

## ARTICLE

# Biographical narratives in teacher education for the countryside: memories and experiences of the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course

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### ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the dimension of biographical narratives in the formation of teachers-educators in the countryside, through the course *Escola da Terra Capixaba*, whose second edition happened in 2017 and 2018, in Espírito Santo. It focuses on the debate on rural education and teacher training based on the experiences of the subjects who, in recording their biographies combined with life, work and training, share experiences and produce training processes, which provokes dialogues with the self, the other, and the world. As results, it is inferred that the biographical narratives of the rural teacher-educators bring life to the knowledge and doings of their experiences and fertilize the learnings from the reflections and tensions that they provoke on the narrative subject and on the listening collective. The work still results as propeller of other theoretical-methodological rationalities in the scope of the continued formation of rural teacher-educators.

### KEYWORDS

biographies; narratives; teaching experiences; countryside teaching formation.

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## ***NARRATIVAS BIOGRÁFICAS NA FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE DO CAMPO: MEMÓRIAS E EXPERIÊNCIAS DO CURSO ESCOLA DA TERRA CAPIXABA***

### **RESUMO**

O artigo discute a dimensão das narrativas biográficas na formação de professoras-educadoras do campo, por meio do curso Escola da Terra Capixaba, ocorrido em sua segunda edição nos anos 2017 e 2018, no Espírito Santo. Coloca em cena o debate da educação do campo e a formação docente a partir das experiências dos sujeitos que, no registro de suas biografias amalgamadas à vida, trabalho e formação, compartilham experiências e produzem processos formativos, o que provoca diálogos consigo, com o outro e com o mundo. Como resultados, depreende-se que as narrativas biográficas das professoras-educadoras do campo visibilizam os saberes e fazeres de suas experiências e fertilizam as aprendizagens a partir das reflexões e tensionamentos que provocam no sujeito narrador e no coletivo da escuta. O trabalho resulta ainda como propulsor de outras racionalidades teórico-metodológicas no âmbito da formação continuada de professoras-educadoras do campo.

### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

biografias; narrativas; experiências docentes; formação docente do campo.

## ***NARRATIVAS BIOGRÁFICAS EN LA FORMACIÓN DOCENTE DEL CAMPO: MEMORIAS Y EXPERIENCIAS EN EL CURSO ESCOLA DA TERRA CAPIXABA***

### **RESUMEN**

El artículo analiza la dimensión de las narrativas biográficas en la formación de profesoras-educadoras en el campo, a través del curso Escola da Terra Capixaba, que tuvo lugar en su segunda edición en los años 2017 y 2018, en Espírito Santo. Se expone el debate sobre la educación del campo y formación docente a partir de las vivencias de los sujetos que, al registrar sus biografías vinculadas con la vida, el trabajo y la formación, comparten experiencias y producen procesos de formación; permitiendo generar diálogos consigo mismo, con el otro y con el mundo. Como resultado, se infiere que las narrativas biográficas de las profesoras-educadoras en el campo, visibilizan los saberes y prácticas de sus vivencias y permean el aprendizaje a partir de las reflexiones y tensiones provocadas en el sujeto narrador y en el colectivo de escucha. El trabajo también se convierte en propulsor de otras racionalidades teóricas y metodológicas en el ámbito de la formación continuada de profesoras-educadoras en el campo.

### **PALABRAS-CLAVE**

biografías; narrativas; experiencias docentes; formación docente del campo.

## INTRODUCTION

The experiences of the countryside educators and the emotional recollections of the Rio Doce can be used by universities to learn and to teach. This article discusses this thesis by thematizing training and research aspects of the course *Escola da Terra Capixaba* held in the state of Espírito Santo (ES).

