

Decolonial curriculum practices in multigrade rural classes: freirean dialogues based on *Professora, sim; tia, não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*¹

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Abstract

This article discusses decolonial curriculum practices in multigrade rural schools based on Paulo Freire's work *Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa ensinar*. It aims to analyze how the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles presented in this work foster dialogues with decolonial thought in order to understand and reframe curriculum practices developed in multigrade rural schools. The study is grounded in Freirean pedagogy, in dialogue with decolonial studies and the theoretical field of Rural Education, conceiving the curriculum as a space of dispute, knowledge production, and the affirmation of multiple educational rationalities. Methodologically, this is a qualitative bibliographical study based on the analysis of *Professora, sim; tia, não*, complemented by specialized literature on curriculum, teacher education, decoloniality, Rural Education, and multigrade schooling. The findings indicate that Freire's work advances principles related to the appreciation of teacher identity, continuing teacher education, dialogue, the critical problematization of educational practice, and the recognition of the knowledge produced by rural communities, providing foundations for curriculum practices committed to cognitive and social justice. It is concluded that Freirean thought remains relevant and contributes to the development of decolonial curricular practices in multigrade rural classrooms.

Keywords: Curriculum; decoloniality; Rural education; Multigrade schooling; Paulo Freire.

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Práticas curriculares decoloniais em classes multisseriadas do campo: interlocuções freireanas a partir da obra *Professora, sim; tia, não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*

Resumo

Este artigo discute as práticas curriculares decoloniais em classes multisseriadas do campo a partir da obra *Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa*, de Paulo Freire. Objetiva analisar como os princípios éticos, políticos e pedagógicos presentes na referida obra possibilitam interlocuções com a perspectiva decolonial para compreender e ressignificar as práticas curriculares desenvolvidas nas escolas com classes multisseriadas do campo. A investigação fundamenta-se no pensamento freireano, em diálogo com os estudos decoloniais e com a produção teórica da Educação do Campo, compreendendo o currículo como um espaço de disputas, produção de saberes e afirmação de diferentes racionalidades educativas. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica, desenvolvida a partir da análise da obra *Professora, sim; tia, não*, articulada à literatura específica sobre currículo, formação docente, decolonialidade, educação do campo e classes multisseriadas. Os resultados evidenciam que a obra anuncia princípios relacionados à valorização da identidade docente, à formação permanente, ao diálogo, à problematização crítica da prática educativa e ao reconhecimento dos saberes dos povos-territórios do campo, constituindo fundamentos para práticas curriculares comprometidas com a justiça cognitiva e social. Conclui-se que o pensamento freireano permanece atual e contribui para a construção de práticas curriculares decoloniais em classes multisseriadas do campo.

Palavras-chave: Currículo; decolonialidade; educação do campo; classe multisseriada; Paulo Freire.



Práticas curriculares decoloniales en aulas multigrado rurales: interlocuciones freireanas a partir de la obra *Professora, sim; tia, não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las prácticas curriculares decoloniales en aulas multigrado rurales a partir de la obra *Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa ensinar*, de Paulo Freire. Su objetivo es analizar cómo los principios éticos, políticos y pedagógicos presentes en dicha obra posibilitan interlocuciones con la perspectiva decolonial para comprender y resignificar las prácticas curriculares desarrolladas en las escuelas con aulas multigrado rurales. La investigación se fundamenta en el pensamiento freireano, en diálogo con los estudios decoloniales y con la producción teórica de la Educación del Campo, entendiendo el currículo como un espacio de disputas, de producción de saberes y de afirmación de diferentes racionalidades educativas. Metodológicamente, se trata de una investigación bibliográfica, desarrollada a partir del análisis de la obra *Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa ensinar*, articulado con la literatura especializada sobre currículo, formación docente, decolonialidad, Educación del Campo y aulas multigrado. Los resultados evidencian que la obra anuncia principios relacionados con la valorización de la identidad docente, la formación permanente, el diálogo, la problematización crítica de la práctica educativa y el reconocimiento de los saberes de los pueblos-territorios del campo, constituyendo fundamentos para prácticas curriculares comprometidas con la justicia cognitiva y social. Se concluye que el pensamiento freireano sigue vigente y contribuye a la construcción de prácticas curriculares decoloniales en aulas multigrado de la educación rural.

Palabras clave: Currículo; decolonialidad; educación del campo; aula multigrado; Paulo Freire.



Introduction

It is impossible to teach without that courage to love, without that bravery of those who try a thousand times before giving up. It is impossible to teach without the forged, invented, well-nurtured capacity to love. [...] One must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without fear of being called *corny*, *sappy*, unscientific, if not antiscientific. One must dare in order to say, scientifically and not 'blah-blah-blabbly,' that we study, learn, teach, and know with our whole body. With feelings, with emotions, with desires, with fears, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reason" (Freire, 2015, p. 21, emphasis added by the author).

The words of Paulo Freire that open this article transcend the character of a simple reflection on the act of teaching. They announce a conception of teaching committed to ethics, politics, dialogue, humanization, and the transformation of reality, reaffirming that educating is a profoundly human act, built on the inseparability of reason, sensitivity, commitment, and hope. Thus, by advocating that teaching demands the courage to love, critical rigor, and a commitment to life, Freire (2015) breaks with perspectives that reduce teaching work to the execution of curricular prescriptions, reaffirming teaching as an ethical, political, and epistemological practice.

