How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop? Educational Innovation, Social Change, and Landless Workers in Brazil

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Background: *Over the past 30 years, the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST), one of the largest social movements in Latin America, has developed a series of pedagogical practices for public schools that support the movement's struggle for agrarian reform in the Brazilian countryside. The MST's educational initiatives can be viewed in terms of their place in the debate about how grassroots movements develop alternatives to dominant educational practices.*

Purpose*: This article examines the diverse pedagogies and educational theories that MST activists have drawn on, while also assessing the political implications of this participation in the public schools.*

Setting*: Research took place in Brazil, in several dozen public schools located in MST communities.*

Population: *Research participants included MST activists, students attending schools in MST communities, teachers working in these schools, administrators, and public officials. More than 150 people were interviewed.*

Research Design: *This research is an ethnographic, qualitative case study, examining the MST's educational initiatives in four different regions of Brazil. Field research took place over 15 months, between October 2010 and December 2011. Research methods included semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, participation observation, analysis of primary documents, and focus groups with teachers and students.*

Findings*: Although the MST initially invested only in informal, popular education, by the late 1980s activists began to realize that transforming public schools was necessary for the realization of the movement's social and political goals. By drawing on their previous experiences with popular education, as well as the theories of several outside intellectuals, activists developed educational utopias that allowed them to solidify their educational proposals in practice.*

Conclusions*: This article provides insights into the process of grassroots educational innovation, illustrating that communities draw on a diverse set of educational theories that resonate with local practices and beliefs to develop alternative proposals for their schools. The article also suggests that certain questions arise about the purpose of public education when social movements with particular visions of societal transformation demand participation in the public school sphere. The article argues that this social movement participation is appropriate if activists can mobilize parents, students, teachers, and other community members to implement this vision through a collective process of participatory governance.*

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INTRODUCTION

It is a hot, sunny morning in a poor rural municipality in northeastern Brazil, in the early 1990s. A teacher, Luisa, sits on a bus that is taking her to a small rural school where she has been teaching for more than a decade. She is a tenured teacher for the municipality, with significant job security but very few options in terms of professional development and continuing education. She has a high school degree but has not attended college, like many of the other teachers in the municipality. Luisa spends most days completely isolated in her one-room schoolhouse, teaching the same lessons she has taught for years from an outdated textbook. She does not have any direct oversight, and she cannot remember the last time anybody from the municipal secretary of education visited her school. As the clock ticks closer to noon, Luisa stares out of the window, waiting for the midday bus to come and pick her up so she can return to her house in the city center for lunch. She is not from this rural area and she worries about the health and happiness of the children who live in these communities, given the lack of irrigation and tough farming conditions. She tries to counter these difficulties by encouraging her students to gain the skills they need for a job in the city.

More than a decade later, in the mid-2000s, Luisa's relationships to her school, students, and profession have transformed. Riding the same bus to her school that she has ridden for the previous two decades, she laughs with her colleagues instead of staring out of the window dreading the school day. The teachers talk excitedly, remembering all of the events that happened the weekend before at the three-day teacher training retreat organized by a national social movement, the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST).[1] Through these types of annual teacher trainings, Luisa has come to embrace a new perspective on rural education. Luisa now believes that the purpose of rural schooling is to help youth stay in the countryside and become farmer-intellectuals, contributing to the sustainability of their communities through collective, small-scale agroecological food production. Luisa considers herself an activist fighting to realize this new social vision.

Instead of teaching the same lessons from an outdated textbook, Luisa now incorporates a range of new pedagogies into her classroom. These pedagogies include organizing students into small collectives that govern the school, combining manual labor with academic study, emphasizing farming practices based on agroecology, meeting with other teachers to share experiences, and utilizing the language of the community to develop her lesson plans each week. Luisa is one of the dozens of teachers

in this municipality—and one of the thousands across the country—who have become dedicated teacher–activists, trained in this alternative pedagogical approach to rural schooling. This pedagogy is nationally known as *Educação do Campo* (Education of the Countryside).

How do new pedagogical approaches toward public schooling develop? Why do teachers begin to embrace these alternative educational practices? And what relationship, if any, do new pedagogies have to alternative social and political visions? In this article, I argue that educational reform is not always a top-down process, implemented by educational officials and politicians in far-off bureaucratic offices. Instead, I illustrate how social movements can become protagonists in the development, implementation, and oversight of new pedagogical practices. In this case, it was peasant–activists from the MST that developed an innovative approach to rural schooling—and it was also these MST activists who began to train public school teachers to implement these pedagogical ideas. This analysis illustrates that social movements not only are capable of demanding access to public education for marginalized populations, but are also well positioned to develop new pedagogies for these schools. However, unlike other educational reform efforts, pedagogies promoted by social movements are often explicitly connected to proposals for alternative political and economic visions, raising questions about the role for public schooling in social transformation.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

There is much debate in the field of education about the relationship between education and social change. Critical pedagogy is one body of scholarship that investigates these connections. The field of critical pedagogy was inspired by the educational ideas of Paulo Freire in Brazil (Leonardo, 2004), but is also linked to the field of critical theory, the Frankfurt School, and the search for a theory of social transformation and emancipation (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 2001). More specifically, the field of critical pedagogy draws on critical theories to develop educational practices that can cultivate students' intellectual capacity to analyze and interpret their political, economic, and social realities. As McLaren (2003) writes:

> Critical pedagogy attempts to provide teachers and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools actually play within a race-, class-, and gender-divided society, and . . . [is] dedicated to the emancipatory imperatives of self-empowerment and social transformation. (p. 189)

Critical pedagogy is both a critique of the current public educational system and an attempt to theorize how to construct a more emancipatory educational model.

Giroux (2001), one of the leading thinkers in the field of critical pedagogy, also suggests that public schools can play an active role in struggles for social change. He asserts that the purpose of schooling is to create a public sphere that becomes a "lens for analyzing the depoliticization of the masses in contemporary society as well as their possible self-transformation toward a conscious and active citizenry" (p. 116). Giroux argues that the purpose of theory is to help people act more strategically in a way that will change unequal economic and political circumstances, and to give them a vocabulary to articulate concepts such as social transformation and agency. In other words, for critical pedagogues, public schools *have* to engage students in struggles that contest unequal power relations. Otherwise, public schools will continue to reproduce the same economic, political, and racial inequities.

Despite the emphasis on social change in the field of critical pedagogy, some scholars question the actual connection between public schooling and societal transformation. For example, Anyon (2005) argues:

> As a nation, we have been counting on education to solve the problems of unemployment, joblessness, and poverty for many years. But education did not cause these problems, and education cannot solve them. An economic system that chases profits and casts people aside (especially people of color) is culpable. (p. 3)

Anyon suggests that in order to reduce inequality in poor communities, an educational model that addresses issues beyond the school walls is necessary. She advocates for schools to become sites for the emergence of new social movements, with educators working directly with community members and students becoming change agents in their schools and their neighborhoods. Anyon's position assumes that public schools are not neutral institutions if they are adapting students to society as it is; rather, these schools are actively supporting an unequal economic system. She argues that public schools need to promote a new social vision of how society should function. This, of course, again raises the question of *whose* social vision should be promoted.

More recently, Apple (2013) has offered several examples of how grassroots movements—on both the right and the left—have used educational institutions for political, economic, and cultural ends. He writes that, "In certain situations and at certain times, educational institutions can and do become crucial sites for and participate in 'changing society.' They can and do act as arenas for envisioning new possibilities" (p. 163). Apple

argues that the development of these alternative educational models "is best done when it is dialectically and intimately connected to actual movements and struggles" (2013, p. 41). In other words, if the purpose of education is to change society, then movements engaged in social change practices should be at the forefront of educational reform efforts. Apple (2013) describes this process in the case of Black activist–teachers in segregated schools in Virginia (pp. 69–72) and in Socialist Sunday Schools (pp. 66–69). Other scholars have highlighted the connection between mobilization and educational innovation in the Highlander Center in Tennessee (Morris, 1984; Payne, 1997), the Black Panther schools in Oakland (Payne & Strickland, 2008), the literacy campaigns in Nicaragua (Arnove, 1986), and U.S. labor colleges (Altenbaugh, 1990).

