

# SCHOOL, LOCAL RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY BUILDING: TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL TERRITORY IN THE INITIAL YEARS OF SCHOOLING

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the ways in which the teaching of Human Sciences in the early years of schooling addresses the municipal territory and community relations in schools located in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, in Southern Brazil. It analyzes semi-structured interviews carried out with teachers working at that level of education, applied in a remote format, favoring the use of electronic messaging applications. The results are analyzed in the light of the theoretical contributions of Arjun Appadurai, Bell Hooks and Alexis Racionero Ragué and highlight three analytical considerations: (a) most of the teachers claim to privilege, within the scope of their lesson plans, the contexts experienced by the students and communities; (b) traditional teaching approaches guided by civic dates and commemorations promoted in the official calendar of the municipalities are still in force; and (c) it appears that the teaching of Human Sciences in the first years of schooling provides conditions for the realization of a territorial education, capable of guiding pedagogical practices for the appreciation of territories and cultures and for the engagement of school actors in projects of community development.

**Keywords:** School; Territory; Community; Teaching of Human Sciences.

## RESUMO

### ESCOLA, RELAÇÕES LOCAIS E CONSTRUÇÃO DE COMUNIDADE: ENSINAR E APRENDER SOBRE O TERRITÓRIO MUNICIPAL NOS ANOS INICIAIS DA ESCOLARIZAÇÃO

O artigo visa a analisar os modos pelos quais o ensino de Ciências Humanas nos anos iniciais da escolarização aborda o território municipal e as relações comunitárias em escolas situadas no Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, no Sul do Brasil. Analisa entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com professoras atuantes

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no referido nível de ensino, aplicadas em formato remoto, privilegiando-se o uso de aplicativo de mensagens eletrônicas. Os resultados são analisados à luz das contribuições teóricas de Arjun Appadurai, Bell Hooks e Alexis Racionero Ragué e evidenciam três considerações analíticas: (a) a maior parte das docentes afirma privilegiar, no âmbito de seus planos de aula, os contextos vividos pelos estudantes e comunidades; (b) ainda vigoram abordagens tradicionais de ensino orientadas por datas cívicas e comemorações promovidas no calendário oficial dos municípios; e (c) verifica-se que o ensino de Ciências Humanas nos primeiros anos da escolarização oportuniza condições para a realização de uma educação territorial, capaz de orientar práticas pedagógicas para a valorização de territórios e culturas e para o engajamento de atores escolares em projetos de desenvolvimento de comunidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Escola; Território; Comunidade; Ensino de Ciências Humanas.

## RESUMEN

### ESCUELA, RELACIONES LOCALES Y CONSTRUCCIÓN COMUNITARIA: ENSEÑANZAS Y APRENDIZAJES DEL TERRITORIO MUNICIPIO EN LOS PRIMEROS AÑOS DE ESCOLARIDAD

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las formas en que la enseñanza de las Ciencias Humanas en los primeros años de escolaridad aborda el territorio municipal y las relaciones comunitarias en escuelas ubicadas en el Estado de Rio Grande do Sul, en el sur de Brasil. Se analizan entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas a docentes que laboran en ese nivel educativo, aplicadas en formato remoto, favoreciendo el uso de aplicaciones de mensajería electrónica. Los resultados se analizan a la luz de los aportes teóricos de Arjun Appadurai, Bell Hooks y Alexis Racionero Ragué y destacan tres consideraciones analíticas: (a) la mayoría de los docentes afirman privilegiar, en el ámbito de sus planes de clase, los contextos vividos por los estudiantes y las comunidades; (b) siguen vigentes los enfoques tradicionales de enseñanza guiados por fechas cívicas y conmemoraciones promovidas en el calendario oficial de los municipios; y (c) parece que la enseñanza de las Ciencias Humanas en los primeros años de escolaridad brinda condiciones para la realización de una educación territorial, capaz de orientar prácticas pedagógicas para la valorización de territorios y culturas y para el compromiso de los actores escolares en proyectos de desarrollo comunitario.

**Palabras clave:** Escuela; Territorio; Comunidad; Enseñanza de las Ciencias Humanas.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The dynamic and contradictory relationships that are established between the school and the sociocultural environment that surrounds it have been systematically addressed in the educational literature. The Teaching of Human Sciences, in particular, shows a significant interest in understanding the relationships between the school and its surroundings, the school and the community, the school and the territory, and the school and the place, sometimes emphasizing epistemological outlines, sometimes issues of spatiality and its constellation of concepts (HAESBART, 2014), sometimes reflecting on the curricular configuration and the problem of school learning in History and Geography (BERGAMASCHI, 2002; CALLAI, 2005; ABUD, 2012; STRAFORINI, 2001; 2018; LUCAS, 2019).