In this direction, we emphasize that this understanding becomes particularly fruitful for sensing-thinking-living the curricular practices developed in rural schools with multigrade classrooms. We advocate for practices embedded in territories marked by multiple identities, ways of knowing, and ways of life. We highlight that, historically, rural schools with multigrade classrooms coexist with curricular policies and teacher education models that, in many instances, disregard their specificities and reproduce hegemonic, urban-centric, and colonial rationalities (Silva, 2021). In this scenario, discussing curricular practices implies recognizing the curriculum as a locus of contestation, knowledge production, and the affirmation of different projects for society and education.

In this direction, this article aims to analyze how the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles present in the work *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters*



to Those Who Dare Teach enable dialogues with the decolonial perspective to understand and resignify the curricular practices developed in rural schools with multigrade classrooms. This study is justified by the need to expand discussions on curricular practices developed in rural multigrade schools, recognizing that these educational contexts were/are historically traversed by curricular policies and teacher education models that disregard the specificities of peasant territories and the knowledge produced by their subjects.

We premise that the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles announced by Paulo Freire in *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* enable consistent dialogues with the decolonial perspective, providing foundations to understand and resignify the curricular practices developed in rural schools with multigrade classrooms. It is in this sense that the decolonial perspective presents itself as an important analytical possibility.

For organizational purposes, the article is divided into two sections, in addition to this introduction, the final considerations, and the references. The first presents the theoretical-methodological trajectory of the research. The second discusses the main messages announced in the Freirean letters and their dialogues with decolonial curricular practices in rural schools with multigrade classrooms.

From Freirean Letters to Decolonial Dialogues: A Dialogue Between Paulo Freire and the Decolonial Perspective

As I have already pointed out, a concern that could not fail to accompany me the entire time I dedicated myself to writing and simultaneously reading this text is the one that has engaged me for a long time in the struggle for a democratic school. For a school that, while continuing to be a time-space of knowledge production—where one teaches and where one learns—nevertheless understands teaching and learning differently. Where teaching can no longer be this effort to transmit the so-called accumulated knowledge from one generation to another, and learning the pure reception of the transferred object or content” (Freire, 2015, p. 36).



Reflecting on the very process of writing *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, Paulo Freire explicates epistemological assumptions that go beyond the understanding of the act of teaching and reach the production of knowledge itself. Thus, by advocating for the school as a time-space of knowledge production and understanding teaching and learning as dialogic, critical, and unfinished processes, the author rejects transmissive and prescriptive perspectives of education, assuming knowledge as a collective, historical construction permanently open to problematization. It is upon this epistemological horizon that the theoretical-methodological trajectory of this investigation is anchored.

From a theoretical-methodological standpoint, this research approaches the decolonial perspective, understanding that curricular practices are produced amidst historical relations of power, knowledge, being, and Mother Earth that permeate educational processes. According to Quijano (2005, p. 342), coloniality is

one of the constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of said pattern of power and operates in each of the planes, spheres, and dimensions, both material and subjective, of daily social existence and on a societal scale.

From this perspective, we understand coloniality as a constitutive element of the modern pattern of power, sustained by the hierarchical classification of subjects, forms of knowledge, and ways of life. This logic extends beyond the historical period of colonization and continues to operate across different dimensions of social life, influencing, among other aspects, educational policies, teacher education processes, and curricular organization.

In the context of rural schools with multigrade classrooms, coloniality manifests in the naturalization of eurocentric, urban-centric, and homogenizing curricular rationalities that frequently disregard the knowledge produced in peasant territories, their forms of social organization, their ways of learning and



teaching, and their cultural identities. Multigrade classrooms are characterized by student heterogeneity regarding age, schooling levels, and learning processes, being conducted by a single teacher (Hage, 2014).

Thus, under this perspective of coloniality, the heterogeneity that characterizes multigrade classrooms—rather than being recognized as a pedagogical potential and an expression of the diversity of rural territories—comes to be interpreted by colonial curricular rationalities as a synonym for precariousness, backwardness, or deficiency. In this scenario, contemplating curricular practices in rural multigrade schools demands breaking away from the logic of lack, deficiency, and permanent comparison with the urban school model.

Coloniality constitutes one of the main mechanisms sustaining the modern/colonial pattern of power, as it legitimizes relations of domination through the hierarchization of subjects, knowledge, cultures, and territories. As Santos (2010) points out, it operates by justifying the supposed superiority of the “discoverers” over the “concealed” peoples, historically classified as inferior, savage, or incapable, while simultaneously reducing nature to the status of a resource available for exploitation.

In this sense, far from being restricted to the colonial period, this logic continues to structure social, political, economic, cultural, and educational relations in contemporary times. Its persistence stems from its capacity to influence different dimensions of social life and subjectivity, manifesting through the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being (Quijano, 2005), to which Walsh (2008) adds the coloniality of Mother Earth, evidencing that processes of domination also extend to the forms of relationships established between human beings and the natural world.

Thus, the coloniality of power “accounts for one of the founding elements of the current pattern of power, the basic and universal social classification of the planet’s population around the idea of ‘race’ [...]” (Quijano, 2002, p. 4). In the perspective of coloniality, the biological criterion was used to establish a



hierarchical classification of the population, attributing to certain peoples a supposed condition of superiority and relegating others to inferiorization.