In all of these examples, social movements are not only demanding access to quality education, but are also linking these educational practices to concrete political struggles. If the field of critical pedagogy claims that public schools can contribute to social change, then investigating the implications of social movement participation in public schools is a logical area of inquiry. In other words, more studies are needed about how social movements develop new critical pedagogies, and whether these pedagogies can move beyond the informal sphere and turn schools into vehicles for social transformation. However, this also requires a deeper discussion about the potential contradictions in grassroots educational reform efforts, and the scope and purpose of public education within a movement for social change.

BACKGROUND: THE MST AND EDUCATION

The MST is a social movement of peasant–activists that has been fighting for agrarian reform—the redistribution of land and the conditions to produce food and live a dignified life on this land—for over 30 years. The MST engages in this struggle by occupying large land estates that are fallow, camping out on these estates for several years, and demanding that the government redistribute this land to landless peasants.[2] The MST is also a self-identified "socialist" movement, meaning that activists are openly critical of the capitalist organization of economic production in the Brazilian countryside. Consequently, once land is redistributed to landless families, MST activists encourage these families to organize their communities based on shared landownership, collective agricultural production, and cooperative social practices.

Initially, most MST activists disregarded public education as an arm of the oppressive capitalist state. In the early 1980s, these activists sought to counteract the influences of the public school system by organizing

informal educational activities (known as popular education) in their communities. However, the MST soon began to realize the importance of participation in the public school system and started developing pedagogies for the teachers in their communities, which became known as *Educação do Campo*. By the late 1990s, *Educação do Campo* had become a nationally recognized educational approach to rural schooling. These pedagogical ideas are now legally sanctioned through a series of guidelines passed by Brazil's National Educational Advisory Board in 2002 and 2008,[3] and a Presidential Decree signed in 2010.[4] This government recognition was a direct result of the political pressure the MST put on the government throughout this period, along with an alliance of other social movements, trade unions, and university professors who supported the MST's pedagogical approach (Tarlau, 2015).

I analyze this transition within the MST—from a movement of popular educators to a movement of public school teachers—while also exploring how the MST's pedagogical approach was constructed through a dialectical interaction between theory and practice. The first part of this article analyzes how the MST transitioned from promoting informal educational practices to participating in the public school system. The second part examines the development of the MST's pedagogical approach to rural schooling, and the diverse theoretical traditions on which MST activists draw. In the third part of the article, I discuss how the "Pedagogy of the MST" evolved through a series of practical experiments, and why the construction of "educational utopias" facilitated the MST's ability to transform rural public schools. I end by exploring some of the tensions in the MST's educational approach, suggesting a need for a larger debate on the purpose of public education in society. The overall goal of the article is threefold: (1) to illustrate how new pedagogical practices develop within grassroots movements; (2) to argue for the critical role of what Freire (2002) calls praxis—the connection between theory and practice—in educational innovation; and (3) to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the connections between public schools and programs for social change.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article is based on 15 months of ethnographic research conducted between October 2010 and December 2011 in four different Brazilian states. My ethnographic approach is both multi-sited and multilevel, falling into a genre of ethnography known as "political ethnography" due to its focus on "politics and its main protagonists" (Auyero & Joseph, 2007, p. 1). An ethnographic approach to the study of politics and collective

action is an important tool in capturing both the practices of politics (strategic choices) and the meaning of these practices (culture/meaning making) as they are unfolding on the ground (Auyero & Joseph, 2007). In each of my field sites, I lived with families on MST settlements, visited local public schools, attended MST-administered teacher trainings, and interviewed activists, teachers, parents, and community members about the MST's educational approach. Comparison across regions was a central component of my research design, allowing for generalizations about political and pedagogical processes.

A large portion of the data for this article is based on my interviews and observations in the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, the location of the first land occupations that eventually led to the founding of the MST in 1984. This state is also the location of the MST's first teacher-training programs. I was able to interview many of the activists who were involved in developing these programs, as well as the teachers who participated. In total, I interviewed 70 activists and teachers working in public schools on MST settlements. Part of this article is also based on my own participant observation at the MST's most famous "movement school,"[5] the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC). Finally, my analysis is also based on an independent examination of the pedagogical texts that MST educational activists utilize in their schools and teacher-training programs.

FREIRE AND THE CHURCH: EARLY EXPERIMENTS WITH POPULAR EDUCATION

Ever since the MST's emergence in the early 1980s, activists have been offering popular educational classes for children and adults in their movement, based in the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's pedagogical proposals. Freire published his most famous text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002), in 1970, while in exile in Chile. In this book, Freire outlines the oppressive nature of the public education system and offers an alternative method for working with the poor. The basic principle in this approach is that literacy programs should teach poor people to read the *word* through developing critical literacy skills, while also helping them read the *world* by reflecting on their political context. Over the next three decades, Freire published dozens of books on these ideas.[6] These pedagogical theories became the inspiration for the MST's informal educational initiatives in the early 1980s. However, it was not Freire's books that influenced movement activists—many of the landless workers in the Brazilian countryside were still illiterate at this time.[7] In order for Freire's ideas to resonate with movement activists, they needed to

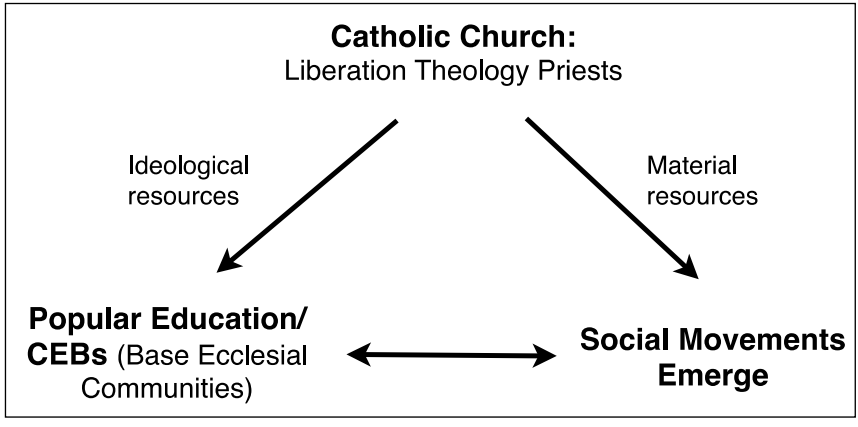
experience the theories in practice. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Catholic Church became a vehicle for this praxis—connecting theory and practice.

Traditionally, Catholic priests working in poor communities were involved in "charity" projects, such as food drives, but were not directly involved in more "political" actions (Berryman, 1987, p. 15). However, during the 1950s, many clergy throughout Latin America were beginning to acknowledge that there were structural inequalities that kept people disempowered and poor. These priests developed a theology of liberation, based on what became known as a "preferential option for the poor." This "preferential option" represented a shift in the priorities of the Catholic Church to improving the lives of poor populations. In 1968, at a conference of bishops in Medellín, Colombia, "liberation theology" was solidified as a political movement within the Catholic Church.[8]

Priests following liberation theology began engaging working-class populations in discussions about poverty and power through local study groups, known as CEBs (Base Ecclesial Communities). These CEBs were organized as traditional Bible study groups, but the study was based in workers' own experiences and their ability to take political actions to improve their communities (Berryman, 1987, p. 36). "The Church thus served simultaneously as arena, promoter, and protector for contestatory movements. Particularly in the urban peripheries, there was no other space in which to participate and develop grass-roots leadership" (Keck, 1992, p. 48). By 1981, there were 80,000 CEBs throughout Brazil (Moreira, 1985, p. 177). The mere quantity and diffusion of CEBs, even during a period of dictatorship, is an indication of the Catholic Church's capacity to influence poor populations.

These CEBs were important vehicles for spreading Freire's educational ideas among social movements during this period. The final document from the conference in Medellín explicitly mentions the Catholic Church's new educational approach: "This education is called education for liberation; that is, education which permits the learner to be the subject of his own development" (Torres, 1993, p. 122). Torres (1993) argues that the language of this document is almost identical to that found in Freire's previous writings, illustrating the influence that Freire had on the Medellín Conference: "One of the main reasons for Freire's success was the close relationship between Freire's early philosophy of education and Catholic thinking" (Torres, 1993, p. 122). In other words, Freire's ideas found a home within liberation theology; the CEBs were the vehicles through which Freirean pedagogy lived in practice. Figure 1 illustrates these relationships between the Catholic Church, popular education, and social movements.

