Chapter 4
Soviets in the Countryside: The MST's Remaking of Socialist Educational Practices in Brazil

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> Once the revolution happens in the schools, people can make the revolution in the streets, however this link is not always necessary. In China, in Cuba, in Russia, without going through the schools, people were able to create a revolution in the streets. But, in a country like Brazil it is necessary to create a minimum general critical consciousness, a universal citizenship and a collective desire for radical change in order to achieve the utopia of constructing a new society that either becomes a reformed socialism or a revolutionary socialism. I prefer the latter alternative.
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> —Florestan Fernandes (Brazilian sociologist), quoted on the first page of an MST publication, *Principles of education in the MST* (MST 1999)

Three hundred people pushed to fit into a majestic room, located in the House of Culture in the town center of the city of Veranópolis. This relatively wealthy city of Italian and German immigrants, located between the mountains in the northeast part of Rio Grande do Sul, is not the most obvious choice of location for the discussion and implementation of socialist educational alternatives. The city is most widely known for having the highest life expectancy in Brazil and for its delicious wine. However, among militants[1] working with social movements that are trying to address issues of poverty and exploitation in Brazil, and especially among those interested in how schools can be part of this process, the city has a different meaning.

The city of Veranópolis is the location of the first school founded and administered by the largest agrarian social movement in Latin America, the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Brazilian Landless Workers Movement, MST). The Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC) functions as a private school with

[1] The English word "militant" is used as a translation of *militante,* the Portuguese word for an active member or volunteer of a political organization (political party, social movement, etc.).

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legal recognition from the Brazilian government.[2] On October 16, 2010, 300 people from different walks of life—government officials, labor leaders, old MST graduates, the Venezuelan ambassador—gathered in the Veranópolis House of Culture to celebrate the school's 15th anniversary. One of the two speakers that day was Luiz Carlos de Freitas, a Professor of Education at the State University of Campinas, who studies the educational initiatives in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1930. During his speech to the audience that day, Freytes reflected on the MST's use of Soviet educational pedagogies, saying, "I cannot help but think that we are in a school the Russian revolutionaries wanted to build."[3]

In this chapter, I give a brief introduction to the MST and how the movement's educational initiatives are tied to the MST's fight for socialism through small agricultural farming in Brazil. Then, I explain how the MST began to develop an alternative educational practice that incorporated both Freirean educational methods and Soviet pedagogies. This is followed by a review of the work of two Soviet theorists who are referenced most often by MST militants, Anton Makarenko and Moisey M. Pistrak. Finally, I end by analyzing the experiences of students at two schools the MST currently administers.

The data for this chapter is based on over 12 months of field research in Brazil, during July and August of 2009 and from October 2010 to July 2011. I carried out research in two different states—Rio Grande do Sul and Pernambuco—as well as the capital city of Brasília. During these 12 months, I conducted approximately 50 semi-structured interviews, all well over 1 hour, with MST educational militants and teachers, in addition to seven interviews with University professors.[4] Interviews were in Portuguese and extensive notes were taken during each interview.[5] While all of these interviews have contributed to my understanding of the MST's educational initiatives, I cite only six interviews in this chapter. I also draw on data from six focus groups I held with 35 students at one secondary institution. Another principal part of data collection was participant observation in more than 30 educational spaces where the MST is attempting to implement its pedagogy: public schools on MST settlements and camps,[6] technical secondary schools administered by the MST, and university

[2] This school is named after the Brazilian author who wrote *Geopolitics of Hunger*, which analyses the human-made causes of hunger and how these hunger crises are tied to the functioning of the capitalism on a global scale (Castro 1946). While the coordinators of IEJC insist on referring to the school with this formal name, most people know the school by the name of the educational entity that hosts the school, ITERRA (Technical Institute of Training and Research for Agrarian Reform).

[3] Quote from a public speech, Veranópolis House of Culture, Rio Grande do Sul, 10/16/2010.

[4] I also conducted over 60 interviews with government officials at the municipal, state, and federal level, who have a relationship to the MST and the educational pedagogies the movement is trying to promote. However, this data is not used in this chapter.

[5] All translations of interview data from Portuguese to English have been completed by the author.

[6] MST "settlements" are areas of agrarian reform where land has been expropriated and given to the MST families. MST "camps" are areas of land that MST militants are occupying, but to which they do not yet have the land rights.

courses organized in partnership with the MST. In addition, I shadowed the activities of the MST education sector in each state I conducted research, participating in events such as evaluations of schools, national conferences, political protests in defense of the MST's educational proposal, teacher-training sessions, and meetings between MST militants and government officials. Finally, I also reviewed dozens of educational documents the MST has produced over the past 30 years.

Introducing the MST

The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) arose in the early 1980s, at the tail end of Brazil's "economic miracle," during the political opening that paved the way for the democratization of the country. In the previous decades, rapid economic growth and industrialization had coincided with massive migration from rural to urban areas. In 1940, less than 32% of the population lived in cities; by 1991, 75% of Brazil's total population was urban (Plank 1996). For the Brazilians who remained in rural areas, hunger and malnutrition increased as the Brazilian government pushed many small landowners off their land in an attempt to increase large-scale agricultural industries. The MST formed as an attempt to combat this rural poverty through occupations of large unproductive land estates, which put pressure on the government to give these workers land on which they can work (Branford and Rocha 2002; Wright and Wolford 2003; Ondetti 2008). Since the first land occupations in the early 1980s, the MST has won land rights to 20 million acres, in the process giving over 350,000 families legal rights to their own land.