The publication of the National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular - BRASIL, 2018), despite the political and methodological criticism directed at it (DOURADO; SIQUEIRA, 2019), repositioned the debate on the pertinence of the Teaching of Human Sciences in Basic Education and its commitments to strengthen the right to education in Brazil. Talking about its pertinence at no time means that there was any kind of unanimity or consensus, but that the text embodied in public education, mainly at the municipal level, the need to discuss the dilemmas related to teaching-learning curricular components in schools and their contributions to human formation in a holistic or integral perspective.

In Brazil, the last three decades were strongly marked by the parameterization of educational assessments, crafting numerous situations in which the relationship between learning and contexts and territorialities was subsumed by a large-scale assessment, by a metric that has been conditioning to school performance the access to budget contribu-

tions for the full functioning of the institutions. As a whole, this process ended up putting the importance of Teaching Human Sciences at school in the background in favor of commitments indexed in satisfactory performance indicators in Mathematics and Portuguese Language, highlighting the prominence of objectives oriented by literacy.

However, it is necessary to highlight that the country has a rich tradition of thinking about education in a critical and contextualized way, according to which “reading the world precedes reading the word”. Paulo Freire’s work is one of the main references and its use in the Teaching of Human Sciences (CALLAI, 2005) explains that its pedagogical relevance is not accessory, but constitutes a significant component in the search for integral human formation. There is an expressive tradition of training, in the main Schools and Faculties of Education in the country, teachers guided by the principles of Critical Pedagogy, with emphasis on undergraduate and graduate courses. Straforini (2018) emphasizes that such disciplines (History and Geography) play an important role in the formation of a critical and reflective citizen.

This article focuses on the links between school and context, from the perspective of teachers who teach pedagogical activities in Human Sciences in the early years of Elementary School. Therefore, it aims to analyze the ways in which the teaching of Human Sciences in the early years of schooling addresses the municipal territory and community relations in schools located in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, in Southern Brazil. From a methodological point of view, it analyzes semi-structured interviews carried out with teachers working at that level of education, applied in a remote format, favoring the use of electronic messaging applications. The results are analyzed in the light of the theoretical contributions of Arjun Appadurai (2001), Bell Hooks (2021) and Alexis Racionero Ragué (2022) and highlight, mainly, three analytical considerations: (a)

1 Translation by Marco Polo Laufer and Rosalia Neumann Garcia.

most of the teachers claim to privilege, within their lesson plans, the contexts experienced by students and communities; (b) traditional teaching approaches guided by civic dates and commemorations promoted in the official calendar of the municipalities are still in force; and (c) it appears that the teaching of Human Sciences in the first years of schooling provides conditions for the realization of a territorial education, capable of guiding pedagogical practices for the appreciation of territories and cultural expressions and for the engagement of school actors in projects of community development.

## Theoretical and methodological conditions

The statement that the school reproduces the environment in which it operates has lost its heuristic potential in the last two decades (DUBET, 2011). It is, effectively, an agent in human formation, a socializing instance that competes with a set of others for the formation of a specific human being and is addressed to a certain social formation. Due to such political, sociocultural and pedagogical strength, the school remains current despite the criticism and distrust that surround it – which is also due to its intentions and to the institutional culture still largely based on the maintenance of power relations.

In order to examine the problem proposed in this article, we are interested in composing a theoretical and methodological framework in which the concepts of place, community and environment are expanded and re-discussed in the light of a framework capable of examining and interpreting the conceptual assumptions rooted in the practices schools over the last few decades. The choice of these concepts is justified by the repeated times in which, in the investigated context, the municipal context is named by teachers, pedagogical coordinators and school administrators as something sta-

ble, coherent and separate from educational institutions. The Brazilian school curriculum, aimed at the early years of schooling, assumes, in Human Sciences, the municipal context as a privileged content, which is routinely presented as everything that is outside the school. Following this article, the problematic question of what is recognized as being inside or outside the school walls will be approached in different ways, mainly because we assume that in this duality important reflections on human formation can reside.

In order to understand this process, we chose to carry out semi-structured interviews with 80 teachers who have been working in the early years of Elementary School for at least three years. As this is a pandemic period (Coronavirus), we expanded the possibilities of interaction with the interviewees and favored remote forms of communication in order to provide opportunities for the participation of the largest number of people. We obtained 66 responses from a heterogeneous group of professors working in different municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, with a predominance of interviewees residing and working in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre. The interview script dealt with the conditions they had for teaching Human Sciences in their schools, the main methodological strategies employed, the challenges observed in their practice, the materials and resources available for their teaching plans and, finally, how they addressed the History and Geography of their municipality in their classes and classrooms.