This classification came to legitimize relations of domination expressed in the control of labor, the appropriation of territories, and the exploitation of land—constitutive elements of the modern/colonial pattern of power. Over time, this logic transcended ethnic-racial relations and organized other forms of social hierarchization, including the rural-urban dichotomy.

Within this rationality, the city was historically conceived as the privileged space of development, science, culture, and progress, whereas the rural countryside was reduced to a site of backwardness, scarcity, and subalternity. Similarly, rural men and women, as well as their ways of life, labor, and knowledge production, were frequently inferiorized in relation to urban subjects, consolidating a vision that also reached educational policies, curricula, and teacher education.

The colonality of being operates through the production of hierarchical identities, establishing standards of humanity that bring certain subjects closer to, or push them further from, what is socially recognized as legitimate. In rural schools, this logic manifests when students, teachers, and communities have their ways of life, cultures, and experiences disqualified or considered inferior in comparison to the urban schooling model.

Thus, “the colonality of being, a third axis, is exercised through inferiorization, subalternization, and dehumanization: what Frantz Fanon (1999) refers to as the treatment of ‘non-existence’” (Walsh, 2008, p. 138). In this perspective, resignifying curricular practices implies recognizing rural subjects as protagonists of their educational processes and valuing their histories, identities, and territorialities.

The colonality of knowledge constitutes, in our view, one of the most evident expressions within the curricular realm, as it legitimizes certain epistemologies as universal and scientific while rendering invisible other ways of producing, sharing, and validating knowledge. In this sense, “the intellectual



elaboration of the modernity process produced a perspective of knowledge and a mode of producing knowledge that demonstrate the character of the global pattern of power: colonial/modern, capitalist, and eurocentered” (Quijano, 2005, p. 115).

In the context of rural multigrade classrooms, this logic impacts the organization of homogeneous curricula that engage in little dialogue with the knowledge produced in peasant communities. Thus, it is precisely in this aspect that the Freirean letters become fruitful for this study, as they advocate for dialogue, critical reading of reality, and the recognition of experiential knowledge as foundations of pedagogical work.

According to Arroyo (1999, pp. 16-17),

the image we always have in academia, politics, and governments is that for the small rural school, anything will do. To work with a hoe, there is no need for much schooling. To survive on a few coins, not to be cheated at the market, there is no need for much schooling. In our history, the dominant image is that school in the countryside must only be the small rural school of primary letters. The precarious, falling-down school, where a teacher who barely knows how to read teaches someone to barely know how to read.

Based on this reflection, we consider that the historical devaluation of rural schools cannot be understood merely as a consequence of a lack of public investment, but as an expression of the colonality of knowledge. By attributing to the peasant population minimal schooling, grounded in the idea that “to work with a hoe, there is no need for much schooling,” a logic is established that hierarchizes knowledge, subjects, and territories, legitimizing the supremacy of an urban-eurocentric rationality to the detriment of knowledge produced in the countryside. In this perspective, rural multigrade schools cease to be conceived as spaces of knowledge production and are reduced to places for transmitting elementary learning, reinforcing the belief that peasant peoples do not require a broad and critical intellectual education.



In turn, the coloniality of Mother Earth, proposed by Walsh (2008), exposes the rupture between human beings and the natural world promoted by modern rationality, reducing nature to the status of an object of exploitation. In opposition, rural peoples build relationships of belonging, care, and reciprocity with their territories, understanding them as spaces of life, culture, and knowledge production.

It is from this logic that historical processes of territorial invasion, dispossession of peoples, and land exploitation are justified, “[...] discarding the magical-spiritual-social, the millennial relationship between biophysical, human, and spiritual worlds, including that of the ancestors, which sustains integral systems of life and humanity itself” (Walsh, 2008, p. 138). Thus, we emphasize that recognizing this dimension expands the understanding of decolonial curricular practices, since the curriculum comes to incorporate territorialities, ways of life, and relationships established with nature as constitutive elements of formative processes.

In opposition to the different expressions of coloniality, processes of decoloniality emerge as movements of resistance, insurgency, and re-existence built by historically subalternized peoples and territories. We highlight that, far from representing merely a reaction to colonial structures, these processes affirm other possibilities of producing knowledge, organizing collective life, building social relations, and understanding the world.

As Mignolo (2017, p. 15) points out, decoloniality “does not consist of a new universal presenting itself as the true one, overcoming all previously existing ones; rather, it is another option.” Under this perspective, Rural Education and multigrade schools affirm themselves as privileged spaces for constructing decolonial curricular practices committed to dialogue between knowledges, cognitive justice, and the valorization of historically subalternized subjects and territories.

Thus, running counter to coloniality, the decolonial perspective advocates for the valorization of epistemological plurality, dialogue among different forms



of knowledge, and the recognition of knowledge produced in the historical, cultural, and territorial experiences of rural peoples. According to Santos and Silva (2020, p. 295),

the post-colonial curriculum performs two simultaneous movements: a) the first unveils the colonial legacies that still survive today and are present in school curricula; and b) the second points to the possibilities of ruptures with colonized curricula and toward the construction of decolonized curricula; consequently, teaching practices are relevant both in the construction of these curricula and for their materialization.