The memories and biographical narratives of the experiences of rural teachers/educators who work in mixed grade classrooms are investigated.<sup>1</sup> Our encounter with this theoretical-methodological framework took place in the research group *Culturas, Parcerias e Educação do Campo* (Cultures, Partnerships and Countryside Education), as a challenge to foster the voices of individuals in the training processes of rural education. It favoured the collective production of theoretical-practical reflections of shared teaching experiences, especially in their relationship with rural areas and their struggles.

The concepts of biographical narratives of training and research in Josso (1988; 2004; 2006) and of experience in Benjamin (1994a; 1994b) contributed as theoretical and methodological bases for the analyses carried out. As a practice of dialogue, the written records of the narratives of teaching experiences had as their main objective the dynamics of the process of knowing/recognizing. The aim was to understand how knowledge and practices emerge from experiences, and how they cultivate teacher training in education for the countryside. The texts of the investigative analysis *corpus* were selected based on the following criteria: life experiences, work experiences and teacher training experiences in the countryside, intertwined with the emotional recollections from the Rio Doce waters.

The article presents the following structure in its internal organization: introduction; contextualization of the creation of the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* (School of “Terra Capixaba”); experiences and biographical narratives as a theoretical-methodological dimension of training and research; what do the biographical narratives of teachers-educators tell us about their life histories, work and training in countryside areas? What do countryside teachers-educators say about life, work and their emotional recollections of the Rio Doce waters? What do they say about teacher training in the countryside?; final considerations; and references.

### CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE FORMATION OF THE ESCOLA DA TERRA CAPIXABA

The *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course has its origins in the struggles for the education of countryside people, as a collective project to train teachers-educators, who work in the early years of elementary school. It was born, in particular, in the context of the discussions that disputed the former *Escola Ativa* (Active School)

1 Throughout the text, we used the two-part term teachers-educators [which in Portuguese refers to female teachers exclusively] to safeguard the specificities of the teaching and gender identity of rural schools, as 98% of the collective was formed by women.

program, established in the 2000s, in much of Brazil, as a policy to improve student learning and work in mixed grade classrooms.<sup>2</sup>

Such a program raised theoretical-methodological questions, encouraging debate between social groups and the university, which resulted in the construction of another training proposal, based on new educational and social challenges for a rural school as a basic right (Arroyo, 2012). In this sense, the *Programa Escola da Terra* (Program of the “Escola da Terra”) was created, linked to the *Programa Nacional de Educação do Campo* — PRONACAMPO (National Program of Education for the Countryside), launched by the federal government on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and regulated by Ordinance n°. 86, of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. Both are guided by a framework of co-operation, by specific actions to support the realization of the right to education of rural people and the *quilombola* communities, considering the historical grievances arising from these populations (Brasil, 2013).

That same year, the Federal Universities of Amazonas (UFMA), Pernambuco (UFPE), Pará (UFPA), Bahia (UFBA), Minas Gerais (UFMG), Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and Maranhão (UFMA) started the pilot project of the *Programa Escola da Terra*, offering 7,500 places to a body of 53,713 teachers from mixed grade classes (Souza, 2019). The state of Espírito Santo joined in 2015 and included the name *Capixaba*, becoming known as the *Escola da Terra Capixaba*. It is a further training course of the *Departamento de Linguagens, Culturas e Educação do Centro de Educação na Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo* (UFES), implemented as one of the proposals of the *Programa de Educação do Campo/UFES* (Countryside Education Program/UFES). Between 2015-2016 and 2017-2018, two editions of the training were promoted, reaching 2,354 accreditations, in 83% of the municipalities of Espírito Santo (Souza, 2019). In June 2021, the third edition began with more than 400 places.

The *Programa de Educação do Campo/UFES* and accumulated research on the countryside cultural diversity of Espírito Santo (Brandão, Schütz-Foerste and Foerste, 2019; Foerste *et al.*, 2020; Foerste, 2021), in a collaborative approach and paying attention to the dictates of education for the countryside, began to work with inter-institutional partnerships and, above all, in a relationship of dialogue with the countryside population (Jesus, 2018).