The statements were fully transcribed and systematized. The excerpts considered most relevant were highlighted from the empirical material and, in this analytical approach, examined and interpreted in the light of three conceptual discussions that deal with the relationships between school and place, school and community, and school and environment. The three concepts, in the *data corpus*, were referred to as the main representations of

how the teachers approach the municipality in their classrooms. Therefore, we chose not to draw a categorical definition of what is or is not a municipality or municipality, but we chose to surround it from the references arising from the testimonies and the daily experience narrated. Similarly, we do not intend to create a cohesive or absolute conceptual tool, nor assume that the three authors mobilized here would compose a theoretical-conceptual field; our proposal is that Appadurai (2001), Hooks (2021) and Ragué (2022) shape a provisional, heterogeneous and promising conceptual framework for us to rethink elements present in the problematic encounters between schools and their surroundings.

First, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai contributes to this reflection by positioning the place as something socially constructed, bearing in mind three recent shifts that have occurred in three levels of social life, namely: (1) a redefinition of the geopolitics of national states in which, given the to the weakening of their political strength in a globalized world, they start looking for new neighborly relations, affiliations and production of loyalties; (2) the growing displacement between territory and subjectivation, causing a myriad of forms of identification and belonging; (3) a visible erosion in spatial and virtual relationships due, above all, to global media and mass media. Appadurai (2001) understands the place as something relational and contextual, which cannot be reduced to a matter of scale. It is a complex phenomenological quality in which a series of relationships are established between the meaning of the immediate social plane, the technologies of social interaction and the relativity of contexts. It concerns different types of social agency and sociability through which the relationship between individual and place (individual's surroundings or neighborhood) is constructed. In his analysis, the place is a type of "situated community" (APPADURAI, 2001, p. 187), a circuit of interactions, images and contingencies that involve the individual and

are, to the same extent, constructed by him.

Recognizing the place as a phenomenological property of social life requires understanding it as "a structure of feelings produced through particular forms of intentional activity that generate different types of material effects" (APPADURAI, 2001, p. 191). It is not possible to dissociate the subjective and objective dimensions that make up the place, even if its understanding requires analytically separating individual agency and context, that is: the production of the situated communities occurs in a historical and contextual anchorage. The situated communities are as they are due to established interactions with other communities, with environmental ecosystems that define or border them, and with distinct cultures or cosmologies.

The place is permanently constructed and reconstructed in these interactions, since it is a context of action and a multiple interpretative place (APPADURAI, 2001). The construction and maintenance of a place is always fragile, driven by power relations and implicated by routine and everyday issues. Thus, it would be possible to say that, on the one hand, situated communities are prerequisites for the construction of local subjects, and on the other hand, such communities are produced by subjects as second nature, habitus or common sense. However, a situated community cannot be reduced to historically inherited situations, human settlements and systemic social reproductions, because there are problematic and non-problematic scenarios in the place.

Everyday human action reproduces scenarios that, because they are routine and non-problematic, are naturalized, since the situated communities tend to the regular and regulated reproduction of common life. At the same time, it must be considered that, as local subjects continue their task of social reproduction of the community, the contingencies of history, the environment and social imagination are offered to them as potential conditions for the generation of new contexts. Thus, in a produc-

tive dialectical relationship, “local production inevitably generates contexts” (p.195).

In globalized societies, there are multiple overlapping contexts influencing the construction of the place, considerably expanding the agencies that define and transform it. Arjun Appadurai helps us understand belonging and the definition of communities, a debate that we believe will be expanded by the recent publication of Bell Hooks.

Another discussion that underlies the analysis of the data concerns Bell Hooks’ (2021) approach to the interfaces present in the encounter between pedagogy and community. The philosopher initially warns us that one of the dangers inherent in our educational systems is the loss of a sense of community, not only the reduction of proximity between co-workers and students but, in fact, “the loss of a sense of connection and proximity to the world beyond academia” (hooks, 2021, p. 28).

In her approach, progressive education should prepare us to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection – it should therefore teach us how to create community. In the last two centuries, the school has produced a set of disconnections with school actors, with school communities and with the world, mainly because it operates under epistemological, curricular and political-pedagogical principles that reduce human beings, knowledge and society to a set of operational principles that rationalize, instrumentalize and fragment training processes. By reducing the holistic possibilities of learning for human beings, the school was mostly placed at the service of maintaining the current power relations and unable to generate conditions of thought and feeling to substantiate a pedagogy of hope.

In seeking a profound conception of dialogue, Hooks comes across the work of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, according to whom “by engaging in dialogue with another person, we have the possibility of changing something internally, we can become deeper” (Hooks, 2021, p. 30). In addition to the con-

ception of dialogue, the author seeks in Parker Palmer a conception of community.