In this view, we consider that understanding the curriculum from a decolonial perspective means recognizing it as a locus of political, epistemological, and cultural contestation, where curricular practices committed to cognitive justice, the valorization of differences, and the construction of socially referenced educational processes become possible. Thus, we argue that the Freirean perspective contributes to tensioning hegemonic curricular rationalities and strengthens educational practices committed to the identity/identities and reality/realities of the people(s) and their territory/territories.

The reflections developed up to this point signal that understanding curricular practices in rural multigrade schools requires problematizing the marks of coloniality that historically permeate curricula, teacher education, and educational policies. In this direction, we consider that denouncing the persistence of these rationalities is not enough. It is necessary to announce other possibilities of educating, teaching, and learning. It is on this horizon that we establish dialogues with the work *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*.

Inspired by the dialogic dimension of the Freirean letters, we seek to understand how the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles announced by the author provide foundations to tension colonial curricular rationalities and strengthen curricular practices committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the valorization of rural subjects and territories. Thus, from the letters to decolonial dialogues, we traverse a path that brings Paulo Freire's



thought closer to the contemporary challenges of Rural Education, recognizing its contributions to the construction of decolonial curricular practices in multigrade schools.

Thus, this reflection inscribes itself, above all, within the perspective of humility, presented by Paulo Freire as one of the indispensable virtues for the best performance of progressive teachers. For Freire (2015, p. 84):

Humility helps us to recognize this obvious thing: no one knows everything; no one is ignorant of everything. We all know something; we are all ignorant of something. Without humility, we can hardly listen with respect to those we consider too far below our level of competence. But the humility that makes us listen to the person considered less competent than us is not an act of condescension on our part or a behavior we exhibit like someone fulfilling a vow made with fervor: 'I promise Saint Lucy that if my eye problem is nothing serious, I will listen attentively to the rude and ignorant parents of my students.' No. That is not it. Listening attentively to whoever comes to us, regardless of their intellectual level, is a human duty and a democratic, non-elitist taste.

In this perspective, humility represents neither passivity nor the abandonment of intellectual rigor; on the contrary, it constitutes an ethical stance that recognizes human incompleteness and the impossibility of anyone asserting themselves as the absolute holder of knowledge. It is this virtue that makes possible dialogue, sensitive listening, and the recognition of the other as a subject producing knowledge. In this way, humility tensions the colonality of knowledge by refusing the hierarchization between forms of knowledge considered superior and inferior, opening space for the valorization of the experiences, cultures, and territorialities of rural peoples-territories. It is, therefore, from this epistemological humility that we establish dialogues between the Freirean letters and the decolonial perspective, understanding curricular practices in rural multigrade classrooms as spaces of encounter among different forms of knowledge, subjects, and ways of existing.



Methodological Trajectories of the Research: Between the Writing of Letters and the Writing of Research

The process of knowing, which involves the whole conscious body, feelings, emotions, memory, affectivity, and an epistemologically curious mind directed at the object, likewise involves other knowing subjects—that is, subjects capable of knowing and who are also curious. This simply means that the relationship called cognitive does not end in the relationship between knowing subject and knowable object because it extends to other knowing subjects (Freire, 2015, p. 82).

By understanding that knowledge is not produced in the isolated relationship between subject and object, but is constituted in the dialogue between knowing subjects, Paulo Freire offers an epistemological premise that guides the methodological trajectories of this research. In this perspective, we consider that conducting research does not mean “applying” methodological procedures, but establishing dialogues with the investigated corpus, recognizing it as a producer of meanings and interpretative possibilities.

Thus, methodologically, this study constitutes a qualitative, interpretative bibliographical research, adopting as its main analytical corpus the work *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, by Paulo Freire. According to Severino (2007, p. 122), bibliographical research is conducted through “[...] the available record resulting from previous research in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, etc. Data from theoretical categories already worked on by other researchers and duly recorded are used.”

Bibliographical research is grounded in the understanding that texts constitute spaces of knowledge production, allowing the construction of new interpretations and theoretical dialogues regarding a given object of investigation. In this sense, the study seeks to understand the ethical, political, pedagogical, and curricular principles announced by Freire and their convergences with the decolonial perspective and Rural Education.

The choice of this work is justified by its theoretical potential to problematize teaching beyond a technical-instrumental perspective. Originally published in



1993, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* brings together reflections constructed by Paulo Freire based on his intellectual and political trajectory, addressing—through the epistolary genre—teachers who undertake the challenge of teaching as an ethical, political, and emancipatory commitment. By choosing to write in the form of letters, Freire establishes a dialogue with teachers, recognizing them as historical, critical, and unfinished subjects capable of producing knowledge from their own experiences.

The research corpus was composed of the ten letters that make up the book. The analytical trajectory was developed through an integral and interpretative reading of the work, seeking to identify categories that dialogued with the objective of this investigation. In this process, principles such as humility, dialogue, permanent education, lovingness, critical reading of reality, valorization of experiential knowledge, autonomy, praxis, and the ethical-political commitment of teaching stood out. These categories were not understood in isolation, but articulated with the literature on decoloniality, curriculum, teacher education, Rural Education, and multigrade classrooms, enabling the construction of dialogues between Freirean thought and the contemporary challenges of curricular practices developed in rural schools.

Thus, the analysis of the work was not restricted to describing its content, but sought to interpret how the Freirean letters announce principles capable of tensioning colonial curricular rationalities and contributing to the construction of decolonial curricular practices in rural multigrade classrooms. In this manner, bibliographical research, in light of the decolonial perspective, understands the Freirean text as a theoretical corpus that continues to produce meanings in the present, offering foundations to conceive teaching committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, the valorization of the know-hows/praxis of rural peoples-territories, and social transformation.