Figure 1. Role of the catholic church in political organizing in Latin America (1960s–1980s)



The MST's emergence in the early 1980s and activists' immediate incorporation of popular education within their communities is emblematic of the relationships outlined in Figure 1. In fact, several of the current national leaders of the MST were actually in seminary together in the late 1970s preparing to become priests when they decided to leave the Catholic Church and join the emerging movement of rural workers occupying land.[9] For these future MST activists, the decision to become clergymen was not a choice, per se, but rather a lack of other options. For example, Edgar Kolling joined the seminary because public schools in the rural interior only went up to fourth grade, and his parents could not afford to send him to a private school.[10] At the seminary, Kolling was able to finish primary and secondary schooling. It was also through the seminary that Kolling started working with the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), a grassroots organization founded in 1975 that was helping to organize land occupations in the south of Brazil. Kolling remembers his decision to leave the seminary: "I always wanted to work with poor people. In the CPT, I learned that you do not need to be a priest to work with the poor. As a popular educator I could also do this work." Although two of Kolling's brothers eventually became priests, Kolling became an activist in the MST. His religious mentors were supportive of this choice:

> Bishop Gomez of our diocese was a huge organizer of land occupations. He was a spiritual inspiration for us; when we studied theology we went straight to learn in the slums. In this sense we were formed by the church, and the church's option for the poor.

As Kolling himself acknowledges, his decision to leave the church was a consequence of the context in which he grew up:

> Liberation theology made us all take the option for the poor. Today it is the opposite, the poor enter seminary to become rich. It was in this historical period that this emphasis on collective formation was present. We are not the products of a personal decision; we are the products of a historical context.

In other words, it was the ideological and material resources of the Catholic Church that led these poor peasant–farmers to become political activists.

The history of Salete Campigotto, commonly known as the "first teacher" in the MST, is another exemplar of these relationships.[11] Campigotto was a teacher and poor farmer living in a rural region of Rio Grande do Sul. When she was 25 years old, in 1977, Campigotto met Father Arnildo Fritzen, who invited her to participate in a local CEB. Campigotto recalls:

> It was in the CEBs and through the CPT that I learned a more critical analysis of the reality of small farmers, of the reality of education in Brazil . . . it was through these experiences that I began to question what was happening, that I realized that the way we were organizing classroom teaching was not helping students reflect on their reality.

In 1981, Campigotto participated in a land occupation. After this occupation, in the MST camp, she immediately began organizing educational activities for both adults and children, using an educational approach similar to that of the CEBs.

The Catholic Church inspired many of the original founders of the MST, like Kolling and Campigotto, to contest poverty by occupying land. These MST activists then incorporated popular education into their struggle, educational practices they had learned through their previous experiences with the CEBs. This popular education included children's education, adult literacy programs, and educational initiatives focused on training new leaders for the movement. However, none of these educational initiatives required MST activists to build relationships with local government officials or school bureaucrats. According to MST activist Ivori Moraes, educators in the camp did not think that their popular educational initiatives had anything to do with public schooling, especially given the capitalist nature of the Brazilian state.[12] Thus, for the first several years after the MST's founding in 1984, activists did not discuss the strategic role of public schools within their political struggle.

REALIZING THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING

It was only in 1987 that the MST began to shift its educational focus from popular education to the public school sphere. This was not a top-down decision made by the MST leadership, but rather an issue pushed to the forefront of the movement by local families living in MST settlements. These families were being confronted with the everyday reality of a public school system that devalued their history and struggle. For example, Carmen Vedovatto describes her personal experience moving to an MST camp in Santana do Livramento, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in 1989.[13] As soon as she arrived at the camp, the MST invited her to teach, since she already had a high school degree. At this point, the government did not legally recognize the educational activities taking place in the camp. When the camp finally won access to land and a new agrarian reform settlement was formed, the local mayor was critical of the MST and did not want to open a school. The families in the camp successfully circumvented the municipal government by convincing the state governor to build a state public school. On the first day of the school opening, the community proudly hung an MST flag. This came to the attention of the state education officials, who demanded that the flag be taken down. After multiple protests, the community won the right to keep the flag on the school walls. Vedovatto was appointed the school's teacher, and the community set up a collective of families to support Vedovatto in her daily work, and defend her if similar conflicts with the government arose in the future.

Campigotto, who also became a public school teacher after the families in her camp won land access, tells a similar story.[14] At that time in the early 1980s, Campigotto's school was the only building in the settlement with electricity. In the afternoons, after the school closed for the day, Campigotto allowed the families in the settlement to set up wires to stream electricity from the school to their houses. One afternoon, however, several state education officials arrived and saw these illegal wires. They were furious, and left Campigotto a message to request a disciplinary meeting. Campigotto did not go to the meeting, and instead, a collective of parents from the settlement agreed to meet the education officials. They explained their decades of suffering to the officials, and asked why they did not deserve to have electricity. They made such a commotion that the education officials sent a letter to the state electricity company, demanding new electric wires in the settlement. Campigotto remembers this fondly: "I always use this story to show the importance of maintaining a strong community organization. Imagine if I had been alone." This situation resonates with an argument that Apple (2013)

makes about organized movements being an important "line of defense against dominant groups' predictable reactions" (p. 165) to teachers taking political positions. For both Campigotto and Vedovatto, the active involvement of MST families was critical to their ability to take controversial positions within their public schools.

The increasing concern among parents living in MST settlements about their local public school eventually led the movement to organize a "National Meeting of Agrarian Reform Educators" in 1987. This national meeting was an opportunity to share experiences teachers were having in public schools on MST settlements throughout the country. These conversations also led to a discussion about the lack of access to secondary education for teachers and the need for more professional training. Kolling remembers, "The teachers had some, but not a lot of pedagogical formation . . . there was a feeling that the MST should have some type of influence in this training."[15] At this meeting the MST national leadership decided to expand the movement's involvement in education to include the formal public school sphere, leading to the founding of a National MST Education Sector.

While the MST's decision to participate in the public school system was initially driven by the concerns of parents, this choice was also connected to the movement's political vision. In contrast to other movements, the MST is what Fernandes (2005) has called a *socio-territorial* movement—not only making demands on the state but also attempting to transform entire geographical "spaces" and make them their own "territories" (p. 30). Activists describe themselves as "socialists," struggling for more collective forms of agricultural production, the creation of viable cooperatives, the establishment of community-owned land, and the promotion of shared work processes. In this way, socio-territorial movements are attempting to form new social relations in their territories that support alternative modes of production (Fernandes, 2005, p. 31).

Another way to conceptualize this process is the following: MST activists are not only demanding land but also attempting to gain cultural and moral leadership—what Gramsci (1971) refers to as hegemony (p. 258)—over civil society in areas of agrarian reform. Thus, although the MST was not initially concerned about public education, by the late 1980s, activists realized that the traditional approach to rural schooling was threatening their movement's ability to maintain cultural, moral, and intellectual leadership in the Brazilian countryside. In this context, activists searched out other experiences, theories, and practices that could help them not only occupy land but also "occupy" and transform the public school system.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: DEVELOPING PEDAGOGIES FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Once transforming public schools had become a central part of the MST's political struggle, the next task for the movement was to develop pedagogies to promote in these schools. The search for appropriate school pedagogies did not occur in isolation from the other popular educational initiatives that were already being put into practice in settlements and camps, or the experiences that teachers such as Campigotto and Vedovatto were having in public schools. The MST built on these experiences, while also searching out new pedagogies that would support the movement's socialist vision. In this section, I analyze the three most important foundations of the MST's educational approach: Freire, Soviet pedagogues, and local cultural practices. I argue that none of these pedagogies should be understood as outside theories that were imposed on the movement. Rather, the educational ideas that "stuck" were the ones that resonated with ideals and values already prominent in MST communities.

FREIRE'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITS

From the very first land occupations in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul in the late 1970s, Freire was the primary educational inspiration for the MST's popular educational initiatives. As already described, these ideas travelled to these landless communities through local church study groups and Catholic priests following liberation theology. Freire's ideas offered the MST a series of tangible classroom pedagogies, as well as a theory about education's relationship to social change.