In line with the *eixo Formação de Professores/as do Pronacampo* [Pronacampo Teacher Training axis], the course *Escola da Terra* was characterized as a further training program and took on the responsibility, within the federal remit of countryside education, of undertaking ongoing training processes for teachers working in mixed grade classrooms. In Espírito Santo, the first edition (2015-2016) took place in four regions of the Continuing Training of Countryside Teachers in Education, composed of 55 municipalities. Namely: the central Serrana region, the North,

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2 In 1997, the Program Escola Ativa (PEA) was received in Brazil as a result of an agreement between the World Bank (WB), the Inter-American Development Bank (Bird), the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) and the Ministry of Education, which assumed responsibility for the implementation and coordination of the program in Brazil from the School Development Fund (Fundescola).

the Centre and the South. With this territorial organization, there was a greater connection with the communities. The presence of a decentralized coordination of the university strengthened the dialogues and collective actions. The regional coordinator had a group of teachers and researchers involved with countryside education and traditional communities. This structural organisation contributed to boosting the relations of the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course so that local demands were profitably understood and met, also ensuring attentive listening to the public and speed in solving challenges. In the second edition (2017-2018), the *corpus* of this study, due to the budgetary restrictions imposed on training, was hit with a 70% reduction in relation to the resources made available in the first edition, leading to a reduction in service to only three regions, totalling 24 municipalities. The organization by region was maintained, mainly due to the achievements regarding the deconstruction of the logic of hierarchization of knowledge between university/school, centre/capital and municipality/community. It was the communities and the teaching subjects that signalled the necessary organizational and executive actions, prompting the university and the state to the territorial and epistemological displacements required for training.

The *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course takes on the assumptions of the Alternation System of Education, practiced by Escola Família Agrícola (EFAs) for five decades, with training spaces and times between school and community (Gerke and Foerste, 2019). Self-management, self-organization, cultural rites, socialization of experiences, studies in groups and research in the contexts of life and work were experiences accumulated by countryside people and the university research group that fostered the actions, stimulating another way of knowledge production in the continuing education of teachers-educators. With a total workload of 180 hours and three modules, the training took place in the areas of the spaces and times of the training centre and the spaces and times of the community and/or school *locus* of work. The meetings at the training centre (called University Time/Training Centre) were characterized by collective moments in the training places, usually schools, community centres or associations, accompanied by university teams (course coordinator and supervisor, training professors and research professors), as well as by a teacher-educator (officially called a tutor), who mediated the studies, with a workload of 90 hours. Similar to this workload, there was the Community Time and/or School *locus* of work, understood as the space and time of knowledge production based on the experiences lived and discussed in relation to the theoretical and methodological framework used. It is noteworthy that this understanding goes against the applicationist logic of knowledge acquired in training, because, on the contrary, it is recognized that the materiality of the school and teaching work constitute *locus* and experiences, respectively, significant in the thinking and carrying out of education, above all, in the specificity of the multigrade.

The subjects studied and the modular organization emerged from the journey with the rural subjects and the importance of understanding the historical and social relations that mark rural people and the struggle for education. Once again, stressing the respective traditional training practices, the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course undertook a discussion that proposed to contextually understand the rela-

tionships, in the collective search for alternatives to the challenges of becoming and being a teacher-educator in a mixed grade classroom, permeated by all the other issues that characterize education for the countryside. The studies revolved around three themes: *introduction to Education for the Countryside; interdisciplinarity, interculturality and inclusion in Education for the Countryside; and pedagogical practices in Education for the Countryside*. The construction of the recollections with the biographical narratives took place gradually, intertwined with the dynamics of the Alternation System of Education, with activities at communal times and the socialization of writings in the meetings at the training centre during university time.