For the analysis of the corpus, we employed Content Analysis in its thematic modality, as proposed by Bardin (2011) and Vala (1990), understanding that this procedure enables the identification, interpretation, and articulation



of core meanings present in the work in dialogue with the research objective. Thematic analysis provided support for organizing the corpus, systematizing analytical categories, and constructing interpretative dialogues among Freirean thought, the decolonial perspective, and curricular practices in rural multigrade classrooms.

Bardin (2011, p. 125) points out that “the different phases of content analysis, much like a sociological survey or experiment, are organized around three chronological poles: 1) pre-analysis; 2) material exploration; 3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation.” In the pre-analysis phase, we carried out an integral reading of *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, by Paulo Freire, complemented by specific literature on decoloniality, curriculum, teacher education, Rural Education, and multigrade classrooms. This movement allowed for initial approximations with the proposed objective, identifying excerpts from the work that engage with the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles announced by the author.

In the material exploration phase, we proceeded with an analytical and interpretative reading of the Freirean letters, identifying recurring thematic categories that guided the construction of the proposed dialogues in this study. Among them, the following stand out: humility, dialogue, permanent education, teacher identity, praxis, lovingness, critical reading of reality, valorization of experiential knowledge, the ethical-political commitment of teaching, and curricular practices. These categories were analyzed in light of the decolonial perspective, seeking to understand how the principles announced by Freire tension colonial curricular rationalities and contribute to the construction of decolonial curricular practices in rural schools with multigrade classrooms.

Finally, in the treatment of results, inference, and interpretation phase, we articulated the emerging categories from the work with the research’s theoretical framework, building an interpretative network capable of evidencing the convergences among Freirean thought, decoloniality, and Rural Education. This movement made it possible to understand that the Freirean letters announce



ethical, political, pedagogical, and curricular principles that remain current for problematizing teacher education and strengthening curricular practices committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the valorization of the knowledges and territorialities of rural peoples.

Messages Announced in Freirean Letters: Dialogues with Decolonial Curricular Practices in Rural Multigrade Schools

If, in writing not only this letter but the book itself, I were overcome by the idea that I possess the whole truth about the various topics discussed, I would be betraying my understanding of the process of knowledge as a social and unfinished process, as becoming. On the other hand, if I judged that I had nothing to contribute to the education of those preparing to assume themselves as teachers, and of those already engaged in teaching practice, I should not have written the book, as it would be useless (Freire, 2015, p. 110).

The critical-reflexive message that opens this section announces one of the key elements of Freirean Pedagogy by situating knowledge as a historical, social, dialogic, and permanently unfinished construction. Thus, by recognizing that he does not possess an absolute truth, Paulo Freire reaffirms epistemological humility as an indispensable condition for the practice of teaching and the production of knowledge. At the same time, he rejects the false modesty of believing he has nothing to share, assuming the ethical responsibility of engaging in dialogue with those who dare teach. In this way, we highlight that the messages announced in *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* are inscribed within the tension between human incompleteness and the political commitment to teacher education.

In this sense, based on this understanding, we turn to the Freirean letters not to seek ready-made answers or pedagogical prescriptions, but to identify the ethical, political, and pedagogical messages that dialogue with the decolonial perspective and signal the comprehension of curricular practices developed in rural multigrade schools. Thus, we mobilize these messages to foster reflections that contribute to the



realization of curricula that promote post-colonial ruptures and intercultural approaches, enabling the curricular and pedagogical practices of/in schools to meet the needs and specificities of their peoples, respecting and dialoguing with their territories. Thus, the curriculum needs to be a territory where students and their communities can see their identity marks reflected and legitimized within the school context (Silva, Silva, & Ferreira, 2026, p. 23).

By assuming that knowledge is built through dialogue among subjects, knowledges, and territories, we approach a reading that recognizes the curriculum as a space of contestation, production of meanings, and affirmation of alternative educational rationalities. Thus, the analyses presented below seek to highlight how the messages announced by Paulo Freire continue to offer foundations to resignify teaching and strengthen curricular practices committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the valorization of rural peoples-territories.

In this direction, when analyzing the ethical, political, and pedagogical principles present in *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* and establishing dialogues with the decolonial perspective to understand and resignify the curricular practices developed in rural multigrade schools, we present Table 1. In it, we systematize the main messages announced by Paulo Freire in each of the letters that make up the work, understanding that they express principles of critical teaching and constitute analytical categories for the decolonial reading proposed here.



Table 1 – Messages announced in the letters of *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* and their dialogues with the decolonial perspective.