This community goes far beyond our face-to-face relationship with one another as human beings. In education, mainly, this community connects us with the [...] “good things” of the world, and with the “grace of good things”. [...] We are in community with all these good things, and the good way is related to knowing this community, feeling this community, perceiving this community, and then leading students to enter it (PALMER apud Hooks, 2021, p. 30 ).

When thinking from the dialogue-community binomial, Hooks encourages us to think of the world as a classroom and to problematize the way in which institutionalized systems of domination use the school as an instrument to reinforce values directed to this end. It is necessary to discuss the conservative foundations present in pedagogical practices, curricula and teaching materials so that we educate according to practices of freedom, to free the minds of students from these systemic frameworks.

In this sense, Hooks adds that “building community requires a vigilant awareness of the work we need to do continuously to weaken any socialization that leads us to behave in a way that perpetuates domination” (2021, p. 80). The author does not treat community as surroundings or neighbourhood of a spatial reference, as usually defined as a school community. She expands, on the other hand, the interactionist notion of community based on established social interactions, such as sociation or sociability groups, as defined by Georg Simmel (2006), for example.

A community is, in Hooks’ approach, a construction guided by the radical questioning of socializing patterns that perpetuate relations of domination and the development of a conscience guided by democratic education and the integrality of the human being. To this end, it establishes a critical thinking about the white supremacist position and its consequent forms of racism and social exclusion. The counterface of this discussion corresponds to the emergence of an engaged pedagogy and

pedagogical practices anchored in the world and in dialogue with it.

If Appadurai (2001) offers us subsidies to examine the school as a producer of local relationships, and Hooks (2021) provides us with reflections on engaged pedagogy and the creation of communities guided by integral human formation and democratic education, Alexis Racionero Ragué (2022) aggregates knowledge for analyses of human communities that no longer dichotomize nature and culture, humans and nature.

The book **Ecotopía: una utopía de la Tierra** (RAGUÉ, 2022) revisits the work **Ecotopía**, published in 1975, in which Ernest Callenbach deeply discusses the wisdom of the Earth and the urgency of reconnecting with it, greatly influenced by the countercultural movement of California and the ideas of hippie utopianism. Ragué updates, expands and deepens the problematic relationship we establish with the planet and suggests that Ecology expand to Ecosophy, which would be life in harmony with nature and listening to the Earth (Gaia) as a way for us to produce a new form of life on the Planet. In an essayistic approach, the historian revisits various philosophies and religiosities, milestones of thought and spiritualities to show that, throughout history, there have been several calls for us to re-discuss the aggressive and hostile way in which we inhabit the Planet. In a similar movement, previously Zygmunt Bauman (2011) defined that we produce a parasitic capitalism in which we neglect the Planet and the sufficient resources for a dignified life for all; Edgar Morin (2015) stated that the education of the 21st century should indicate that we are in a complex planetary crisis and the need to recognize that, along with the Planet, we form a community of destiny; while Alberto Acosta (2016), appropriating Andean and Amazonian philosophies and cultures, affirmed the emergence of a radical critique of colonialism and the recognition of new ways of imagining other worlds and existences (Bem-Viver).

Ragué (2022) emphasizes that human beings need to be re-educated in their conduct and transform, individually and collectively, the attitude to move towards an integration with nature, which means questioning the way of life we have established, guided by having and by accumulating. In addition, the author elaborates an epistemology and ethical horizon in which integral human formation could collect inputs for revising curricula and pedagogical intentions.

Interconectados con el resto de las comunidades y en armonía con el entorno natural. No se trata de ser buenos salvajes sino hombres modernos y tecnológicos de consciencia ecológica. Estas páginas no han sido más que un intento de excitar la consciencia ecológica desde un punto de vista personal que no busca la originalidad sino la recuperación de un legado que puede alumbrar caminos y abrir las puertas del bienestar a todos los seres (RAGUÉ, 2022, p. 102).

Interconnected with the rest of the communities and in harmony with the natural environment. It is not about being good savages but modern and technological men with an ecological conscience. These pages have been no more than an attempt to excite ecological awareness from a personal point of view that does not seek originality but the recovery of a legacy that can illuminate paths and open the doors of well-being to all beings (RAGUÉ, 2022, p. 102).

In the next section, we will give centrality to the teachers' testimonies, with emphasis on the more specific and close reports to the applied interview script. The conceptual framework built in this section will be in synergy with the data selected and exposed below.

## The context as a starting point

The interviews with teachers working in the early years of schooling initially focused on the ways in which they approach the municipality as an object of study together with students in the 3rd and 4th years of Elementary School. It is important to start by reiterating that, in the historical Brazilian curriculum construction for this level of education, there is a predominance

of approaches that reproduce a concentric circle, in which, year after year, the geographical scale to be worked with students expands and becomes more complex. From the simple to the abstract, from the close to the distant and from the simple to the complex, one sees the passage from the “I” to the “family”, to the “neighborhood”, to the “school” and to the “municipality” as geographic scales and epistemic levels to consider supposedly appropriate to the level of understanding of students from different school grades (BERGAMASCHI, 2002). As Callai (2005) discusses, concentric circles tend to fragment and decontextualize the studied knowledge.