This organization took place in the editions of the *Escola da Terra* Program in Espírito Santo as a collective proposition; however, due to the specificities of the movements and communities, there were reinventions in the context, thus respecting the addendums and adaptations of the journey. Based on the assumptions of the Alternation System of Education, a generating theme was chosen that permeated through the debates at the meetings, as well as the biographical narratives: “Water as a source of life and sustainability”. This was the choice of the groups, enhanced by the criminal tragedy of the rupture, on the 5th November 2015, of the dam in Marina/MG, which drastically affected the life and existence of the riverside people of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. From this perspective, the approaches of each module were studied in a dialogue with the generating theme that was also present in the biographical narratives of the subjects in training, intermingling with their existences the relationship of cultures with the land, springs, streams, rivers, work and countryside teacher training. This is, then, the scope of the following discussions. We start from this work with the biographical narratives of countryside teachers-educators as a sharing of knowledge and practices, understood as experiences that can enhance the thinking and action of teaching, engaged against social inequalities, the project of development and bourgeois progress, the collective struggles guided by the National Movement of Education for the Countryside.

The work with biographical narratives starts to be undertaken by *Escola da Terra Capixaba* as a possibility to bring the life stories to the training process, profession, and training of the countryside teachers-educators, with reflections that merge the individual, their existence and their relationship with the world, and also:

Given that each and every theoretical object is built thanks to the specificity of its methodology, the same is true of the concept of training, which is enriched with biographical practices, over which this object is thought both as a singular history and as a manifestation of a human being who objectifies their autopoietic capacities. (Josso, 2004, p. 38)

The biographical narratives in the training processes of *Escola da Terra Capixaba* utilized a theoretical-methodological basis that deconstructs crystalized truths in the tradition of teacher education. Countryside teachers-educators, with their experiences in mixed grade classrooms, recollections and life stories, take a leading role in the research of continuing teacher education in countryside education and as discussed by Foerste (2005), in collaboration with the university.

## EXPERIENCES AND BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES AS THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Biographical narratives as an axis for the training of countryside teachers-educators foster theoretical-methodological discussions in at least two possibilities which relate to each other: on the one hand, appropriations of Benjamin's (1994a) approaches to narrative and its relationship with the concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) encourage us to understand narratives as an aesthetic praxis, resulting from a collective experience, as a practice of human and knowledge exchange; on the other hand, inspired by the studies of Josso (1988; 2004; 2006), we adopted biographical narratives in the process of training of the teachers-educators, marked by a new research methodology in the field of education. In its origins, we saw that the relationship between biography and learning emerged in France, in the 1970s, with Henri Desroche, at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*. It was thought of as a possibility of reflective return through autobiographical writing, situating it as a "path to build a research-action-training project from it" (Pineau, 1999, p. 331). We have followed this sentiment with a route that elects the voice, the singular-collective experiences and listening to the other as a possible path in the construction of these processes. Therefore, the work with biographical narratives in the training of countryside teachers-educators is, for us, the pulse of learning from lived and shared experiences in a dialogical way. It also constitutes theoretical-methodological assumptions that turn the reverberating voices, the narrated experiences and the listening of the other a judicious and intentional praxis in the search for the unveiling of temporalities, knowledge, doings, which, reflexively interrogated, become the driving force of making-thinking-existing-apprehending the teaching in these spaces and times of training and work (Jesus, 2018).

Far from the need to establish a linear and chronological time of the facts, the narratives here are understood as an expression of life stories, remembered in three-dimensional time (Abrahão, 2006), which remembers the past with eyes of the present to think about the future, as a possibility of transformation and self-transformation of the subject. Moreover:

Articulated with the three-dimensional perspective of narrated time, we understand the autobiographical narrative in a triple dimension: as a phenomenon (the act of reflexively narrating oneself); as a research methodology (narrative as a research source); as a process (of learning, of self-knowledge and of redefining of the lived experience). (Abrahão, 2011, p. 166)

In view of this, the biographical narratives present themselves as a training strength, which favours retrospective reflections, mobilizing memories in spaces and times that represent choices to think about an ongoing project, in this case, life, work and teacher training as articulating dimensions of education for the countryside.