Letter	Message Announced by Paulo Freire	Dialogue with Decolonial Curricular Practices in Rural Multigrade Schools
First Letter Teaching-learning. Reading the world – reading the word.	Critical reading of the world precedes and resignifies the reading of the word.	Values the knowledge produced in rural territories and recognizes the subjects' experiences as the starting point of the curriculum.
Second Letter Do not let your fear of difficulty paralyze you.	Teaching requires courage, continuous study, and commitment to transforming reality.	Strengthens teacher training committed to overcoming colonial curricular rationalities.
Third Letter From talking to learners to talking to them and with them; from listening to learners to being heard by them.	Dialogue and listening constitute foundations of educational practice.	Reaffirms curricula built alongside rural subjects, breaking away from top-down and imposing practices.
Fourth Letter Cultural identity and education.	Education must recognize and respect cultural identities.	Values rural knowledge, cultures, and territorialities as legitimate forms of knowledge.
Fifth Letter Concrete context – Theoretical context.	Theory and practice constitute an inseparable unit, articulated in praxis, in which critical reflection on reality guides and resignifies educational action.	Defends curricula contextualized to the specificities of rural multigrade classrooms and their territories.
Sixth Letter On the virtues or indispensable qualities for the performance of progressive teachers.	Teaching is grounded in humility, lovingness, rigor, competence, and ethical commitment.	Epistemological humility breaks with the colonality of knowledge by recognizing different subjects and epistemologies.
Seventh Letter On the relationships between educators and learners.	Teaching authority is built upon respect, dialogue, and ethics forged in teacher-student interaction.	Fosters democratic pedagogical relationships and the collective construction of the curriculum.
Eighth Letter “I decided to enter teacher training because I had no other choice.”	Teacher identity is constituted through commitment to education and social transformation.	Reaffirms teaching as a political practice committed to rural peoples-territories.

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Letter	Message Announced by Paulo Freire	Dialogue with Decolonial Curricular Practices in Rural Multigrade Schools
Ninth Letter First day of school.	The beginning of teaching inaugurates bonds, welcoming, and educational responsibility.	Values the encounter with subjects and the concrete contexts of rural communities.
Tenth Letter Once again the question of discipline.	Discipline results from dialogue, autonomy, and shared responsibility.	Defends participatory, democratic, and emancipatory curricular practices.

Source: Prepared by the author, based on Freire (2015).

In this sense, we emphasize that, more than synthesizing the content of each letter, the table highlights principles that engage with the valorization of rural peoples' knowledge, cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the construction of decolonial curricular practices committed to transforming reality. From this systematization, we develop dialogues between Freirean messages and the decolonial perspective, demonstrating their contributions to sensing-thinking-living the curriculum in rural multigrade schools.

These dialogues help us sharpen the importance of the school-community relationship. Thus, "the collective consciousness between school and community grows stronger as a decolonial option [...] as the educational institution recognizes that, together with subjects and their territories, its pedagogical practices impact student formation" (Silva, 2021, p. 227). In this perspective, the school ceases to occupy the position of a mere transmitter of externally produced knowledge and becomes a space-time of dialogue, knowledge production, and the strengthening of peasant identities.

For rural multigrade schools, this movement proves even more significant, as it reaffirms the curriculum as a collective, contextualized construction committed to local realities. Thus, recognizing the community not merely as the backdrop for educational action, but as an active subject in the production of knowledge and the consolidation of decolonial curricular practices, contributes



to promoting Rural Education that is geo-politically and socially referenced in its peoples-territories.

In presenting *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, Paulo Freire announces, in the very title of the work, a statement that calls the reader to a first exercise of understanding. Far from constituting a simple terminological distinction between “teacher” and “aunt,” the author explicates:

What seems necessary to me in the attempt at a critical understanding of the statement ‘teacher, yes; aunt, no’ is not to oppose the teacher to the aunt, nor is it to identify them or reduce the teacher to the condition of an aunt. A teacher can have nieces and nephews and, therefore, is an aunt, just as any aunt can teach, can be a teacher, and thus work with students. This does not mean, however, that the task of teaching transforms the teacher into an aunt to her students, just as any aunt does not become a teacher to her nieces and nephews simply by being their aunt (Freire, 2015, p. 22, emphasis added).

The message articulated here goes beyond a simple distinction between the terms “teacher” and “aunt.” What is at stake is the affirmation of teaching as a profession committed to the production of knowledge, ethical responsibility, and the transformation of reality. In this sense, by refusing to reduce the teacher to the condition of an aunt, Freire (2015) does not deny the affective dimension that permeates the educational act; on the contrary, he reaffirms that affection neither replaces teacher professionalism nor eliminates the rigor, pedagogical intentionality, and political commitment that constitute teaching. His reflection denounces historical processes that devalue teaching work by naturalizing it as an extension of female care or as an activity sustained solely by goodwill and vocation.

This reflection becomes even more relevant when brought into dialogue with teachers working in rural multi-grade schools. We highlight that coloniality has produced hierarchies that historically marginalized teaching practiced in these territories, spreading the idea that these professionals are less prepared,



less qualified, and destined for schooling considered to be of lower complexity (Silva, 2021).