The MST has become famous around the world for its success in redistributing land in Brazil, but less well known is its simultaneous struggle for the right to free primary, secondary, and tertiary education for all children, youth, and adults living in MST settlements and camps. Over the past 25 years, the MST has pressured state and local governments to build more than 2,000 new rural public schools that currently serve approximately 200,000 students (MST 2009). The MST is also concerned about the *type* of education that occurs in these public schools, and over the past three decades, movement members have developed a theoretically innovative educational pedagogy for rural schools—nationally known as Education of the Countryside (*Educação do Campo*). However, since public schools are under the administration of municipal and state governments, the influence of the MST is continually being negotiated and can change rapidly depending on political elections, shifts in power relationships, or the movement's own organizational strength.[7] Therefore, MST militants also search out institutional relationships that offer more stability in

[7] The relationship between the MST and different levels of the Brazilian government, in terms of implementing the MST's educational pedagogies within public schools, is the focus of my dissertation (forthcoming, University of California, Berkeley).

implementing the movement's educational ideas. The MST has approximately ten private secondary schools that have official government recognition. In addition, ever since the 1997 creation of the federal program PRONERA,[8] the MST has partnered with dozens of universities across the country to offer over 40 bachelor courses to youth and adults living in areas of agrarian reform. The MST has almost complete autonomy over the pedagogical organization of these university courses.

The long-term goal of the MST is to use the formal school system as one vehicle to construct socialist economic alternatives in rural areas. The movement openly fights for a socialist society, drawing on revolutionary leaders such as Vladimir Lenin, Che Guevara, Rosa Luxemburg, Jose Martí, Emiliano Zapata, and Antonio Gramsci for their inspiration. While MST militants have no illusion that a socialist revolution in Brazil will occur in the near future, their activism is focused on reconstructing relations of work in the rural countryside through organic cooperatives that are sustainable and competitive in the current economy. When people in MST camps receive legal rights to their land, the movement encourages people to give up these individual rights and join their land together to construct agricultural collectives. Many MST courses offer joint technical degrees in agroecology, encouraging students to go back to their settlements and promote organic agriculture. The MST's most vocal fight is against large agricultural industries that dominate rural areas of Brazil. In April of 2011 the MST launched a national campaign against the use of agricultural pesticides, and movement members continually discuss the fact that since 2009 Brazil has become the number one consumer of pesticides in the world (MST 2011). In addition to organic agricultural collectives, the MST wants to construct alternative community health programs on settlements, invest in cultural events and youth activities, and, of course, create a school system that supports these new social and economic relations. MST militants are acutely aware that the traditional school system will not promote the type of society they want to create on their settlements; therefore, for 30 years MST militants have sought out educational theories, pedagogies, and practices to support their socialist vision.

Educational Experiments: Beginning to Develop an MST Pedagogy

Salete Campigotto is commonly known as the "first teacher" in the MST. The daughter of a small landowner in Rio Grande do Sul, she spent much of her youth working on the farm.[9] After finishing eighth grade in 1972, Salete spent 4 years as a first and

[8] PRONERA (National Program for Education in Agrarian Reform) is one of the most important programs that fund the MST's educational initiatives across the country.

[9] The information that follows about Salete Campigotto is from my interview with her in January 2011, as well as a formal published interview with Campigotto (Tedesco 2008). The rest of the history in this section comes from interviews and informal conversations with MST educational militants and analysis of MST publications on education.

second grade teacher, until she was finally able to enter a joint secondary school and teacher degree course in 1975. When she was 25 years old, in 1977, she met Father Arnildo Fritzen, an adherent of liberation theology,[10] who invited her to participate in a Christian Base Community (CEB)—an informal study group that met every week to study religious and political texts. It was through this CEB that Salete began to grow politically, eventually supporting one of the first land occupations that occurred in Rio Grande do Sul in 1979.[11]

In 1981, Salete decided to participate in a land occupation herself. At this point, she was 27 years old and the only person in the camp with a teaching degree. According to Salete, there were 112 school-age children in the camp; in addition, 70% of the adults in the camp were illiterate. Salete, together with a woman from the local University of Ijuí, began to organize informal educational activities for both children and illiterate adults. However, as Salete emphasizes, they wanted to teach in a way that was different from the traditional school system that trains students for the urban job market. MST militants began to search for educational references that could help construct schools that would become vehicles for economic and social change. Paulo Freire was already famous nationally for his work with adult education, as well as being a major theoretical influence within the CEBs. In 1982, two people from Freire's educational team agreed to visit the camp and work with Salete and others on how to use Freirean pedagogy.

Over a period of 6 days this couple introduced the major ideas of Freirean educational philosophy to the people on the camp: the importance of teachers doing research in the community before teaching, in order to understand the common language and topics of conversations in the community; the creation of generative themes from this research, which would stimulate classroom discussions; pedagogical activities based in students' realities and accumulated knowledge; a critique of the banking method of education where the teacher just transmits information to the students; and the need to educate through dialogue and posing questions to the students.[12] After this training, Salete said she began to teach the alphabet with words that represented the reality of the community, for example, "A" for "acampamento" (camp) or "O" for "ocupação" (occupation). She also taught geography by helping students identify where MST camps were located in the region or where the large landowners had plantations. To learn mathematics, the students practiced measuring a hectare of land and then used these measurements to estimate the size of the camp.