In terms of pedagogical concepts, the critical role of dialogue, problem-posing education, and the importance of starting with students' previous knowledge became the foundational ideas for the MST's approach to rural schooling. Although Freire's critique of the "banking" system of education—wherein teachers are seen as "depositors" of knowledge into the "receiving" minds of the students—is currently widely accepted around the world, in the 1980s and 1990s in rural Brazil "banking education" was still the norm. In this context, the MST embraced Freire in order to contest the idea that teachers are the owners of knowledge and that students are passive in the learning process. Instead, MST activists promoted a problem-posing education in which teachers would construct knowledge with their students. Through this approach, "students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the

students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own" (Freire, 2002, p. 81). Activists began to demand that teachers incorporate dialogue and problem-posing education into their classrooms.

Freire's writings also helped MST activists justify their desire for schools to be based in students' experiences in rural areas, and the knowledge already being produced by peasant communities. As Freire writes, if an educational program does not start within the realm of students' previous knowledge, then it is intangible and becomes meaningless words, what Freire (2002) famously refers to as "an alienated and alienating 'blah'" (p. 87). Again, while this idea has become common sense for educators around the world, in the 1980s and 1990s, rural public schools in Brazil were still dominated by an urban-centric curriculum and teachers attempting to prepare students for an industrial workforce in the cities (Plank, 1996). Drawing on Freire, the MST contested the urban orientation of their rural schools and demanded that teachers incorporate topics and issues relevant to students' experiences in the Brazilian countryside. This basic idea—that public education should not only be located *in* the countryside but should be based in the experiences *of* the countryside—has become a nationally recognized concept known as *Educação do Campo*.[16]

In addition to these classroom pedagogies, the MST also found within Freirean theory a justification for the more political aspects of the movement's educational approach. The MST wanted schools that encouraged students to participate in the movement's struggle for agrarian reform. Freire helped to justify this perspective by insisting that education is never neutral; it is always actively maintaining or changing the status quo. Therefore, the MST's vision for schools was no more political than was the way in which the current school system reinforced social inequities. For the MST, and for Freire, the goal of education is for students to define tangible actions that they can take to change the world. Freire (2001) writes, "Insofar as I am a conscious presence in the world, I cannot hope to escape my ethical responsibility for my action in the world" (p. 26). Freire offered the MST a vision of political change as not only possible, but ethically necessary.

Finally, Freire also taught MST activists about the critical role of participatory governance, and the pitfalls of vanguardism. Rosali Caldart, a leader in the national MST education sector, emphasized this latter point in a pedagogy class she was teaching for MST activists:

> Paulo Freire taught us that we are the subjects of the process, not objects. He believes in peasant workers. Some revolutionaries

> thought that vanguards would produce revolution.[17] Paulo Freire taught us that revolution is not through vanguardism, everyone has to be an agent in this process.[18]

The notion that everyone needs to learn how "to coordinate and be coordinated" is a strongly held ideal within the MST.[19] This ideal is not always applied perfectly in practice; many MST activists have held the same leadership positions for decades, not everyone feels that their voice matters, and women were marginalized from national-level decision-making roles until the first decade of this century (Peschanksi, 2007). Nonetheless, a critical component of the MST's pedagogical approach is teaching students as early as possible the value of participatory governance.

Despite the many valuable lessons that Freire offered the movement, MST activists quickly began to realize Freirean theories had certain limitations. For example, Freirean educational experiments were almost always limited to non-formal, popular educational contexts.[20] Activists began to realize that the public school system is more than just a single classroom; it is an entire institution with a particular hierarchal structure of government officials, bureaucrats, school principals, teachers, students, and community members. MST activists concluded that Freire alone could not help them transform the institution of public schooling. While not rejecting Freire's contributions to classroom pedagogy, activists began to search out other theorists who had thought about the role of public schools in a socialist society.

FINDING THE SOVIETS

The Soviet Union, particularly in the years between 1918 and 1930, was one place where leaders were thinking about, debating, and experimenting with how to construct public schools that would support new social and economic relations. The writings of several Soviet theorists became important theoretical inspirations for the movement, initially introduced to the MST through the mediation of outside intellectuals who were studying in university contexts. For example, Rosali Caldart—who would eventually become a leader in the MST education sector—was in a master's program at a university in Rio Grande do Sul when she began visiting MST camps and introduced a few MST activists to the Soviet theorists she was studying. However, this was not simply an imposition of outside theories on the movement. The reason that these Soviet theories became influential is because they reinforced ideals MST families *already held* about the relationship between education, work, and cooperation.

The following story that Campigotto tells of Caldart visiting her camp

illustrates how these outside ideas resonated with practices already occurring in the camps:[21]

> In the visit that Rosali made in the 1980s, we were already working in education collectives, and I had already developed practical activities with the kids. We had a rabbit farm, and the kids took care of the rabbits each day, they learned how to take care of them. Rosali came to visit us, and I think she had studied some stuff before because personally I had never heard of Krupskaya. She said to me, school and work . . . the issue of studying, but having work responsibility, but also studying, this is an issue Krupskaya wrote about, the connection between work and study. This is how we began to study Krupskaya.

In Campigotto's camp, everyone was always working—planting food, building houses, taking care of animals. It seemed logical to Campigotto that her students should also have work responsibilities, which is why she set up the rabbit farm for her students. When Caldart saw this rabbit farm, it reminded her of the educational theories of Nadezhda Krupskaya, the minister of education during the early years of the Soviet Union, and Vladimir Lenin's wife. The fact that a local university student suggested a book for MST activists to read was not unusual; this was a common practice in MST camps. The difference in this case was that Caldart introduced theorists to the movement who offered activists a pedagogical justification for practices that were already occurring in these camps. As MST activists began to read the writings of Krupskaya as well as other Soviet theorists, these ideas immediately made sense. Two other Soviet writers in particular have become important theoretical foundations for the MST's educational approach: Moisey M. Pistrak and Anton Makarenko.[22]

Pistrak is not widely known in the English-speaking world, and in fact, 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. Pistrak's pedagogical ideas, like those of Krupskaya, immediately resonated with MST activists.[23] Pistrak's biggest contribution is his discussion of the educational value of manual labor, which he argues must be a central part of any socialist school system. Incorporating manual labor into public schools has multiple benefits, he writes, as it teaches students the principles of discipline, organization, and collectivity (Pistrak, 2000, p. 30). Pistrak's theory of a "school of work"—in which students are equally involved in manual and intellectual labor at school—is emphasized in several MST publications (MST, 1996).

Another core component of the MST's educational philosophy is the vision of education as the learning ground for cooperation and collective organization. The Soviet educator Makarenko was born in Ukraine, and continues to be held in high esteem by educators around the world. Makarenko became famous internationally for his theory of the "student collective," which he implemented in practice while administering a residence school for war orphans after the Bolshevik Revolution—known as the Maxim Gorky[24] Labor Colony (Bowen, 1962; Makarenko, 2001, 2004). Makarenko's book *Road to Life* (Makarenko, 2001), *Poemas Pedagogicas* in Portuguese, is a firsthand narrative of his time as the director of the Gorky Colony. Although many people in the Soviet Union considered war orphans to be societal rejects, incapable of contributing to the new socialist society, Makarenko believed that it was possible to develop the personality, character, and intellect of these students (Bowen, 1962). He thought that this could happen by allowing the orphans to take complete responsibility for the governance of their school. Makarenko organized the Gorky Colony into dozens of small collectives of four to six students, which slowly took over the administration of the school. Makarenko believed that this collective organization, and the emphasis on self-governance, would help students dispense with their individualism and strive for a greater goal: the collective good.

Both manual labor and collective organization are basic principles in the MST's struggle for agrarian reform. For example, as soon as an MST land occupation takes place, the first task for activists is to organize the camp into collectives of 10 families, known as "Base Nucleuses" (*Núcleos da Base*, or NBs).[25] Discussions that occur in these NBs are the most important decision-making mechanism in the camp, and the goal is for this organizational structure to transfer over to the settlements. Given this use of family collectives for decision-making in settlements and camps, creating collectives of students in public schools made sense to MST activists. Makarenko's pedagogical approach allowed activists to think not only about how to transform classroom pedagogy, but also how to reverse the traditional relationship between students, teachers, and administrators.