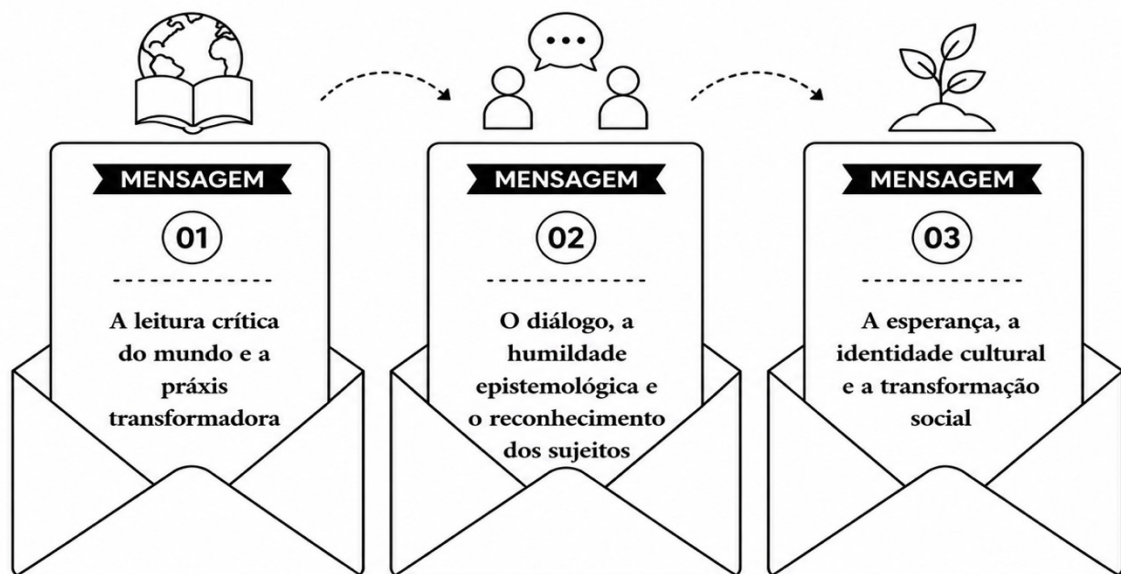
The messages announced by Freire invite an understanding that teaching in these contexts demands a solid theoretical-practical background, a critical reading of reality, permanent dialogue with the community, and a commitment to constructing curricular practices that recognize local knowledge as constitutive of the curriculum. In this way, teaching identity is no longer reduced to a caregiving or affective function and asserts itself as an ethical, political, and epistemological practice committed to the emancipation of subjects and the valorization of rural territorialities.

In this direction, based on Content Analysis in its thematic modality (Bardin, 2011; Vala, 1990), we identified different core meanings present in Paulo Freire's letters. We recognize, however, that the richness of the work is not exhausted in the interpretations constructed here, nor do we intend to cover all the messages announced by the author. The analytical categories presented result from the dialogues established between the research corpus, the objective of the study, and the adopted theoretical framework.

Thus, among the multiple messages that traverse *Teachers Where You Dare to Teach [Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa ensinar]*, we highlight three core meanings that directly dialogue with the construction of decolonial curricular practices in rural multi-grade schools. In Figure 1, we present a synthesis of these core meanings, understood as the main messages announced by Paulo Freire throughout the letters and which ground the analyses developed in this section.



Figure 1 - Messages that traverse Paulo Freire's letters.



Source: Prepared by the author, based on Freire (2015).

The message “The critical reading of the world and transformative praxis” emerges from the relation that articulates the reading of the world to the reading of the word, understanding theory and practice as inseparable dimensions of teaching work and the transformation of reality. In this sense, Freire (2015, p. 116, author’s emphasis) highlights that,

My presence in the world, with the world, and with others implies my complete knowledge of myself. And the better I know myself in this wholeness, the more possibility I will have to, by making History, know myself as being remade by it. And, because making History and being made by it, as a being-in-the-world and with the world, the “reading” of my body like that of any other human implies the reading of space.

This thought announces that the critical reading of the world constitutes the starting point of transformative praxis, since understanding reality implies recognizing oneself as a historical subject capable of intervening in it. Thus, it is not enough to interpret the world; it is necessary to assume an ethical and political stance that articulates reflection and action in a permanent movement of transformation. In the context of rural multi-grade schools, this reflection reaffirms the need for curricular practices that are formed from the territorialities,



knowledge, and experiences of rural peoples-territories, strengthening an education committed to emancipation and social transformation (Silva; Silva; Ferreira, 2026).

The message “Dialogue, epistemological humility, and the recognition of subjects” announces one of the pillars of Freirean pedagogy by affirming that knowledge is not built vertically nor concentrated in a single subject, but emerges from dialogicity, listening, and the recognition of human incompleteness. In this vein, Freire (2015, p. 90, author’s emphasis) states that: “It seems important to me, recognizing the incompleteness of reflections around virtues, to discuss a little the joy of living as a fundamental virtue of democratic educational practice.”

In the decolonial perspective, this positioning tensions the colonality of knowledge by refusing the idea of a single, universal, and hierarchically superior knowledge, recognizing that different subjects, cultures, and territories produce legitimate knowledge (Quijano, 2005). In rural multi-grade schools, this principle strengthens curricular practices built in dialogue with rural peoples, valuing their knowledge, experiences, and ways of life as constitutive dimensions of the curriculum and emancipatory human formation.

The message “Hope, cultural identity, and social transformation” presents that education is constituted as an act of critical hope, committed to the valuation of cultural identities and the construction of other possibilities of existence. According to Paulo Freire (2015, p. 33, author’s emphasis),

My hope is that, experimenting freely in open administrations, they will end up keeping a taste for freedom, for the risk of creating, and will prepare themselves to fully assume themselves as teachers, as professionals among whose duties is that of testifying to their students and to their students’ families that of, without arrogance, but with dignity and energy, refusing the arbitrariness and the almighty status of certain so-called modern administrators.