[10] Liberation theology was a movement within the Catholic Church that believed charity was not sufficient to help the poor; it was necessary to change the structures that kept the poor in poverty. Liberation theology was extremely important for the development of new social movements, NGOs, and women's organizations in the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil (Berryman 1987). Father Arnildo was part of this liberation theology movement and a very important figure in the founding of the MST.

[11] For more detail about the history of these first land occupations in Brazil, see Wright and Wolford (2003), Wolford (2010), Ondetti (2008).

[12] For more in-depth reading on Freirean educational methods, see Freire (2002), Gadotti (1994), Hooks (1994) McLaren (2000).

Salete experimented with various educational methods, always with Paulo Freire as the principle theoretical reference. In 1983, the camp won legal rights to the land, and soon after the government agreed to construct the first public school in the country on an MST settlement, with Salete as the teacher.

In 1985, 1,500 families occupied Fazenda Annoni, a large plantation in north-central Rio Grande do Sul. This occupation drove the issue of land reform into the national spotlight. An important aspect of this occupation was the presence of hundreds of children, running around and playing in the camp, as parents participated in the enormous task of organizing the daily necessities for more than a thousand families. Salete started travelling to the campsite on a daily basis in order to work with these children. As she got to know the people in the camp, Salete discovered that eleven of those involved in the occupation already had teaching certificates. These teachers, along with some parents, began to formalize an education collective.

As the occupation at Fazenda Annoni received national media attention, many sympathizers began to visit and offer their support. Among a group of university student visitors was a woman, Rosali Caldart, who would became extremely important for the development of an educational pedagogy within the MST.[13] Rosali, along with another woman from the same university, helped to organize a study group with the camp's educational collective.[14] Through this study group, Rosali began introducing socialist pedagogies to the movement, primarily those developed by intellectuals from the Soviet Union. This was not simply an imposition of outside intellectuals but rather an attempt to synthesize outside theories with the ideas and practices already occurring within the movement. For example, when I asked Salete about her first experience with a Soviet theorist, she recalled that when working with children in Fazenda Annoni she would get the students to participate in manual work as well as the normal academic curriculum. Salete had a box of rabbits in the classroom, and the students were in charge of taking care of these rabbits. When Rosali came to visit and saw this combination of manual work and intellectual studies, she asked Salete, "Do you know that Nadezhda Krupskaya, Vladimir Lenin's wife, talks about this?" The next visit, Rosali brought an article by Krupskaya, which according to Salete was the first socialist educational text she read.

The study group that began to evolve expanded beyond Fazenda Annoni to include MST militants who were already settled and beginning the process of constructing new schools in their settlements. As Rosali explained, this education collective was focused on how to create a school linked to a larger social and economic project. She said that the collective searched for experiences around them that would help, but did not find any. While many people had experiences with Paulo Freire, Freire

[13] Rosali Caldart went on to write many important books about the educational pedagogies of the MST (Caldart 2004; Arroyo et al. 2004).

[14] All of the information about Rosali Caldart and her work with the education collective is from my interview with her in January 2011.

focused primarily on adult education and literacy methods, not formal schooling. In addition, Freire was concerned with the relationship between the teacher and students in a single classroom, not the relationship and structure of the school as a whole. Where in the world had people tried to create a different type of school linked to larger socialist goals? The Soviet Union was one obvious answer.

Discovering Soviet Pedagogy

Moisey M. Pistrak

Moisey M. Pistrak is one Soviet theorist whose work resonated with the MST's practical experiences. Pistrak is not widely known in the English-speaking world; there are no translations of his writings in English. The first translation of his work into Portuguese was the *Fundamentos da Escola do Trabalho* (*Fundamentals of a School of Work*) published in 1981.[15] It was not until 2010 that Professor Luiz Carlos de Freytes translated a second book by Pistrak into Portuguese, *Escola Comune* (*Commune School*), after spending several years in Russia studying Pistrak's educational theories.

Although there are very few records of his life, it is known that Pistrak was born in Russia, lived from 1888 to 1940, and was influential in reforming the education system in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. He was also a contemporary and follower of the educational theorist Nadezhda Krupskaya. Krupskaya was deputy minister of education in the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1939 and married to the revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin. Kruspkaya was one of the first Marxist pedagogues, and participated during the 1920s and 1930s in the construction of a Soviet public school system that would support a new socialist society (Pistrak 2000). While MST militants also mention Krupskaya when discussing Soviet educational initiatives during the 1920s, Pistrak is a much more common reference.

In *Fundamentals of a School of Work,* Pistrak discusses his experiences constructing and implementing a Marxist pedagogical method in primary schools in the Soviet Union. As he clearly states, "The revolution and the school should act in parallel, because the school is an ideological arm of the revolution" (Pistrak 2000, p. 30).[16] Based on this sentiment, the book offers an analysis of how to construct a school that prepares students to contribute to a socialist revolution. Perhaps the most important among the book's contributions is its emphasis on manual labor as a cornerstone of any school system, intended as a way of teaching the principles of discipline, organization, and collectivity. Pistrak writes, "It is necessary to teach love and esteem

[15] The original translation was done by Daniel Aarão Reis Filho and published by São Paulo Brasiliense Press in 1981. The publication quoted from in this paper is a 2000 publication printed by Editora Expressão Popular. All quotes from this book are translated into English by the author.

[16] All quotes from this book are translations from Portuguese to English by the author.

for work. Work elevates the man and brings him happiness; it educates him in a collective sentiment, it ennobles the man and because of this, work, and particularly manual work of whatever type, is necessary as a means of education" (Pistrak 2000, p. 48). Pistrak also emphasizes the importance of teachers engaging in theory and developing their own creative practices, the need to address the current political reality, and the self-management of the students, who should become the principal protagonists within the school.