Discussions in Benjamin (1994a) contribute to understanding biographical narratives as expressions of experiences, in a dynamic in which the relationship of communicability in the collective is fruitful and valuable. The experience in German is *die Erfahrung*. According to Gagnebin (2009, p. 58), the radical *farb* literally

means “to cross a region during a trip”, which refers to the changes and dangers related to the journey. It is understood that the experience, therefore, is not just the accumulation of knowledge built during a trip but is related to the changes produced in the journey during the crossing.

The parable of the treasure buried under the vineyard, narrated by an old man on his deathbed to his heirs, contributes to the debate we intend to discuss. According to Benjamin (1994a, p. 114):

[...] the children dig, but do not discover any trace of the treasure. With the arrival of autumn, the vineyards produce more than any other in the region. Only then did they understand that their father had passed on a certain experience to them: happiness is not found in gold, but in work.

As true treasures passed from grandparents to parents and children, the experiences appear as advice, communicated to the youngest “concisely, with the authority of old age, in proverbs; verbosely, with his talkativeness in stories; often as narratives of distant countries, in front of the fireplace, told to parents and grandchildren” (Benjamin, 1994a, p. 114). It is observed that the narrative of the experiences accumulated by the elders, regarding the journeys of a lifetime, is a possibility of transmission between generations, to pass down lessons and learning to the younger generations.

[...] all this clarifies the nature of the true narrative. It always has within it, sometimes latently, a utilitarian dimension. This usefulness can consist either in a moral teaching, a practical suggestion, a proverb, or a rule of life — in any case, the narrator is a person who knows how to give advice. (Benjamin, 1994a, p. 200)

In this sense, we can also say that the teaching of something is not related to a cumulative and linear transmission but refers to an experience produced in the tradition of a community. Benjamin, then, in a dialectic form, expresses the narrator (*der Erzähler*) and the experience (*die Erfahrung*). To narrate is to share experiences and the narrative becomes possible because there are narrators, experiences and listening. Thus, the narrated experience, shared by the individual narrator, is no longer just theirs and becomes the other’s as well, becoming, in each one’s subjectivity, an experience that took place while listening. “The narrator takes from the experience what they relate: their own experience or that reported by others. It incorporates the things narrated into the experiences of its listeners.” (Benjamin, 1994b, p. 201)

By mentioning this discourse, as Benjamin says, we do not suggest for a moment a nostalgic return to the art of narrating as it once was. We recognize, from his perspective, that modern society, due to the dynamics that it is made up of, favours *Erlebnis* (experience) much more than *Erfahrung*. However, we agree with Gagnebin (1994, p. 09) that there may be a possibility of “reconstruction of *Erfahrung* accompanied by a new form of narrativity”. Motivated by this sentiment, in our training spaces and times we seek to reinvent communicable possibilities of experiences and reinvent these as a *locus* of knowledge and actions of life journeys and rural teaching work. Benjamin’s ideas empower us to think of experience not as



a human product, but as a process of transformation that takes place in the journey, in the crossing. The experience is seen as a treasure, valuable and rich, that is in the other and that, when narrated, reaches so many others; an experience linked to tradition, allowing us to meet the aesthetics of narrative — hence its mention as art.

Having said that, in the dialogic interfaces between Benjamin's approach and the work with teacher training and research based on biographical narratives, we seek to think about experiences as formative — which emerge from the subjects' memories, voices and life stories. In connection with Josso (2004, p. 40), we used the term (coined by the author) “recollection-references”, to bring the narrated experiences of teachers-educators in training in the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course as a reflective praxis, interchangeable and productive of other experiences. The term consists of a “[...] concrete or visible dimension, which appeals to our perceptions or social images, and an invisible dimension, which appeals to emotions, feelings, meaning or values.”