The problem is not to start from the “I”, but rather to fragment the spaces that follow one another and that are now considered in isolation, as if everything was explained within that and by that same place. The dynamics of the world is given by other factors. And the challenge is to understand the “I” in the world, considering its current complexity (CALLAI, 2005, p. 230).

The demands that the current context offers to teaching are innumerable and complex (MORENO-FERNANDES, 2018), including the necessary efforts to deconstruct monoidentities (SILVA, 2015) and increase criticality regarding the approach to concepts and curricula. Curriculum fixity and, at the same time, the naturalization of readings and analyzes of the social environment challenge pedagogical actions to use lived contexts as starting points for the development of pedagogies aimed at producing communities (Hooks, 2021).

Authors from the field of Geographic Education such as Helena Callai (2005) and Lana Cavalcanti (2011) have been emphasizing the movement of reading the context as a pedagogical experience, or as a starting point for teaching Human Sciences with greater consistency and quality.

One way of reading the world is through reading space, which bears within it all the marks of human life. In this way, reading the world goes far beyond cartographic reading, whose representations reflect territorial realities, sometimes

distorted due to the cartographic projections adopted. Reading the world is not just reading the map, or through the map, although it is very important. It is to read the world of life, constructed daily and which expresses both our utopias and the limits that are placed for us, whether in the scope of nature or in the scope of society (cultural, political, economic). (CALLAI, 2005, p. 228)

When we compared the results of the teachers’ interviews, we identified an emphasis on interpreting the context as a starting point for the development of their History and Geography classes in the early years of school. In the pedagogical practices developed in different municipalities of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, the idea of taking students on technical visits or “tours” to get to know a landscape or think about local history in the environment in which historical events may have occurred is recurrent. On the other hand, the place is perceived as a reflective space (object of knowledge) based on the previous experiences of the teacher and the students and, not necessarily, associated with leaving the school building or with some type of displacement.

Teacher A, working in the city of São Leopoldo, and Teacher C, working in the city of Novo Hamburgo, observe that they begin their classes by offering references and reflections on History and contextual Geography, from school to neighborhood and from neighborhood to city, with a strong influence of official information or enshrined as “Official History”.

When I develop these works with my students, we start with their location, in the surroundings, where they live, what is around them, the journey to the school and then I approached the municipality of São Leopoldo (Teacher A).

The planning is based on the students’ experiences, dialoguing about the municipality where they live and the municipalities that border it; know the origin of the name of the city and know that this municipality did not come out of nowhere, but that it carries a lot of history. The flag of the municipality, the colors used, the anthem, if any, the location on the state map (Teacher C).



We found that, firstly, a conventional sense of municipality prevails, interpreted as an administrative division with a statute and its own government, initially not expanding the discussion on cultural, ethnological or economic-political issues. In the vast majority of testimonies collected, we observed the use of this understanding of the municipality and the promotion of practices guided by its traditional conventions, generally defined by Municipal Law – in the case of symbols, commemorative dates, flag and anthem. There is, therefore, a predominance of traditional teaching approaches guided by civic dates and commemorations promoted in the official calendar of the municipalities.

Professor F, a professor in Salvador do Sul, adds the initiative of a project entitled “I love Salvador do Sul”, which highlights the cultural issues of the municipality, with a marked predominance of German immigration to the State. By tracing such emphasis, it presents pedagogical potential to awaken situations of belonging and affection to the place.

Thus, the question of classes about the municipality, Salvador do Sul has the project “I love Salvador do Sul”, which is developed with the 4th grade classes. Each year we have a different theme addressed within this content, we work on the municipality, the history, the communities, the locations, the neighborhoods, climate issues, approximate inhabitants... but we work on the cultural issue, the question of cultural predominance that we have here (Teacher F).

Choosing the place as a starting point requires the next step: leaving the place to think about yourself and the world. In the next textual section, we intend to discuss this shift from school to society, from the classroom to the school community, observing to what extent, in these teachers’ narratives, the school acts in the production of the place.

## Leaving the place

Another approach to the municipal territory present in the teachers’ testimonies presents a

greater pedagogical scope in the sense of honoring other voices and other narratives about the place. It assumes a fieldwork perspective and gives students the opportunity to understand the complexity of their relationships with the world, relationships between their place of living and the world (STAFORINI, 2001). It is not possible to deprive students of “establishing hypotheses, observing, describing, representing and constructing their explanations”, that is, of “a practice that no longer matches the current world and an Education focused on citizenship” (STAFORINI, 2001, p. 57).