In my interview with Rosali,[17] she said that MST militants saw Pistrak as engaging in a task similar to their own: creating a formal school system that directly supported a larger socialist project. Pistrak's theory of a "school of work," in which work was valued and students were involved in both manual and intellectual labor, was and remains one of the pillars of the MST's educational beliefs. Pistrak offered a language to theorize the practices that were already developing within MST camps and settlements, and his writings connected these local practices to other socialist projects. For MST militants I interviewed who have read Pistrak, the principal concept they recollect from his writings is that manual labor is a school in and of itself and should be connected to the intellectual tasks students are taught in the classroom. Today, the MST incorporates these ideas in various ways, from creating gardens or mini-factories in the schools, to requiring students to be responsible for all cooking and cleaning. However, the MST's use of Pistrak may be changing. Edgar Kolling, a leader in the national MST education sector, expressed in an interview that after 25 years, with the publication of *Commune School* in 2010, MST militants have come back to Pistrak, rereading his writings and discussing how these theories can continue to be incorporated into the pedagogy of the movement.[18]

Anton Semyonovich Makarenko

Anton Makarenko has become famous in educational circles for his work with children who had been orphaned after the Bolshevik Revolution. Born in Ukraine in 1888, Makarenko graduated from the Poltava Pedagogical Institute in 1917 and was appointed the head of a secondary school, a few months prior to the October revolution. In 1920, he was asked by the Soviet Department of Public Education to organize a residence and school for homeless children, which became the Maxim Gorky Labour Colony, named after the Russian intellectual Makarenko most respected. Makarenko's famous book *Road to Life* (*Poemas Pedagogicas*) is an account of his 7 years at this school working with war orphans (Makarenko 2001). In 1927, Makarenko was appointed the head of another colony for homeless children and adolescents, the Dzerzhinsky Labour Commune, where he worked until 1935. Between 1935 and 1939, when he passed away, Makarenko published several books that became popular in educational circles. Makarenko remains an extremely important

[17] Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 2011.

[18] Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 2010.

authority within the MST today; his books are studied in pedagogy courses, and he is quoted in official publications of the MST education sector. Makarenko's work is widely available in both English and Portuguese. In particular *Road to Life*, a story-like first-person account of his years as the director of the Gorky Colony, captured the imagination of many MST militants, allowing them to directly relate the experiences of the Gorky Colony to their own educational initiatives in Brazil.

While Pistrak was writing about a formal school system, Makarenko was discussing a school that was outside of the formal system, whose goal was to "form" war orphans into disciplined revolutionaries who would contribute to the construction of a new society in the Soviet Union. These war orphans were considered by Soviet society to be deviants and devoid of norms, and Makarenko believed that their personalities, character, and intellect had to be reshaped (Bowen 1962). His solution to this dilemma was the collective. He believed that students who are brought into a collective dispense with their individualism and begin to strive for a goal greater than themselves. Makarenko understood that a key aspect to constructing a school as a collective is allowing for the self-management of the students, permitting students to discuss together the daily tasks and problems in the schools and to determine their solutions (Luedemann 2002).

Ever since the first land occupations in Rio Grande do Sul, MST militants have worked with this idea of the collective, both in the organization of daily tasks in the camp and in the agricultural work on the settlements. Transforming a school into a collective made sense, given the prior organizational structure of the movement. As the next section of this chapter will detail, the MST has incorporated this idea into schools by organizing "Base Nucleuses" (Núcleos da Base, or NBs), which are collectives of five or six students that make up the foundational structure of any school the MST administers. While Pistrak offered a theory of manual work as an educational experience and Freire offered concrete pedagogical techniques within a classroom, Makarenko's theories discussed a transformation of the relationships within the school as a whole. As opposed to students simply arriving in the school and completing tasks that are set out for them, these students would become the principal agents determining how the school would function. For the MST, these student responsibilities include collectively addressing all disciplinary issues in the school, participating in discussions on curriculum, helping to organize the class schedule and extracurricular school activities and events, facilitating class discussions, evaluating teacher performance, and actively participating in larger debates about the goals and objectives of the school. Just as socialism had to transform power relationships in the workplace, Makarenko's educational pedagogy meant radically overturning the traditional relationships between principals, teachers, and students.

Picking and Choosing from Soviet Pedagogy

Although MST militants have clung onto Makarenko's idea of a school as a collective, not all aspects of Makarenko's pedagogical ideas are so easily accepted. In talking to MST militants about Makarenko, some people expressed concern about the

extreme authority he held, the fact that he was perhaps the strongest presence within the collective, and his harsh disciplinary punishments. At one point in *Road to Life*, Makarenko tells the story of becoming so exasperated with a student that he hits him as a form of punishment. In interviews, MST militants often mention this part of the book, expressing disagreement, but also arguing that you cannot throw out Makarenko's theories because of this one incident; the context of the Soviet Union and the extremely alienated youth that Makarenko was working with have to be taken into consideration.

Makarenko and Freire can seem like stark opposites, the former extremely concerned with discipline and conforming to socialist values, and the latter focused on dialogue, student expression, and a humanistic teacher-student relationship. This difference also stems from their different philosophical backgrounds and political contexts: Makarenko was a self-proclaimed Marxist working to ensure the success of the recent Bolshevik revolution and a model of democratic centralism. Success would require discipline, dedication, and the formation of a "new Soviet man" (Cheng 2009) who would submit to decisions of the vanguard party. On the other hand, Freire was a Catholic, a humanist, and writing in exile against an authoritative military dictatorship in Brazil. These differences might appear irreconcilable, but the MST has never felt the need to choose between the two theorists. Rather, the MST has incorporated aspects of both theories into its pedagogy, as well as drawing on Pistrak, and defends all three theorists in educational publications, conferences, and teacher-training courses.

