Thus, in that type of school, more than balancing what is indigenous knowledge and knowledge of the whites, what matters is the knowledge necessary for the maintenance of community life.

By reflecting on what they want from their school, the Kotiria reflect on what they want for their future and for that of their community.

More than intermeshed with those aspirations, their school appears as the main space of community meeting, debate and intervention on current and future living conditions.

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