These practices were produced in the in-betweens of shared singularities and the collective, which welcome and produce narrated experiences; their central motto is life, work and teacher training in countryside areas and the emotional recollections from the waters. For Abrahão (2011), the narratives constructed by recollections-references are utilized with a view to making visible and re-signifying aspects and moments of the individuals' own training that affect/affected them and that, in the act of narrating their biographies, in the present time, are overlaid by other and new meanings. Furthermore, Josso (2004, p. 39) presents an approach to the experiential learning found in the training narratives, giving us the opportunity to build a course of dialogue with the training process, the knowledge and the learning that takes place within it. “The situation of narrative construction requires psychosomatic activity on several levels, as it presupposes the narration of oneself, from the angle of its formation, through the use of recollections-references, which mark out the duration of a life.”

Bringing the experience to the collective, either orally or in writing, leads to a choice of a communicable repertoire, which, when produced, mobilizes memories, time, the choice of words and the course of the narrative. Listening to biographical narratives, as a formative power, lays down the ability to “understand and use references for interpretation” (Josso, 2004, p. 40). Focusing on what is narrated, as an auditory experience, allows an encounter with singularities in the midst of plurality and their appropriation as formative; training, then, takes place from the ability to infer reflections and problematizations for learning.

[...] as the narrative brings together and intertwines very diverse experiences, it is possible to ask ourselves about choices, inertias and dynamics. The perspective that favours the construction of a narrative emerges from the paradoxical clash between the past and the future in favour of the present questioning. (Josso, 2004, p. 41)

The biographical narrative, as a formative possibility, chooses a questionable situation of the present, in our case being a teacher-educator of the countryside, life,

work, training and its emotional recollections of the waters, a journey full of stories. This choice defines a route of knowledge. They are stories that translate subjective paths of knowledge of each subject in their uniqueness, their readings of the world and the expression of the senses about the experiences-references brought in the narratives.

[...] for an experience to be considered formative, it is necessary to speak from the angle of learning; in other words, this experience symbolizes attitudes, behaviours, thoughts, know-how, feelings that characterize a subjectivity. (Joso, 2004, p. 48)

With this formative intention, we seek to encourage the qualification of subjects with an individual and/or collective conscious reading of life journeys, thinking about the present questions and their formation in the three-dimensional temporality of life (Abrahão, 2006), marked by their existence in the countryside areas.

Therefore, making use of biographical narratives as a training and research possibility has become, in recent years, a form of transgression and resistance to conventional modes of work and investigation. It is known that there are different approaches to the biographical movement, which, according to Pineau (2006), constitutes the very strength of the diversity of understandings of its uses as a backwash to the conventional patterns of ways of doing science. For us, the work with biographical narratives has proved to be potent for bringing together research and training, placing the subject researcher and teacher-educator in training in a dialogic relationship. The narrated experiences show how they mobilize their knowledge, actions, memories, in favour of learning in the context of life and profession. It is, therefore, in this movement — and what is produced from it — that we feel embroiled and motivated to undertake actions, whose shared experiences constitute a source of knowledge in the process of countryside teacher training.

#### WHAT DO THE BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES OF TEACHERS-EDUCATORS TELL US ABOUT THEIR LIFE STORIES, WORK AND TEACHER TRAINING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AREAS?

The work with biographical narratives in *Escola da Terra Capixaba* was used by all the teachers-educators taking the course. However, our investigative analysis was carried out in the clipping of ten biographical narratives from a single group of teachers-educators from communities in the Rio Doce basin. The choice is based on the observance of the richness of the narratives as an expression of the subjectivities of human experiences and leads us to carry out a limited dialogue on a smaller scale. For ethical reasons, we chose to use fictitious names to refer to the teachers-educators involved in this study.