From Makarenko the MST takes the idea of the collective, the importance of students being the principal organizers of the school system, as well as the idea of in-residence education where students live and study at the school. The MST uses Pistrak to articulate the importance of manual labor and valuing the culture of the working class. And finally, the MST continues to use Freirean methodologies in the classroom: working with texts that draw from the students' realities, organizing classes around debate and dialogue, and teaching students about the causes of poverty and oppression in Brazil.

On the other hand, the MST does not emulate the military character of the Gorky Colony, the idea that students should march around the school in columns and have military rankings. MST militants often critique Makarenko for his overbearing presence in the Gorky Colony. As Professor Luiz Carlos da Freytes explained, in the collective Makarenko creates, Makarenko is always present, whereas in the collective Pistrak develops, Pistrak disappears.[19] This difference between the two theorists offers the MST flexibility in how to build a collective within a school. This is also where the MST can draw on Freire, who believed in student-centered classrooms, but did not believe a teacher should simply become a facilitator of student-led discussion, but rather, must know where he or she is leading the students and be firm in that direction.

[19] Interview with Luiz Carlos de Freitas, January 2011.

The MST has thus refused to wed itself to one theory/theorist, allowing militants to adjust MST pedagogy to particular contexts and needs. As militants always tell me, the pedagogy of the movement is in *movimento* (movement—always changing and adapting). Finally, beyond picking and choosing from the theories of Pistrak, Makarenko, and Freire, the movement also incorporates its own organizational culture into the schools. For example, classes always begins with *mística*,[20] a moment of cultural and political performance that can include dance, music, theater, videos, or other cultural expressions that reflect on issues important to the students. Classes also start with "words of order" (*gritos de ordem*)[21] and the singing of the MST national anthem. Beyond this organizational culture, teachers discuss the history of the MST, news about the movement, and if there is an important event nearby, such as an MST march or workshop, students are brought along. Thus, while drawing extensively on Soviet theorists, the pedagogy of the MST really looks quite different than it ever did in the Soviet Union. It is a new hybrid, a locally adapted and dynamic pedagogy, drawing on the old, but created for a particular, contemporary, Brazilian context.

For many MST militants, the educational opportunities offered by the movement are the only way to complete secondary school and enter a university course. One example is Vanderlúcia Simplicio, who grew up in the northeast part of Brazil with 16 brothers and sisters, and with a lot of difficulty was able to make it through eighth grade. In 1992, when she was 20 years old, she began to participate in activities with MST militants, who were starting to organize in the northeast. Shortly after getting involved she was asked to participate in the education sector of the movement, teaching in an MST camp. A year later, she was invited to continue her education through an MST-administered secondary course being offered in Rio Grande do Sul. The movement paid for all of her expenses to attend this course. In 1998, Vanderlúcia was invited to be part of a group of 56 MST militants who entered the first ever MST university course, "Pedagogy of Land." After graduating from the course in 2002, Vanderlúcia got a post-bachelor degree in "Education of the Countryside," a course also organized by the MST. Finally, 2 years ago, Vanderlucia was accepted into a master's degree program in education at the University of Brasília and recently graduated in May of 2011.

In November of 2010, I travelled to Brasília for a conference, and while I was there I stayed with Vanderlúcia's family. At the end of my stay Vanderlúcia drove me to the airport, and it was a chance to ask her a few last questions. One question was about Anton Makarenko: as we pulled up to the airport, I finally asked Vanderlúcia about Makarenko and the importance of Makarenko in the movement. She said that he is very important to the movement, and that when she first read

[20] *Mística* is part of the MST's general organizational structure and is performed before all meetings, events, and conferences the movement organizes.

[21] *Gritos de ordem* are two-line chants that MST militants shout during meetings, marches, and rallies. They can express thoughts about education, revolutionary leaders, fighting for socialism, etc.

about the Gorky Colony she realized that the pedagogy course she was taking was trying to imitate this colony, that this is exactly what they were trying to do. She said she read the *Road to Life*, that she learned about the collective from it and that this collectivist attitude is a very important part of the pedagogy of the movement. At this point, she began to get pretty emotional. She told me that there is a lot of value in collective life, and all of her education up to this point has been collective. And now she has entered this master's program, and it is so individual, and it is very hard for her; she spent a lot of time crying the first year because it was difficult. Everything is very individualized, and although she was told she had to enter a master's program and begin to develop her own individual line of research, she does not like it. Classes are just battles of ideas between individuals, and there is less learning than there would be if people were collectively discussing and developing these ideas together. She says it is very hard to be in this individualized environment and with a small child as well.[22]

Vanderlúcia's juxtaposition of her experiences with MST-run courses, versus the way education is organized in mainstream universities, is revealing. The idea of the collective—which was part of the origins of the MST, but also reinforced through studying Makarenko and Pistrak—is in complete contrast to the philosophy of individualism that predominates in capitalist society. Transitioning from these MST-administered courses to a normal university master's program was hard for Vanderlúcia because she has always had a collective educational experience. Vanderlúcia's experience is a strong evidence of the success that the MST has had in transforming social relations within schools by implementing a creative adaptation of socialist pedagogy. The next section will describe two secondary schools where the pedagogy of the MST is being implemented and will analyze accounts of student experiences in these schools.