In the Freirean perspective, hope distance itself from a passive or naive waiting; it is an ethical and political force that mobilizes teachers to problematize



reality and act in its transformation. Thus, recognizing the cultural identity of subjects means affirming their knowledge, memories, territorialities, and ways of interpreting the world as constitutive dimensions of educational practice. In dialogue with the decolonial perspective, this message breaks with curricular rationalities that have historically rendered invisible rural peoples-territories and their knowledge, strengthening curricular practices committed to their identity markers (Silva, 2021).

From these analyses, we can consider that the messages announced by Paulo Freire constitute important ethical, political, and pedagogical foundations for the construction of decolonial curricular practices. By valuing the critical reading of the world, dialogue, epistemological humility, the recognition of subjects, hope, and cultural identity, these messages contribute to re-signifying the curriculum in rural multi-grade schools, strengthening educational practices committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the transformation of reality.

The words with which Paulo Freire (2015, p. 130) closes *Teachers Where You Dare to Teach* [*Professora, sim; tia, não: Cartas a quem ousa ensinar*], “that knowledge has everything to do with growing, it does. But it is necessary, absolutely necessary, that the knowledge of dominant minorities does not forbid, choke, or castrate the growth of the immense dominated majorities,” continue to inspire us to walk by problematizing reality. In them, we find reaffirmed that knowledge cannot serve the maintenance of inequalities, but must constitute itself as a possibility for collective growth, emancipation, and social transformation.

Final considerations

Dear Paulo Freire, Patron of Brazilian Education,

Your letters continue to arrive at rural multi-grade schools. They arrive through the hands of teachers who insist on reading the world before the word, who transform listening into dialogue, hope into action, and the curriculum into a territory of life. Today, we write to thank you. Thank



you for showing us that teaching is an act of courage, humility, and commitment to those who, for so long, had their knowledge silenced. Your words continue to inspire new readings, new dialogues, and new hopes. Your letters remain open, finding, in each generation, educators willing to answer them with their own practice. With this letter, we do not close the dialogue. We merely reaffirm that we continue responding to your invitation to dare to teach (Prepared by the author, 2026).

The letter that inaugurates this section constitutes a deliberate authorial choice, coherent with the interpretive path developed throughout this study. More than a stylistic resource, it dialogues with the textual genre of the analyzed work itself and reaffirms the understanding that Paulo Freire's letters remain open to dialogue, calling for other readings, interpretations, and responses in different historical times and contexts. If, throughout this article, we sought to understand the dialogues between *Teachers Where You Dare to Teach* [*Professora, sim; tia, não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*] and the decolonial perspective, seeking to understand their contributions to the construction of curricular practices in rural multi-grade schools, it seemed epistemologically pertinent to us to conclude this trajectory by responding, also in the form of a letter, to the educator from Pernambuco. This option, however, does not replace the analytical synthesis presented here.

The analyses carried out allow us to consider that Freirean thought remains current by announcing ethical, political, and pedagogical perspectives capable of problematizing the colonality present in educational processes and of sustaining curricular practices committed to cognitive justice, epistemological plurality, and the recognition of rural peoples-territories as historical subjects of knowledge production. We highlight that the dialogues established between Paulo Freire and the decolonial perspective show that categories such as dialogue, critical reading of the world, praxis, hope, epistemological humility, and valuation of historically subalternized knowledge constitute relevant principles for the construction of curricula committed to the diversity and difference of subjects, experiences, and territorialities.



In this sense, we consider that the curriculum ceases to be understood as a set of universalizing prescriptions to assert itself as a territory of disputes, negotiations, and production of meanings, in which different epistemologies can coexist in conditions of (re)cognition, legitimacy, and cognitive justice. By bringing Freirean thought closer to decolonial reflections, this study also reaffirms the power of Rural Education as a space of resistance to the colonial logics that have historically aimed to make invisible the knowledge produced in peasant territories.

In this movement, we understand that the construction of decolonial curricular practices does not merely imply the inclusion of new content or methodologies, but demands a critical review of the rationalities that underpin the production, selection, and legitimation of school knowledge. It is, therefore, a matter of recognizing rural multi-grade schools as territories for the production of knowledge, in which community knowledge, cultural experiences, and local histories constitute inseparable dimensions of educational practice.

The present analysis focused on the work *Teachers Where You Dare to Teach* [*Professora, sim; tia, não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*], articulating it with the frameworks of decoloniality and Rural Education, without developing empirical investigations in multi-grade schools. In this sense, we indicate that future research can deepen these dialogues through field studies that analyze curricular practices, teacher training processes, and pedagogical experiences developed in different peasant territories, expanding the possibilities of understanding the multiple ways in which Freirean thought continues to be reinvented in contemporary times.

Finally, understanding Paulo Freire from a decolonial perspective means recognizing that his legacy remains unfinished, open to dialogue, and permanently summoned by present educational challenges. If the letter that opens these considerations symbolizes a response to the educator from Pernambuco, the synthesis presented here reaffirms, in analytical terms, that his reflections continue to offer theoretical-practical possibilities for the



construction of other curricula committed to social justice, epistemological plurality, and the valuation of rural peoples-territories.

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Note

- 1 Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence – Gemini, an artificial intelligence tool developed by Google, was used to assist in translating this article into English. The translated version was fully reviewed and adjusted by the editorial team to ensure fidelity to the original text, terminological accuracy, and compliance with the journal’s editorial standards. The tool was not used to generate the article’s arguments, analyses, or academic content.





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