The experience of leaving school with the students is conditioned by sociopolitical and pedagogical representations of the place. We verified a tendency to visit spaces that contain or represent the History and Geography of the municipality, such as museums and public cultural facilities, numerous times reproducing an official view of the place, retelling a history and a spatiality that neglects the existence of black, indigenous, quilombolas populations, women, riverside dwellers and the poor. As highlighted by Silva (2022), the 21st century offers us important opportunities to revisit and review the construction of the place, in search of other discursive modulations and re-readings of the municipality by other narratives and other voices to multiply more inclusive and democratic reports. The contemporary revisionist effort is allied to a holistic and integral vision of the human being and of education, as it broadens narrative horizons and provides participants with the opportunity to think and act in other ways.

Professor S, recently retired and with extensive experience in teaching in the early years, offered us an account of her practice in the municipality of São Leopoldo. The pedagogical potential of places needs to be converted into pedagogical intentions, as visiting museums and cultural facilities should lead to rethinking life in the municipality and triggering pedagogical reflections on individuality, the community lived and society in a broad sense. If integral

education refers to the recognition of the multidimensionality of human formation, it also means, in effect, the multidimensionality of formative spaces.

To talk about the city, the Visconde de São Leopoldo Museum has many historical images. I would usually collect these images. I'd take them to the computer room, where I'd analyze the photos, the characteristics of these places and we did a study on the buildings, the works, their importance, the context in which they were built, such as, for example, the Immigrant's House (Casa do Imigrante). I would work on buildings around these places. After studying about this topic, the school would end up renting a bus and taking us on a tour guided by the teachers or even by the guide due to the importance of these places and their preservation (Teacher S).

Professor G, in the municipality of Dois Irmãos, complements the practice of visiting museums with the use of cartographic representations of different scales, while Professor F, in Salvador do Sul, makes use of other visits to communities and rural districts in adjacent to the school and the center of the small town.

We visit the municipal museum, where all the localities and neighboring municipalities appear. We use the Mapa Mundi, (maps) of Brazil, of Rio Grande do Sul too, to show that our municipality is part of Rio Grande do Sul, which is in Brazil that is part of the world (Professor G).

We visit the localities, we visit the schools and we usually do one more tour, another visitation. We, after working the theoretical part in the classroom, then we explore these visits. Where, usually the children, teachers and directors introduce us to the school and some details of that community (Teacher F).

Teacher C usually makes a complementary movement usual in pedagogical proposals that seek to know the municipality in its depth and complexity, namely: it aims at dialogue and sensitive listening to different narratives about the municipality and its history: "Bringing older people to the municipality to make a speech with the class, telling how the past was in that place" (Teacher C).

Associating the teaching of Human Sciences with dialogue with actors and school communities should be a central prerogative for the work of educators, male and female, especially those committed to building a democratic society. Integrating education implies going beyond symbolically impoverished representations, which reduce human beings to the mechanism of life, and beyond the authoritarian pedagogical views that separate students from the world in which they live. The idea that society and collective life environments are potentially pedagogical recreates a more significant concept of learning, expanding the spectrum of knowledge perception beyond institutionalized teaching and learning environments.

Pedagogical practices that seek to visit public spaces, to listen to other narratives and to dialogue with non-school and non-educated social actors (such as the elderly mentioned by Teacher C) connect students to the world. "When this is transmitted to students, they are able to experience learning as a complete process, not as a restricted practice that disconnects and alienates them from the world" (Hooks, 2021, p. 93).

Bell Hooks yet complements:

Dialogue is the central space of pedagogy for the democratic educator. Talking to share information and exchange ideas is the practice that, both inside and outside the academic environment, affirms that learning can occur in different durations (we can share and learn a lot in five minutes) and that knowledge can be shared in different registers of discourse (Hooks, 2021, p. 93).

In summary, leaving the place and meeting the municipality and its communities requires attentive listening to their realities and a willingness to build it as a better place to live. Although most of the teachers interviewed claim to privilege, within the scope of their lesson plans, the contexts experienced by students and communities, it is necessary to advance methodologically so that these classes are committed to the production of the place

(APPADURAI, 2001) and to the creation of new relationships with the Earth (RAGUÉ, 2022).

In our reading, the repositioning of this debate implies an important ingredient of comprehensive education today, namely: the feeling of belonging to the place. "By creating a learning community that values the whole above division, above disassociation, separation, the democratic educator strives to create proximity" (Hooks, 2021, p. 99). Integral education, a sense of belonging and learning communities institute relevant semantics for understanding the teaching of Human Sciences in the 21st century.

## Knowing and representing the municipality

The focus of this article is on the ways the teaching of Human Sciences in the early years of schooling addresses the municipal territory and community relations in schools located in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. To this end, a third analytical category emerging from the statements refers to the strategies used by the teachers to promote knowledge and representation of the municipality as a "situated community" (APPADURAI, 2001).