From the Books to the Classroom: Moving from Theory to Practice

Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC)

This chapter began by discussing the 15th anniversary of the IEJC, the first MST private school to attain legal recognition. As one of the speakers at the anniversary emphasized, IEJC was created to prepare youth for a political project and to give them the technical skills they needed to achieve this project. Rosali Caldart, who was also a speaker at the event, said that the goal of this school was to prepare youth and adults for collective life and to create political militants who could help organize the movement and contribute to agricultural production in the settlements.

[22] Informal conversation with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, recorded in field notes, November 2010.

The original question was not "How can we create a different school?" but rather, "How can we pedagogically form people who will attend to the needs of MST settlements and camps?"[23] These clarifications about the original intent for IEJC are important, because like Pistrak and Makarenko, the MST is discussing a pedagogy that has a larger purpose: to create socialist relations of production in their settlements and camps and to form citizens with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to construct these socialist relations of production. This is a key aspect of socialist pedagogy: the direct connection between pedagogical strategy and the fight for socialist economic alternatives.

IEJC receives funding from both the government and other private sources, enabling the school to offer dozens of free secondary courses where students can pursue technical degrees in teaching, cooperative administration, community health, and popular communication. In partnership with the federal government and the state university, the school has also been able to offer post-secondary courses in pedagogy. The students who attended the first few courses at IEJC were older MST militants, in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, who had never had a secondary education. Fifteen years later, most of the older MST militants have passed through these courses, and thus, students now tend to be younger. However, IEJC maintains an age requirement of 17 years to go to the school. The school consists of different "courses" of 40–60 students that study together for 3 or 4 years. These courses are run through "alternation" (*pedagogia da alternância*), which means students spend a few months at the school studying and then a few months in their communities doing research. In any given month, there are at least two or three courses present at IEJC, with between 80 and 150 students.

When new visitors go to IEJC, they are amazed at the high level of organization and discipline at the school. Students get up at 6:30 AM for breakfast and are studying late into the night while also spending several hours each day cleaning bathrooms and common spaces, washing dishes, and organizing meals. Each morning, students from all the different courses in the school meet in a school-wide assembly, and all disciplinary issues are announced publicly, including students who have not made their beds or were late to class the day before. The school is managed by the students, in partnership with a collective of MST militants who oversee the school, through Base Nucleuses (Núcleos da Base—NBs). These NBs are small collectives of five to six students, who are in charge of cleaning, gardening, preparing snacks, maintaining discipline, and even facilitating classes. For example, each day a different NB is in charge of the classroom, and must take attendance, lead class discussions, make sure no one is causing a disturbance, and help the instructor in any other task. The active participation of these NBs in all aspects of the school is a direct influence from Makarenko.

On the first floor of the school, there are administrative offices, a large dining room and kitchen, and a well-kept library with over 23,000 books. On the second and third floors are the dormitories where students sleep. In the basement, there is a

[23] Quote from a public speech, IEJC, Veranópolis, Rio Grande do Sul, 10/12/2011.

bakery where students make the bread they eat at the school, as well as a factory where students make jams to be sold, teaching students how to set up and manage small industries. There is a day care center at the school, and all students take turns babysitting the young children, whether or not they are parents. Although IEJC does not offer primary education, student's children can attend the city public schools in Veranópolis. In the front of the school is a large garden in which almost all of the food that the students eat is produced. As for their meat supply, they have a partnership with a local farm in which they receive pork and beef in exchange for students working at the farm. While Monday through Saturday there are cooks at the school that prepare meals for the students, on Sundays the students are in charge of cooking. And beyond these manual tasks, the students have a very rigorous study schedule.

Izabela Braga has spent more than 7 years studying at IEJC, first as a student in a secondary course, and then in a post-secondary pedagogy course. In an interview with Izabela, she said that while she was at IEJC she really internalized the teachings of Pistrak, Makarenko, and Freire. She told me a famous quotation from Makarenko that was always repeated in the school: "Those who do not work, do not eat. No, that is a lie. Those who do not work should not have the right to eat."[24] Izabela said that this quotation emphasizes the importance of work: that there is time to study and time for work and that work is just as important as studying. Izabela said this is important to her because when she was in the kitchen cooking a meal for 200 people, she knew another group was cleaning the bathrooms, or washing everyone's clothes, or taking care of the children so the parents could study.

At the IEJC anniversary celebration, it was often expressed that the most important aspect of the school is that it prepares political actors to return to their communities ready to be active militants in the MST and fight for socialist alternatives in the Brazilian countryside. Whether they graduate with a technical degree in cooperative administration, popular communication, or community health, they have also learned about the political context of the country, the barriers to land reform, and the need to be organized and fight for more land redistribution and alternative forms of rural development. Although not all students become militants, many of the MST militants I met over months of field research were graduates of IEJC.