A PEDAGOGICAL STEW

Over the past three decades, MST activists have drawn on various pedagogies to develop their approach to public schooling, with Freire, Pistrak, and Makarenko becoming the most important references. At times these theorists can seem like stark opposites. For example, while Makarenko and Pistrak are concerned with discipline and developing socialist values, Freire is focused on dialogue, student expression, and

forming humanistic teacher–student relationships. These differences stem from their philosophical background and political contexts. On the one hand, Makarenko and Pistrak are orthodox Marxists, working to spread the success of the recent Bolshevik Revolution. These Soviet theorists were part of a project of centralization, attempting to develop and inculcate into people's consciousness and practice an emancipatory centralized State. This ideal resonated with the MST's desire to integrate youth into a project of agrarian reform in the countryside. On the other hand, Freire was a Catholic and a humanist, writing in exile against an authoritative military regime. Freire's was a project of resistance again a repressive state. These ideals resonated with the MST's desire that students participate in determining their own destiny and contesting the authoritative structure of the traditional public school system.

Although the MST is often asked to identify its primary educational inspiration, Kolling says that the movement refuses to adhere to one theoretical tradition: "We dialogue with intellectuals of Brazil and the world . . . we chose the theorists that help us to advance in our problems and challenges."[26] These diverse theories offer the MST a range of ideas they can draw on for every educational context. As Caldart explains:

> Pistrak was creating a new school for a socialist society. . . . Makarenko had a different challenge, the educational process of re-entering children into the revolutionary process. These children had lost their ability to be part of social life, and he was creating a school for these children.[27]

Thus, Pistrak's writing allows activists to think about working with mass-schooling systems, while Makarenko's helps the movement reflect on how to educate students who feel alienated from Brazilian society—and how to direct this indignation into productive channels. For the MST, one "productive channel" for youth is becoming an activist in the movement.

Finally, none of these theorists are employed at every moment or with total consistency. For example, at one point in *Road to Life*, Makarenko becomes so exasperated with a student that he hits him as a form of punishment. I have heard several MST activists critique Makarenko for this harsh disciplinary action.[28] However, these activists also argue that Makarenko's theories cannot be thrown away just because of this one incident. As Marli Zimmerman reflects,[29] "I was drawn to Makarenko because of the population he was working with, the unwanted, the kids who were rejected from society, like the *sem terrinha* [little landless children]." Although Zimmerman does not approve of Makarenko's use of force with one of his students, she still finds his pedagogical ideas useful because of the population of students he worked with. She admires his

success incorporating these students into a project of self-governance within their own schools.

In addition to picking and choosing from different theorists, the MST also incorporates local cultural, agricultural, and political practices into public schools. The most prominent example is agroecological production. As a movement of peasants, the MST has as a central goal of its educational approach the training of a new generation of youth farmers in the countryside, who know how to grow food sustainably using agroecological practices. Consequently, in almost all MST schools there is an area for agricultural production where students are in charge of overseeing the production process through the use agroecological techniques. In ideal situations, the students' daily meals come from these farms. This teaches them both the benefits of local agricultural production and the ideals of food sovereignty.[30]

Activists also incorporate cultural practices into their school, such as the *mística*—a moment of cultural and political performance that can include dance, music, theater, videos, or other cultural expressions that reflect on past and current political struggles. At the start of every school day, before meetings, and during social events, MST students organize these cultural performances, which are all based on some aspect of social justice. The performances of *mística* help students collectively remember past struggles of the working class and other oppressed groups by reenacting important events in these histories. *Mística* is also an implicit critique of the dualism between mind and body, inherited from Cartesian enlightenment. By singing the MST national anthem together, or a song that comes from a settlement's rural popular culture, or by reciting a poem about other socialist struggles, students *embody* their history and the interconnections between the MST and other political movements.

Thus, the MST's educational approach is quite different than the schools in the Soviet Union, or the other popular educational contexts across Latin America. The "Pedagogy of the MST" is a hybrid philosophy, adapted for the contemporary Brazilian countryside by local activists.

TRAINING A "MOVEMENT" OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

The previous section described how the MST's unique pedagogical approach toward formal schooling developed, and how the educational theories that "stuck" with the movement were the ones that resonated with practices and values already present in MST communities. This section discusses how activists put these educational theories into practice, or in other words, how MST activists trained a "movement" of teachers to work in their schools.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, government officials were generally wary of the MST's participation in the local public school system, and sought to prevent these initiatives. However, there were some moments when the interests of the movement and the local government converged. A primary example of this was the MST's first teacher-training program, which took place in 1990 in the municipality of Braga, in the northeastern part of Rio Grande do Sul. The idea for this teacher-training program arose at the MST's national education meeting in 1987, when families expressed concern about the low level of teacher education on settlements. Many teachers had not even finished high school. Moreover, by 1990, it was illegal to be a teacher without a secondary degree, and judicial bodies were beginning to enforce this law. This threatened the MST's ability to keep supportive teachers in the rural public schools.

The local municipalities were facing a similar problem: teachers in their municipal public schools without a secondary education. Although the municipalities had the legal capacity to recognize schools offering these degrees, they did not have the financial or pedagogical capacity to develop these programs. The MST education collective began to work with these government officials to develop a proposal for a high school program that would also issue a teaching certificate, referred to as a "MAG" (*magistério*) high school program. The MAG program would be administered by the MST education sector, legally recognized by the municipal governments, and include teachers from both the city centers and the MST camps and settlements. The MAG high school program was the first of many formal degree programs that MST activists developed over the next two decades, with official government recognition.

For the MST, the goal of the MAG program was twofold—"to certify the teachers"—but also to "dialogue about what type of school we wanted, and what was the necessary training to develop this relationship between work and school, education, peasant culture, and cooperation."[31] For the MST, teacher training is not simply about being effective in the classroom; it is also about developing a collective of teacher–activists in the schools dedicated to supporting the movement. In Gramscian terms, the idea is for teachers to become organic intellectuals in MST communities and offer students "a homogeneity and an awareness of [their] own function" as a social class, and prepare the students for action (Gramsci, 2000, p. 5).

In 1990, the first MAG high school program began. Half of the students in the program were municipal teachers, and half were MST activists working formally or informally in the settlements and camps. The members of the MST education sector who organized the MAG program included many of the activists already involved with popular education over the previous decade. This group was determined to use the MAG

program to further develop the movement's educational proposal for public schools. Caldart remembers, "We made a lot of mistakes, but the MAG course had complete control, we could do whatever we wanted."[32]

The two-year MAG program was implemented through what the MST refers to as the pedagogy of rotation (*pedagogia da alternância*). The pedagogy of rotation allows students to live and study together for two to three months through intensive "study periods" (*tempo escola*), and then return home for "community periods" (*tempo comunidade*) in which they engage in local research projects. This organization allowed teachers to complete the program without giving up their teaching responsibilities, since the "study periods" occurred during school holidays.

The MST activists coordinating the MAG high school program actively incorporated Soviet and Freirean educational pedagogies into the course. For example, when the teachers arrived in Braga, nothing was prepared for them—they had to organize themselves into Base Nucleuses (NBs; see Figure 2 below), and divide up the tasks necessary for the school to function. Students also lived together and shared the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. The program incorporated manual labor into the curriculum, requiring students to work in local agricultural cooperatives. Teachers were often uncomfortable with this work, since many identified as part of the professional class and spent their days far away from the fields. During the community periods, teachers put what they were learning into practice, and, like good Freirean practitioners, reflected on these experiences during the next study period. Teachers not only read Soviet and Freirean texts, but also lived these texts in practice.

I interviewed dozens of MST activists who received their high school degree through this MAG program in Braga between 1990 and 1995. Many of these activists never thought they would achieve this level of educational access. For example, Elizabete Witcel, the current principal of a settlement school near the capital city of Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul, only had an eighth-grade education when she turned 18 because her father did not believe girls needed to study.[33] In 1985, she participated in an MST land occupation and began to teach the 500 or more children in the camp how to read and write. In 1990, she was invited to participate in the first MAG course. Similarly, MST activist Marli Zimmerman became an educator in a local MST camp, despite only having an eighth-grade education. She was invited to participate in the second MAG high school program, MAG 2, offered in 1991. Today she is the vice principal of a public school located next to an MST settlement, also in Rio Grande do Sul.