Recognizing the municipality as a situated community implies expanding its conceptualization, contemplating dimensions, situations and experiences lived in different municipal contexts. From a pedagogical point of view, the strategies employed by some teachers mobilize the importance of knowing the context in question. Countless are the reports of students who reside in São Leopoldo, Novo Hamburgo, Sapiranga, Esteio or Campo Bom and who say they do not know their city, as well as the testimonies of students from the same municipalities who state not living in that municipality, but in a determined district, neighborhood or village. The relationships between knowing and belonging are very much considered in the interviews.

Very important aspects about this work that, although the children live in São Leopoldo, many did not have knowledge about these places, they did not have this vision. A part that I considered very important when working with children, many of whom had no idea of observing the river, its importance. In this sense, a whole work is done at school, we build models and engravings. My main objective is knowing to preserve (Teacher A).

Patricia Ramirez Kuri (2006) states that talking about a municipal context consists of considering it as a privileged place of encounter, relationship and activity, which operates as an identity and symbolic referent that draws bridges between individual and collective continuity. This Mexican sociologist describes the public space of the contemporary city as the overlapping of different forms of public life, traditional and modern socio-spatial representations, local and global symbols and practices, and experimental places of encounters and discoveries (KURI, 2006, p. 106). These aspects coexist with multiple realities, mainly with contradictory situations that reinforce deficient conditions of citizenship, situations of vulnerability and social exclusion, as well as insecurity and violence.

Thinking about municipalities requires thinking of them as public spaces and permanently questioning how their populations appropriate them and what conditions of citizenship are instituted at different scales. When students do not recognize themselves as part of this municipality, as mentioned above, it is necessary to discuss the contradictions present in the social field that have been hindering logics of belonging and citizenship. Simultaneously, it is essential to observe circumstances in which students and school communities do not actively participate in the production of the place.

All the schools had received the city map, we also had a really cool project, because we had an atlas of the city showing the issue of animals. The question around the school... we surveyed the trees, the importance of environmental conservation, in terms of preservation (Teacher A).

Teacher A adds the relevance of students participation in mapping and recognizing socio-spatial characteristics observable around the school. Observing, identifying, cataloging, systematizing and interpreting are significant formative actions for the classes to take ownership of municipal territories and be able to understand them in their multiple dimensions. Recognizing the existence of water resources, food production, fauna, flora and ecosystem issues are provocations for school communities to recognize their environment and be able to engender programs and projects aimed at new uses of natural resources and new ways of “inhabiting the Earth” (RAGUE, 2022).

The challenge is to promote the visitation of the city’s spaces because they study the symbols, the sights of the cities and many times they don’t know them. So sometimes it makes more sense to take them to these points so that they have the opportunity to value, to know. However, financially, it is not always viable and if you are looking for resources on the networks, the networks do not offer either. Schools cannot cope with this (Teacher M).

[...] in other schools I managed to organize trips for a better immersion of the students in the history of the municipality, but in the school where I am currently working, I don’t have subsidies for that, unfortunately (Teacher E).

Another recurring issue in the testimonial sample is carrying out field work and visiting places of recognized historical or geographic importance in the municipal territory. We verified that the teaching of Human Sciences at school provides conditions for the realization of a territorial education, capable of guiding pedagogical practices for the appreciation of territories and cultures and for the engagement of school actors in community development projects. However, these movements are limited by several factors. The first to be highlighted is the socioeconomic reality of most Brazilian public schools, which do not receive support for the cost of external activities, such as providing or renting buses for students to travel on field trips. Another is epistemological and

curricular: as we noted earlier, in the symbolic hierarchy of school knowledge, the teaching of History and Geography is secondary in relation to other school subjects. Another is pedagogical, as many teachers are still unwilling to be absent from school with their students or even maintain school practices defined as traditional.

Valuing cultures and territories through school projects enhances self-esteem (Hooks, 2021), affection for places (KURI, 2006) and the strengthening of new ways of exercising citizenship in lived contexts. The teaching of Human Sciences can cooperate for the development of an education anchored in the territories and an educational model capable of mobilizing a new relationship with the Earth (RAGUÉ, 2022).

## Pedagogical practices and their challenges

In fact, there are few materials to conduct research with students. The 4th grade teachers share a lot of material with each other, in addition to researching some videos and testimonials on social networks in the municipality (Teacher G).

Among the challenges I felt to work on is the lack of more organized, more systematized material. There is a lot of information, but all the information you need to look for in scattered places (Teacher I).