Considering the categories of life, the emotional recollections from the waters, work and countryside teacher training as stimulants of formative dialogue and of this writing, we bring excerpts from the narratives that proved to be more significant, as a choice that makes visible the existence and historical productions of the individual narrators. They will be highlighted in italics. Thus, the textual clip-

pings were organized in two questioning axes: *What do countryside teachers-educators say about life, work and their emotional recollections from the waters?*; and *what do the teachers-educators say about teacher training in the countryside?*

In an attempt to promote the moments suggested by Josso (2004; 2006) in the methodological context of narratives written in training and research, the countryside teachers-educators were motivated to talk about descriptors, such as:

1. life;
2. work;
3. teacher training in countryside areas and their emotional recollections from the waters (the main theme of the course).

Oral narratives of experiences in training groups favoured the “initial objectification of a narrative expressed in words addressed to one or several people” (Josso, 2004, p. 187). The written production of the narrative, according to Josso (2004, p. 187), promoted, in turn, the “face to face with a self that narrates itself, giving it a stronger impact on the return thanks to this materialization (the narrative makes an external object, a kind of face to face)”. Narrative analysis, as a “work of intersubjective interpretation” (Josso, 2004, p. 188), and also the “comparative work on the processes of knowledge, training and learning” (Josso, 2006, p. 26) fostered new and equally complex reflections and elaborations on teaching and its memories. Thus, it is known that the theoretical-methodological choice of this nature means an operational bet on the production of intersubjective knowledge, permeated by choices that arise from the impulses and the plot that produce meaning in the narrator and in the narrative itself. In this sense, the analyses produced took place in the questioning and resignification of what was narrated in the service of training. The memories evoked and the shared experiences are selective, occurring through the intentional analysis of the researcher-trainer and the subject in training, thus raising reflections for the understanding of the itineraries of the teacher-educator’s existence and their contributions in the act of training.

Therefore, the narratives here are accompanied by reflections created in the process of listening, reading and collective intersubjective dialogues with the narrated experiences, in the moments of training. Aware of our lack of completeness, we seek, within the limits of this text, to signal what is considered in the authors’ reading as powerful in the process, especially in view of the descriptors employed to prompt the narratives, namely: *life, emotional recollections from the waters, work and teacher training in countryside areas*.

#### WHAT DO COUNTRYSIDE TEACHER TRAINERS SAY ABOUT LIFE, WORK AND THEIR EMOTIONAL RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE WATERS?

As a regularity in the narratives produced, we observed that they express memories-references (Josso, 2004), constituting ways of narrating about childhood, in a movement of remembering contexts, trajectories and marks. This is a look at the self of the narrator, in a distant time, which brings, between the lines of what is said, different feelings, which also stimulate us in many ways in listening.

*Dry land, intense heat. I lived with my parents and three other brothers. I used to play with my brothers slipping on top of the pastures. I remember the long walks to get to school; dirt roads that were dusty and sometimes muddy, taking my sandals in my hand, and when I got to school I washed my feet to put them on. (Lucia, 2018)*  
*I miss the simplicity of bathing in the rivers and going down in a canoe made from banana trees, eating fruit taken from the tree, the healthy and naïve games of children, the time that was used to “play”. (Iolanda, 2018)*

Talking about life and work in the countryside, at the interfaces of childhood and life today, emphasizes the description of the hardships of climate, land and work, as well as the delight in the shade of trees and bathing in rivers. Talking about oneself reveals, in the words spoken by Lúcia and Iolanda, as in the other biographies with which we worked, the marks of resistance and (re)inventions of countryside people. Most of the teachers-educators, when recalling their emotional recollections from the waters and sharing their life stories, produce a narrative that has, in spite of the difficulty of life and the precarious rural work, a great importance for contributing to the experiences of their journeys and the recognition of their identities. “*I come from a family of farmers. My parents have always taken our sustenance from the land in the form of corn, beans, rice, vegetables, fruits and livestock*” (Dandara, 2018). The pioneering spirits and victories of their conquests are also revealed, thus valuing a process that takes place in the recognition of oneself as a historical subject belonging to family and community roots. “*My grandparents were the first residents of the community. When they arrived, it was dense forests. I grew up seeing my parents working hard with the land. They cultivated and raised their livestock, and it was from the land that the family’s livelihood came.*” (Mara, 2018)

In this sense, the narratives allow us to know-recognise not only the biography of the narrator, but of the rural community and the individuals that accompany them in life. For Benjamin (1994a), the tradition present in the experience (*Erfahrung*) carries the marks of communities as communicable experiences, with the narrator being the one who proposes to exchange experiences.