The MST activists who graduated from these MAG programs describe

the important role they played in both activists' understanding of the movements' educational approach and their political consciousness. Vanderlúcia Simplicio remembers reading Makarenko and realizing that the MAG program was trying to imitate the Gorky Colony.[34] It was through the MAG program that she first learned the values of collectivity, and its role in the movement's pedagogical approach. Adilio Perin compares the MAG program to the organization of a settlement, which includes self-governance, cooperatives, and time in the classroom and at work.[35] Ivania Azevedo refers to the MAG program as an "opening of the waters," where she first learned about the intentionality of education—*à la* Freire—and that an educator must always know for what purpose she is teaching.[36] The common theme in all of these reflections is that the MAG programs helped MST activists *visualize* the movement's pedagogical proposal by allowing them to experience it through practice. These activists are now participants—or organic intellectuals—in dozens of public schools on MST settlements across the country, teaching their colleagues about the movement's educational vision and pedagogical practices.

Building an Educational Utopia – IEJC

In 1995, MST activists founded their first "movement school," the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC),[37] a high school independent of the public school system in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.[38] Currently the school offers a range of high school programs, including high school degrees in pedagogy, cooperative administration, popular communication, and community health. The high school has three interconnected purposes: (1) political formation—to train new activists; (2) technical formation—to attend to the technical needs of the settlements; and (3) high school access—to raise the level of education among the settlements and camps. Unlike their attempts to transform educational practices in the public school system, where MST activists are always in a dispute with government officials for school governance, the establishment of IEJC has given the MST a degree of autonomy from the state and an opportunity to solidify the movement's pedagogical approach, and its unique mixture of Freirean, Soviet, and organic cultural practices, in a space where activists have a high degree of control over the educational process. For the MST, the IEJC is an educational utopia—an ideal educational setting that may never be realized in the public schools, but that gives activists something tangible they can strive for.

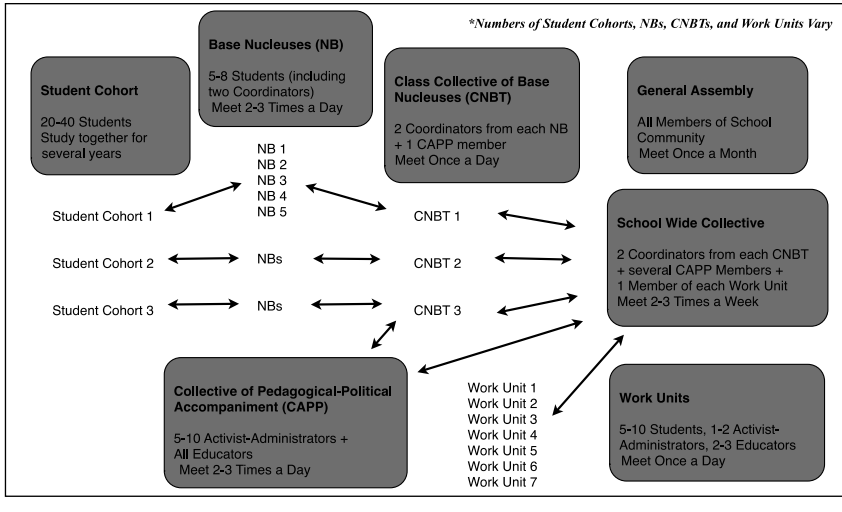
I asked dozens of MST activists if it was possible to have an educational experience similar to IEJC in public schools on their settlements, and across the board the answer was "probably not." Activists brought up a

series of barriers, such as the oversight of unsympathetic government officials, short school days, bureaucratic requirements concerning academic disciplines, and the lack of infrastructure for gardening. Nevertheless, as Leonardo (2003) writes, "Utopia is a concept that educators depend on and which becomes indispensable in their search for theories and practices that are viable as well as defensible" (p. 504). The educational experiences at IEJC offer MST activists a concrete set of practices that they take with them into the public school system, despite the unlikelihood that these ideals will ever be fully realized.

IEJC AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

One of the most important educational innovations in IEJC is its governance structure, designed as a participatory democracy that allows students to be involved in every aspect of the school's decision-making process—similar to Makarenko's Gorky Colony. Figure 2 is a visual representation of this organizational structure at IEJC, and the "upward" and "downward" democracy that governs the school.

Figure 2. Upward and downward democracy: Governance structure of the Institute of Education Josué de Castro (IEJC)



As the diagram illustrates, there are generally two to four cohorts of 20 to 40 students studying at any given time at IEJC. Each of these cohorts of students pursues a different technical high school degree, the two most common being the cooperative administration and teaching certificate programs. Within each cohort, students are divided into NBs: small

collectives of eight students that allow the students to participate in the school's collective organizational structure. Then, each NB selects two students, a man and a woman, who participate in a class-wide collective, the CNBT (Class Collective of Base Nucleuses). Thus, if a problem arises within an NB that cannot be resolved, the two NB coordinators can raise this issue at the CNBT meetings that occur each day. At these CNBT meetings, the NB coordinators "socialize"—the concept the MST use for sharing or report-backs—the conversation that took place in their NB with the rest of the collective. Consequently, if a question arises in the CNBT meeting that affects all of the students, such as extending the due date of an assignment, the discussion that takes place in the CNBT must be "socialized" again with each of the NBs before a final decision is made.

Also participating in the class-wide CNBT meetings is a member of the CAPP (the Collective of Pedagogical-Political Accompaniment), a "governance" collective that includes five to 10 experienced MST activists who help administer the school. The MST leadership rotates activists in and out of the CAPP for several years at a time. Within the school, the CAPP functions like another NB, with daily work responsibilities. One CAPP member is assigned to "accompany" each of the student cohorts present at the school. Educators who are invited to teach at the school are incorporated into the CAPP when they arrive.

Generally, all cohort-specific issues are decided by the CNBT, in conjunction with the conversations occurring in the NBs. However, if an issue arises that affects the rest of the school, such as a request from an NB to organize an educational event for all of the cohorts, this issue goes "upward" to a school-wide collective. This school-wide collective includes the CAPP and two coordinators from each cohort's CNBT. However, before the school-wide collective can make a decision, the debate has to return "downward" to each of the NBs. This process ensures that any issue that arises in an NB in another program's cohort but which affects all of the students will go upward to the school-wide collective and come downward for all of the NBs to discuss. Thus, students participate in all of the decisions that affect them at the school, through the mediation of their NBs. As one CAPP member, Diana Daros, explains:[39]

> The NBs do not make decisions, they are part of a collectivity of the class, and the class can take a position, but it is also part of a collectivity with the other programs and the work units. Everyone has to discuss, and the process demands a lot of work, but it ensures that we address everyone's concerns.

Finally, every month there is a General Assembly where students, activists, and educators come together to collectively evaluate the events of the previous month.

In addition to being part of a NB, students also participate in a work unit (*unidade de trabalho*), which includes members of different program cohorts. The jobs of these work units are different than the "school maintenance" chores, such as cleaning and cooking, which each NB is also responsible for completing each day. While school maintenance is necessary for the school function, the jobs that the work units are assigned represent socially useful productive labor processes—producing goods through the use of one's manual labor for the well-being of the collective. Pistrak (2000) describes productive labor as an integral part of any socialist educational experience. Some of the "work units" at IEJC include an agricultural production collective (taking care of the school garden), a bakery collective (baking bread for students to eat), an industry collective (making jam to be sold commercially), and a culture and art collective (producing artistic ornaments that can be sold at the school).

Students are also asked to participate in productive labor processes that go beyond their individual work units. For example, the MST often raises money for the IEJC through what is called, in peasant culture, a *mutirão*: a joint effort or community project that requires the contribution of a whole group. While I was in a course at IEJC, an entire cohort of students was asked to participate in a *mutirão* to clear a hillside for planting. We spent five hours chopping down small trees, bushes, and weeds with machetes. The idea was for students to learn the value of manual labor—*à la* Pistrak—while also contributing financially to the school.

The actual content of the courses at IEJC depends on each particular program. Many of the curricular requirements are the same as other high schools across the country. Math, physics, biology, Portuguese, history, sociology, geography, and literature are all topics that students are required to cover over their three years in these high school programs. In addition, for the teacher-training certification, there are courses on pedagogy, child development, literacy methods, and other basic topics for elementary school teachers. The MST also makes sure to integrate into these courses topics relevant to the movement's struggle, such as the history of the MST, agrarian reform, debates on the future of MST settlements, internationalism, and socialism. Students in the teaching certificate programs also read the foundational pedagogical texts that the movement draws on—Freire, Pistrak, and Makarenko. In a course that I participated in at IEJC, the students even named themselves "Cohort Makarenko," to honor Makarenko's contribution to educational theory.