Institute Educar

IEJC is the MST's oldest educational institution; the school has developed dozens of courses and graduated over 3,000 students. However, it was clear from the beginning that the pedagogy of the movement could take place not only in the city of Veranópolis. Like Anton Makarenko, who decided to move from the Gorky Colony to the Dzerzhinsky Commune to see if his pedagogical methods worked in another context,

[24] Interview with Izabela Braga, November 2010.

the MST has also moved its pedagogical ideas across the country. As national MST leader Edgar Kolling said in a speech at the anniversary celebration, when IEJC was founded it was the only opportunity for MST militants to study; now there are dozens of examples of public schools, technical schools, and university courses in other cities and states where the MST must implement its pedagogy.[25]

One of these examples is Institute *Educar*, a secondary school that the MST founded in 2005, which functions as an extension of a federal technical institute. This institutional relationship allows students to get both their secondary degree and a technical degree in agroecology, while also giving the MST almost full autonomy to implement their educational pedagogies. Institute *Educar* is organized similarly to IEJC. There are several secondary courses occurring at any one time, but these courses are all organized through "alternation," with one course at the school for several months while students in the other courses are in their communities doing research. Students have to spend seven 3-month periods at the school to graduate. One important difference with IEJC is that Institute *Educar* accepts students right out of 8th grade. This means that many of the students are 12, 13, or 14 years old when they begin this 3-year secondary course. Each course is split into six or seven NBs. There is also a coordinating collective of the NBs (CNBT), and every study period a different person from each NB must participate. The CNBT discusses any concerns the students have, discipline issues, upcoming events, or messages from the collective of MST militants that direct school. This information then gets disseminated and discussed in the individual NBs. The most important decision-making body at the school is the assembly, where all the school directors and students come together to discuss issues as an entire collective.

At Institute *Educar,* the students adhere to a very strict and busy schedule. The day starts at 6:30 AM for breakfast, and from 7 to 7:30 AM each NB has a part of the school to clean, chores that shift every few weeks. From 7:30 to 8:00 AM is time for *mística*, "words of order," and the singing of the MST anthem. A different instructor comes to the school each day to work with the students for 6 hours, from 8 am to noon and 2–4 pm. These classes include conventional academic subjects such as biology, physics, math, history, and Portuguese, as well as agricultural studies. Lunch is at noon, and then from 1 pm to 2 pm there is another period of time for the NBs to clean the school. From 4 pm to 7 pm is "time for work," during which each NB is required to contribute to a different agricultural sector. Institute *Educar* has several acres of land with cattle, horses, and pigs, in addition to a large vegetable garden and fruit trees grown organically by the students. Several MST militants work at the school for free, coordinating these different sectors. In the evening, there is dinner and then time to either study or undertake a night activity.

The majority of the students at Institute *Educar* are the sons or daughters of people who won land before they were born, and, therefore, these students have no direct experience with the fight for land. Depending on the political activity of their parents, students may know almost nothing about the MST when they enter the

[25] Quote from public speech, IEJC, Veranópolis, Rio Grande do Sul, 10/12/2011.

school. This raises a critical question about how the MST's socialist pedagogy works in a context in which students do not identify with the MST or with any larger socialist project. I did group interviews with each of the NBs at Institute *Educar* to find out about their experiences.[26] I began by asking the students about their first impressions of the school. These impressions were often shock, confusion, and negativity:

> I was totally lost, the schedule was very hard, I did not know what a CNBT was, I had never heard of an NB. (F2, S4)

Other students responded,

> I thought it was strange, I wanted to leave, it was a very heavy course load and a different routine. (F4, S1) The first week was hard and I thought, is it always going to be like this? (F4, S6) I hated the school, I thought it was very different from life at home, I did not work at all at home, and it was hard to adapt to. (F6, S1)

Although the first study session was difficult for most students, and many dropped out of the school, the students who stayed expressed a complete transformation in their opinion of the school and their political understanding of the MST. One student, for example, said,

> The school contributed 100% to my political formation. I was always connected to the MST, through my parents, but I did not really have a notion about what an NB was, how to coordinate a meeting. (F1, S1)

Another student said,

> The school gave me a critical vision of society, I understand more about the MST, and I will continue to learn more and work with the MST because there is always work for militants. (F2, S2)

A third said,

> I did not know anything about agro-ecology. In my settlement there is only soy and corn, and it is all being grown with chemicals. Now I can enter the debate and say that this is not the way we should be going! (F5, S1)

As for disciplinary issues in the school, one student stated,

> There is a sector of discipline and ethics, and when questions arise or problems, the solutions are decided by the students. (F1, S2)

According to the students, this caused a lot of problems the first few weeks at the school:

> My friends would get mad when I enforced a rule, they would ask, why did you tell that I did not get to class on time? (F1, S1)

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[26] All of the following student quotes are from the six focus groups held with 35 students at Institute *Educar* in January 2011. Quotes included in this article are representative of all six focus groups, unless otherwise indicated as a unique response. All focus group sessions were recorded, and the number of the focus group and the student is indicated after each quote.

Another said,

> If you have friends it is hard, because you have to enforce rules, and they get angry, and they curse at you, but it helps that one person is the coordinator one week, and someone else is the coordinator the next study period. (F4, S1)

However, as time passed, students said it got easier:

> People eventually realise that they have to be part of this process, they learn and grow, it is not easy, it is very complicated until this learning process happens. (F1, S1)

Another student said,

> There is a need to create a consciousness that there is no longer really a director of the school, because outside of the school this does not happen. Here students have an opinion and outside they are just told everything. (F2, S2)

During these conversations on discipline I asked a provocative question to the six focus groups: if the students have so much control over the school, why not cancel class and play soccer? One response was,

> You have to have good sense, because we did not come all the way here just to play soccer. We were selected by our regions and have a responsibility to them. (F2, S4)

Another said,

> You are representing people in the settlement, you have to leave with something that you learned, not just soccer. They are betting on us. (F2, S1)