The material we have... some things are from longer. So we... these texts that tell the story, then we type them again. We even update some information, update some data. There is the website, the city hall portal that has some information, right. (Teacher F)

When we asked the teachers about the main challenges they face for teaching in the municipal territory in the 3rd and 4th school years, most of the responses echoed the lack of systematized and appropriate material for the level of education. There is, in the Brazilian school, a standardization of books and teaching materials, which incurs in the absence of

publications that address the local context<sup>2</sup>. Many teachers adopt collecting practices and, throughout their careers, compile file folders with various publications about the municipal territory, its history and culture. However, in which the effort of these professionals stands out, the compiled material derives from inserts and publications in local newspapers, in the regional media or on the official page of the city halls on the Internet, which in most cases reproduce the official history and narratives privileged areas of power that neglect the multidimensionality of historical and territorial processes. Many of the teachers interviewed emphasize that the absence of these materials could be supplied with research and extension projects from colleges or universities.

The lack of material... many students come from other municipalities, which means that the work done does not make much sense to them, because often they don't even have family members here, they stay for a short time and leave (Teacher G).

The biggest challenge when developing classes is when the teacher does not live in the city (Teacher D).

Drawing a parallel between the past and the present, showing the progress and innovations that have emerged over time (Teacher C).

The three excerpts above show the continuation of the previous argument. The absence of materials is reinforced when teachers and students were not born or do not reside in the municipality in question. What perceptions about the municipality circulate in school environments? How to produce belonging when students and teachers were not born in the municipality? How to develop projects on Municipal History and Geography if the partic-

ipants do not have enough references to start a study? Why expand the cultural repertoire of a school community? How and why engage in a territorial education proposal?

As highlighted by Appadurai (2001), the context of economic and cultural globalization tends to discipline relations between institutions and populations, with emphasis on the State and its regulation of social relations. We observe a cultural isomorphism, through which we verify a reduction in our ability to understand the place where we live and in our feelings of belonging. Cultural exchanges in globalization make identifications from global flows predominate (mass media, cultural industry, cinema and phonography, among others) and reduce our possibilities for intercultural communication (SILVA, 2022).

Finally, we highlight the didactic and methodological challenges that the teachers recognize in their work.

The methodology we generally use is research, the children research at school in the computer lab. And with the research they learn to use computer resources, interviews with grandparents to talk about the past relating to the future, pedagogical walks, readings and drawings (Teacher A).

As a challenge, I see managing to draw the attention and curiosity of students to seek this knowledge related to the history of our municipality, respecting the changes and customs that remain in their families until today (Teacher H).

Luna et al. (2019) emphasize the curricular and pedagogical emergence of themes that elucidate new relationships between school and society, as cultural heritage, knowledge of the environment and education for citizenship. The methodological qualification of the classes and didactic experiences depends on the affirmation of cultural expressions and manifestations in the lived context, enhancing its thematic universe by including approaches close to the citizen and actively produced by him. The active participation of actors in the production of the place (APPADURAI, 2001) and its interconnection with all forms of life on

2 The literature produced in Brazil on Geography Teaching points out, since the 1980s, the absence of consistent didactic materials for pedagogical work on states and municipalities. There is a curricular centralization that, in many cases, weakens the study of municipal territories and related cultural issues. An important didactic and pedagogical alternative has been the use of representations in Geography (BOMFIM; ROCHA, 2012) and the examination of situational perceptions and narratives in the classroom.

Earth (RAGUÉ, 2022) stand out as powerful political and pedagogical categories for expanding engagement in classes and the necessary diversification methodology in teaching work. Integrating education requires a creative pedagogy, capable of dialoguing with territories and creating communities.

## To conclude

Location is not simply a matter of scale or socio-spatial location; refers to a set of socially produced cultural relations and expressions. The school is one of the main agencies that acts in the production of the place, mediated by teaching and learning situations, by the agency of logics of belonging and by the mobilization of meanings and representations about social or community life. In the curricular organization of the Brazilian school, learning about urban life and municipal territories is a privileged content for the initial years of Elementary School.

As suggested in this analysis, the municipal territory cannot be reduced to organizational and political-administrative conditions, or even to legislation established to agree on symbols, cultures and school curricula. Contemporary cultural metamorphoses require an expanded and complex vision of the place (APPADURAI, 2001), community (HOOKS, 2021) and environment (RAGUÉ, 2022). A vision that recognizes the active participation of actors in local production, in the generation of open and democratic communities and in responsibility towards the environment and all forms of life on the planet (RAGUÉ, 2022). The teaching of Human Sciences, when expanded by the proposed conceptual rediscussion, can contribute to the development of a territorial education.

The Teaching of Human Sciences in the early school years is essential to expand the students' cultural repertoire and for the development of human capabilities and potential in a holistic and integral sense. The presence of the Humanities in school education is indispensable for

full human education and for the development of more creative, sustainable and fair societies.

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