UTOPIAN INFLUENCES

As in the MAG programs in Braga, studying at IEJC is an incredibly formative experience for students—giving them both professional and technical skills, and training them in the educational and political philosophies of the movement. More than 3,000 students have received high school degrees from IEJC in the last 15 years. Although not all IEJC graduates are currently connected to the MST, many of the activists I met over my months of field research graduated from this school. At the IEJC's 15th anniversary celebration, in October 2010, hundreds of graduates were present, and invited panelists elaborated on the strategic role IEJC has played in training MST activists with technical skills the movement needs to survive.[40]

The IEJC also plays a critical role in the transformation of public schools in MST settlements. As a "real utopia" (Wright, 2013)—the IEJC allows activists to "envision the counters of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals" (p. 9), so that activists can implement these ideals in public schools in their own communities. The control that MST activists have had at IEJC has solidified the movement's pedagogical approach to formal schooling, providing activists with a (utopian) vision of the type of public education they are striving to create. This utopia includes pedagogies that might be questionable to the larger Brazilian public, such as extremely strict discipline, mandatory work schedules, and the celebration of socialist struggles. Nonetheless, MST activists unapologetically support these pedagogies as part of their attempt to link public schools to the construction of an alternative hegemonic project in the countryside.

CRITIQUES, CONTRADICTIONS, AND CONCERNS

Although the MST's pedagogy is widely embraced in Brazil as a new educational approach to rural schooling, the movement's participation in public schools is also frequently critiqued as too "political." On the one hand, a basic ideal of the movement—and an ideal that many educators and scholars promote (Apple & Beane, 2007; Fung, 2004; Lipman, 2011)—is that communities have the right to participate in defining the goals of their public school systems. Thus, as legitimate participants in the public educational sphere, parents and communities have demanded that public schools no longer follow an urban-centric curriculum, and instead, that schools support their attempt to construct sustainable communities of small farmers working collectively in the Brazilian countryside.

On the other hand, these families are not simply participating in the public schools as a conglomeration of individual community members. They are part of a social movement that is advocating for a particular pedagogical approach to rural schooling that adheres to their collective vision of how society should function. Although this is often critiqued as an inappropriate and "political" use of public schools, activists—drawing on Freire—argue that no educational system is neutral; schools are either actively maintaining or actively changing the status quo, and they demand the latter option.

However, even within these agrarian reform settlements, not all community members agree with the MST's right to use public schools to push forward the movement's political and economic struggle. For example, Bernadete Schwaab and Jussara Reolon, who work in a public school on an MST settlement in Rio Grande do Sul, are both critical of the movement's educational approach. In 1998, they were invited to take part in a "Pedagogy of the Land" bachelor degree program at the University of Ijuí, through a partnership with the MST and the federal government.[41] Although Schwaab and Reolon admit that they learned a great deal from the four-year "Pedagogy of Land" program, they also both disagree with how the course incorporated the political vision of the movement. Schwaab and Reolon kept referring to the "radicalization" of the program. They said they were "tortured" on the weekends, forced to sit through boring lectures on politics. After the course ended, Schwaab and Reolon cut off all of their participation with the movement and the regional MST education collective.

Schwaab and Reolon continue to teach at the same public school they taught at when they entered the program. In fact, they still incorporate aspects of the MST's pedagogical proposal, such as student collectives and community research. However, Schwaab and Reolon now try to isolate the school from the more "political" aspects of the movement. For instance, at some point they took down the MST flag from the school entrance. Schwaab and Reolon say they do not feel a need to push the MST's "struggle" on students because "kids need to be kids and play." They disagree with MST activists "who talk about socialism at every moment." They say that they prefer to construct a quality education for students not overshadowed by these political debates.[42]

I asked several MST activists who attended this course with Schwaab and Reolon about the decision these women made to leave the movement. The activists I spoke with all expressed disappointment, and even some resentment, at the fact that these two women accessed higher education through the MST's collective struggle, but immediately afterwards, chose to stop participating in movement activities. These

critiques suggest that although activists embrace critical thinking and self-governance, there are several aspects of the movement's pedagogical approach that are not up for negotiation. The collective orientation of these programs, the political formation, and the self-discipline of the students are required components of all MST educational initiatives. If students refuse to participate in these aspects of a course, they are not allowed to continue being part of the educational experience.

For example, MST activist Witcel, who took the "Pedagogy of the Land" bachelor degree program with Schwaab and Reolon, talked about a student who chose to leave this degree program. As Witcel describes, this student decided he no longer wanted to participate in the collective aspects of the course, such as the collective housing and chores, and spending the weekends participating in collective discussions on Brazilian politics. The MST activist–coordinators critiqued this student for his behavior, and subsequently the student requested and obtained permission from the university to transfer into a normal pedagogy degree program. Remembering these events, Witcel said,

> It was then that we realized the university did not really understand us or our proposal, because the university supported and valued his decision one hundred percent. But our proposal was not about individual educational access, it was about societal transformation.

Witcel's reaction illustrates that MST activists do not support students who choose to disconnect their educational pursuits entirely from the movement's larger social vision. In other words, for the MST the purpose of these educational initiatives is to encourage students to participate in grassroots struggles. This does not necessarily mean that students have to be part of the MST itself—activists from dozens of different rural social movements are invited to participate in the courses that the MST organizes. However, some kind of participation in collective political struggle that aligns with the MST's own political objectives is necessary.

These examples of dissent also suggest that "critical pedagogy," or at least the variation of critical pedagogy that the MST has developed, does impose rules and constraints on students similar to other educational institutions. Although the goals of the MST's educational proposals are clearly quite different than those of other schools, the limits to students' rebellion against the schools' educational principles are not. In other words, while the MST gives students more power over the governance of their schools than most educational institutions, certain issues, such as participation in discussions about agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and peasant livelihood, are not optional. In the end, "critical pedagogy" is

not the same as students having the right to completely dissent from the basic goals of an educational process, whatever those goals are.

Schwaab and Reolon represent one extreme of the students who graduate from MST courses: those who are critical of the MST's educational and political vision and choose to leave the movement. It could be argued, however, that Schwaab and Reolon have not left the movement completely behind, as they continue to incorporate aspects of the MST's pedagogical practices into their classrooms. Nonetheless, these practices are now unlinked from a larger social movement struggling for political and economic transformation. This is analogous to the use of Freirean "methods" independent of larger struggles for social change (Apple, 2013).

The other extreme are activists who enter MST courses with prominent leadership positions in the movement, and continue to hold these leadership roles after they graduate. These activists see MST courses as critical spaces for internal capacity building and political formation. As Kolling says, "These formal educational programs are pedagogical laboratories. They are privileged spaces because in no other space are activists together for an extended period of time, discussing and creating theories for the movement."[43] For these leaders, the goals of the public schools on MST settlements should be directly connected to the goals of the MST itself. These activists openly acknowledge that their educational proposal is political; however, they argue that at least their proposal is explicitly political, in contrast to other educational reform efforts that have political agendas not openly discussed.

Somewhere between these two extremes are students and teachers living and working in MST communities, who are only peripherally involved with the movement, and choose to enter the MST's educational programs primarily because they have no other means to access high school or college. For some of these graduates, the experiences in these courses have led them to taking on new leadership roles within the movement and within their schools. Like Luisa in the opening vignette, many teachers who graduate from these MST programs have a renewed commitment to their profession. They become advocates for a different form of education in the countryside, one that encourages youth to become farmer–intellectuals and participate in collective forms of social organization. These teachers are attempting to implement what they learned in the MST's "educational utopias" in their own schools' bureaucratic structures. It is not an easy task; they are constrained by daily school practices, paperwork, and mundane everyday routines. However, these teachers are acutely aware of the educational experience they are trying to create, because they lived these theories in practice.

Do social movements have the right to participate in defining the goals of the public educational sphere? Apple (2013) and Anyon (2005) argue that education can only change society with and through grassroots movements that have a vision of what that society should look like. For the MST, the society that activists envision is one where youth stay in the countryside and participate in the struggle for agrarian reform. A component of this vision is not only encouraging but in many cases demanding that students participate in collective actions that push forward this struggle—actions such as land occupations and protests. Is this an inappropriate and "political" use of public schools? Or do public schools that teach students not to protest have an equally "political" agenda?