While most student replies focused on this personal sense of responsibility, one student admitted that although the students have control over little changes in the schedule, they would never be able to cancel class and play soccer. Finally, I asked students what socialism meant to them. Their answers were mostly in terms of equality and rights. Responses included,

> For me socialism means equality, equal rights. Lots of people go hungry in the world, socialism means everyone has what is necessary, but not too much. (F3, S3) Socialism is a society without oppression, with equality for all. (F3, S4) We are socialism, this school, everyone here is helping each other, and when we go back to the settlements we should continue to help each other. (F5, S4)

In contrast to these general answers, one student gave a more specific response:

> For me socialism is getting rid of privatisation, because privatisation in Brazil only leads to exploitation. It is necessary to divide all the goods in the world and privatisation does not do this. Brazil has a big potential and it is about dividing that potential among the population. (F3, S5)

These various responses shed some light on how the students at Institute *Educar* interpret and experience these educational pedagogies. Teaching, learning, and work in the school is explicitly based on the socialist theories of both Makarenko and Pistrak. Through the organizational structure of small collectives the students have a relative autonomy in the management of the school. The school also has a strong manual labor component, in which students are responsible for cleaning the school in addition to learning organic agriculture, working in the fields, and taking

care of the animals. Beyond these socialist pedagogies, many aspects of the school are specific to MST practices: *mística*, "words of order," and the MST anthem. This combination of practices has created a school that is very different from the mainstream educational system, and many students have a hard time adapting. The class I interviewed was in their fifth study period, and although they had started with 60 students, they were down to 35. While this dropout rate is actually similar to regular courses offered by the local federal technical institute, it also means that Institute *Educar* is not successful in assimilating all students to this new form of collective life. Thus, the 35 students who were part of the focus groups are not representative of the original group of 60 students.

As the focus groups illustrate, the students who do stay in Institute *Educar* express a personal transformation in terms of their understanding of socialism, organic agriculture, and the history and importance of the MST. However, this fight for socialism is neither simple nor easily attainable. Institute *Educar* is located on one of the oldest MST settlements in the country, Fazenda Annoni. In this settlement, the movement has tried to implement various cooperatives and models of collective work, and almost all of them have fallen apart. The majority of the people living on this settlement grow soy, which they plant using pesticides and then sell to large companies for export. When students were asked in the focus groups about the biggest challenges at Institute *Educar*, their answers often touched on the difficulty of implementing the school's socialist vision:

> The biggest challenge is to put into practice agro-ecology, because the world is dominated by international companies and it is hard to challenge this. (F1, S2) Production, to show that production can have another model, to show that the world can be changed. (F1, S3). To sustain the commercialization of what we produce in the school, to sell our produce outside of the school so we can change people's opinions about the schools. (F2, S2) To show everyone that we are not a group of crazy people, that we are going to succeed in creating socialism and that we are studying for this goal. (F1, S1)

During these group interviews, the students at Institute *Educar* were clear about their goal of implementing the movement's vision of socialism through small organic farming, however, they were also realistic about the challenges they faced.

Conclusions

For 30 years, MST militants have been drawing on a variety of theories to develop an educational pedagogy that is appropriate for their rural reality and achieve the larger goals of the movement. This educational pedagogy has three theoretical pillars: (1) Freirean ideas stemming from the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that emphasize the importance of the students' cultural contexts and a critique of education as simply a transmission process; (2) Soviet theories based in Makarenko and Pistrak's work, principally the importance of the collective, the students' management of the school, and the idea of manual labor as an educational process; and (3) the movement's own practices and needs as a political organization, for example, the necessity to train new

political leaders who also have technical expertise to help develop rural settlements. This synthesis of ideas—the pedagogy of the movement—is constantly contested by the Brazilian government, and in most contexts only ever partially implemented. On a mass scale within public schools in MST settlements, there are hardly any signs of this pedagogy at all. Nevertheless, in some institutional contexts where the MST has autonomy, this pedagogy is flourishing.

The pedagogy of the MST is unique not only due to the eclectic use of theories and educational practices, but also due to the fact that the pedagogy is organically linked to an alternative political project for the Brazilian countryside. This political project—challenging large agricultural industries through organic agriculture and collective work practices—faces countless barriers across the country, and there are currently only a few examples of successful collectives on MST settlements. If we evaluate the MST's pedagogy based on its goal of creating socialist alternatives in Brazil, we might come to the conclusion that it has been a failure. However, these difficulties must also be compared with the successes. For many MST militants, the educational opportunities the movement provides are the only means to get a secondary or a university degree. Vanderlúcia is an important example of an MST militant who was only able to study until 8th grade, but now has a master's degree. Vanderlúcia's story also illustrates the success of the pedagogy in teaching about the importance of collective learning and putting aside individualism, critical lessons for the development of "new Socialist men and women." The statement of IEJC student Izabela Braga and the many students at Institute *Educar* prove that this pedagogy has been successful in changing traditional power relationships within schools by giving students more responsibility and control. Their reflections illustrate that students are capable of taking charge of disciplinary issues and that they learn a lot in the process. These educational experiences are also a principal reason why many sons and daughters of people living on MST settlements, who often never had the experience of occupying land or living in a camp, have chosen to become MST militants. Therefore, the MST's educational pedagogy is important in the reproduction of the movement itself. Although socialism in the Brazilian countryside might not be a reasonable goal in the near future, the educational pedagogy the MST has developed over the past 30 years has affected the lives of many MST militants, and continuing to learn about these educational initiatives will help to shed light on what a twenty-first-century socialist pedagogy may look like.

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