Clearly, social movements have the potential to be at the forefront of educational innovation, directly connecting school pedagogies to alternative social visions. Furthermore, if public schools are expected to solve issues of "unemployment, joblessness, and poverty" (Anyon, 2005, p. 3), then building these relationships is a logical step. However, the degree to which a social movement should have autonomy with respect to defining the goals of a public school system is a serious question for debate. I argue that the solution to this dilemma may actually emerge from within the communities themselves. If a social movement such as the MST loses its relationship to its base—for example, if previous activists are taking down the movement's flag and refusing to implement the movement's pedagogies, and there is no countermovement—then perhaps a new social vision is necessary. Social movements should not be allowed to unilaterally implement their political vision in schools and communities; activists must *work* for this right by mobilizing communities around these ideas. If activists are able to convince parents, teachers, students, administrators, and bureaucrats of the value of their educational approach, then this participation in the public school sphere is legitimate.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have analyzed how new pedagogical practices develop at the grassroots level, the ways in which educational theories influence pedagogical innovation, and the role of "educational utopias" in solidifying new pedagogies for public schools. I have examined these issues through the case of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), and activists' attempt to transform the public school system to support the movement's struggle for land redistribution, sustainable communities of small farmers, and collective agricultural production in the Brazilian countryside. There are several conclusions that come out of this article, which help explain how educational initiatives develop within grassroots

movements, and the ways in which these pedagogies can transform public schools.

First, it is clear that the MST's incorporation of Freirean popular education within their movement—and MST activists' relationship to the Catholic Church—was not unusual but was typical of social movements at that historical moment. Today, the MST continues to incorporate popular education, *à la* Freire, into various contexts: working with children in the occupied encampments, implementing adult literacy campaigns, and organizing political trainings for new and old activists. Early on, however, the MST also began to care about public schooling. Unlike other movements, the MST is a *socio-territorial* movement (Fernandes, 2000, 2005), attempting to transform the social relations of entire geographical areas. Thus, when new schools that are constructed within "MST territories" devalue the social relations activists are trying to promote, it becomes necessary for activists to transform these schools.

The second conclusion in this article concerns how the MST's pedagogical approach developed. The MST activists who initially began thinking about public schooling already had experiences with Freirean education, which influenced their ideas about formal schooling. However, these ideas were primarily concerned with classroom pedagogy, not schools as institutions. This forced the movement to search out other theorists who also thought about transforming entire school systems to support new social and economic relations. During this process, the MST was introduced to several outside intellectuals; however, the ideas that "stuck" were those that resonated with values already being promoted within the settlements and camps—such as collectivity and manual labor.

A third conclusion is that it was not enough simply to theorize about public schooling: the movement needed to experiment with these ideas in practice. However, this was difficult given the bureaucratic constraints of the public schools. Thus, in order to solidify their approach to formal schooling, activists created teacher-training programs outside of the public sphere. These "movement schools" became laboratories for the construction of the "Pedagogy of the MST." Teachers and activists across the country attended these MST educational programs. By living the movement's pedagogy for several years at a time, these teachers graduated with a clear, albeit utopian, vision of schooling. Many of these graduates then returned home with a renewed vigor about educational purpose, attempting to implement aspects of this utopian experience into their own public schools. It is through these teachers, who transform from disillusioned employees into enthusiastic implementers of new pedagogical ideas, that social movements become a form of critical

pedagogy in schools, and the critical pedagogy becomes a form of new social movement.

Finally, this article has also highlighted a central tension in a social movement's participation in the public school sphere: Activists in these movements often have particular visions for how society should be transformed and they want public schools to promote this transformation. In this perspective, the role of the teacher is to connect students to an alternative hegemonic project that promotes new forms of social and economic production. In the MST's case, this social world involves youth struggling for agrarian reform in the countryside and refusing to participate in the traditional urban workforce. MST activists unapologetically struggle for public schools to promote these goals. These activists argue that the school system, as is, also promotes a particular vision for society, but one that they do not support. I have argued that social movement participation in public schools is appropriate, *if* activists can mobilize parents, students, teachers, and other community members to implement this vision through a collective process of participatory governance. Hopefully this proposition, and the other questions raised in this article, can be the grounds for an ongoing debate about educational purpose and both the possibilities and tensions of linking schools to grassroots struggles.

NOTES

1. For more on the MST, see Branford & Rocha, 2002; Wolford, 2010; and Wright & Wolford, 2003.

2. The MST's legal claim to these lands is based on a clause in the Brazilian constitution that requires the government to "expropriate for the purpose of agrarian reform, rural property that is not performing its social function" (Article 184). Social function is defined as using fertile land for agricultural production.

3. Diretrizes Operacionais da Educação do Campo, passed in April of 2002 by the Conselho Nacional da Educação/Câmara da Educação Básica (CNE/CEB).

4. Brazilian Decree Nº 7.352, passed in 2010 by President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva.

5. I refer to this as an MST "movement school," as it functions outside of the traditional public school network and is administered by MST activists, while still receiving legal state recognition.

6. These include Pedagogy of Indignation (2004), Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage (2001), Letters to Cristina: Reflections on My Life and Work (1996), Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1998), Education for Critical Consciousness (1994), and Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau (1978).

7. For information on the lack of educational access in rural Brazil during this time, see Plank, 1996.

8. For more information on liberation theology, see Berryman, 1987; and Gutiérrez, 1973.

9. This was mentioned to me in several different interviews with MST activists, and is also recorded in other historical accounts of the MST's emergence (Branford & Rocha, 2002; Fernandes & Stédile, 2002).

10. All of the following information is from an interview with Edgar Kolling on November 18, 2010.

11. All of the following information is drawn from an interview with Salete Campigotto on January 13, 2011, and supplemented by a published interview with her in the text: Tedesco & Carini, 2008.

12. Interview with Ivori Moraes, October 3, 2011.

13. All of the following information is from an interview with Carmen Vedovatto on January 5, 2011.

14. Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

15. Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

16. MST activists make the distinction between an "Education in the Countryside" (Educação no Campo) and what they were fighting for: "Education of the Countryside" (Educação do Campo).

17. This was an explicit critique of Lenin's theory of vanguardism and the need for a vanguard core in organizing a revolution.

18. Field notes, September 2011.

19. However, the movement does strive to create spaces where new activists can take on coordinating tasks, and Freire is the inspiration for this ideal. For more information on these gender dynamics, see Peschanski (2007).

20. It was not until the late 1980s that Freire had the chance to implement his ideas within the Brazilian school system, and even then it was a short two-year experiment (O'Cadiz, Wong, & Torres, 1998).

21. Interview with Salete Campigotto, January 13, 2011.

22. While activists still refer to Krupskaya, Pistrak and Makarenko are more common references.

23. It was not until 2010 that Professor Luiz Carlos de Freytes translated a second book by Pistrak into Portuguese, Escola Comune (Commune School).

24. This colony was named after a Russian intellectual who Makarenko highly respected.

25. The internal structuring of members of political organizations into "base nucleuses" is a common practice throughout Latin America.

26. Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2013.

27. Field notes, September 2011, during a course for MST activists on the "Pedagogy of the MST."

28. Concern with Makarenko's discipline was expressed in several interviews with MST teacher–activists.

29. Interview with Marli Zimmerman de Moraes, November 21, 2010.

30. Food sovereignty is an approach to hunger and poverty that emphasizes ecologically appropriate production and local food systems as ways to guarantee food for all peoples. For more information on food sovereignty, see the MST (mst.org.br) or La Via Campesina website (viacampesina.org/en/).

31. Interview with Rosali Caldart, January 17, 2011.

32. Ibid.

33. Interview with Elizabete Witcel, November 15, 2010.

34. Interview with Vanderlúcia Simplicio, November 9, 2010.

35. Interview with Adilio Perin, November 28, 2010.

36. Interview with Ivania Sotilli Azevedo, January 16, 2011.

37. Named after the Brazilian geographer who wrote *Geography of Hunger* (de Castro, 1952).

38. From 1995 to 2001, these high school programs were run through a research institution known as ITERRA (Technical Institute of Research and Training on Agrarian Reform).

39. Field notes, September 2011.

40. Field notes, October 2010.

41. This partnership was through the Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA).

42. Informal conversations with Bernadete Schwaab and Jussara Reolon, November 2010.

43. Interview with Edgar Kolling, November 18, 2010.

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