All teachers-educators brought experiences from the waters in their narratives, because at the time when the improvement course of the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* was held, it was a time of severe drought in Espírito Santo and, along with that, the Rio Doce was in the news in Brazil and internationally. Below are excerpts from some narratives that illustrate this context well: *I had the opportunity to enjoy bathing in a waterfall, playing in a stream that passed next to my house, have a picnic in the shade of a huge chestnut tree that was in the backyard of the house.* (Mara, 2018). Such experiences are related to both leisure and work.

*I remember that at one time, when things were difficult in the countryside, my father would go camping on the banks of the Rio Doce. He would spend the week cutting ubá, a plant used in the manufacture of sieves [...] today the river suffers from the negligence of men. (Lucia, 2018)*  
*[...] close to the house, there was a stream and a waterfall. When my grandfather came home from farming, he would go there to wash his shoes and the pots to cook*

*the pigs' food. Then he would take my cousins and me to have a shower. This time of day was the most anticipated. This stream ran through the entire community. Whenever the teacher talked about the environment, they took us there. Today this stream still exists, but much of it turned into a pond surrounded by wire and no one can get close anymore. (Dandara, 2018)*

The emotional recollections from the waters in the biographical narratives were a way to think about teacher training processes and work in schools with links to social and environmental issues, which, on the one hand, guide the education for the countryside movement; on the other, they were due to the experiences lived by rural communities, who were victims of the environmental crime caused by the rupture of the Mariana dam in Minas Gerais, in 2015. This group of teachers-educators live in riverside areas and the Rio Doce basin and their narratives are words of resistance and denunciation at the same time. How can we not consider in the discussions a crime that killed people, animals and violently interfered in the lives and work of hundreds of riverside people? Introducing the stories marked by lengthy riverbeds, the jokes, as well as the abundance of fisheries, raised important reflections on human action and the need for mobilization towards transformation. Such reflections are observed in the excerpts below:

*[...] when I see the river dying, the fish that died and the sand appearing, I ask myself: where is that big river that scared me? What have we made of nature? What will Samarco be able to do now? We need to do something. We need to take this to the classroom, discuss it with the students, tell the story, show the old photos. We need to work on this at school and also in the community. Is it still possible to save what's left of the river? (Lucia, 2018)*

*[...] when we stop to think and remember our lives here, a lot of things go through my mind, and it even makes me feel a certain revulsion. How did we let this happen? It seems like we closed our eyes and now we have woken up. How many picnics did we have by the river? It was our entertainment. We can still do things, but we don't have faith in that water anymore. Will it take years for all this to pass? What if it doesn't? I miss those times and I see that I need to do something. Education for the countryside must discuss the environment. One is linked to the other. (Dandara, 2018)*

The narratives of the teachers-educators call for transformation. The experiences put in the scene of the emotional recollections of the Rio Doce mobilize reflections that strengthen collective struggles for change in society. We, thus, infer that the sharing of Lúcia's and Dandara's stories, by denouncing and calling for the insertion of this debate in the school, for social engagement, care, and, therefore, transformation, starts to appear as a proposal for thematic insertion in the curriculum of the school. In this way, it is the teachers-educators who, based on lived, narrated and shared experiences, begin to deliberate, in their training processes, on content in countryside schools.

Experiences and memories about school life were highlighted in the teachers' narratives, as they expressed the contradictions between the difficulties and the

joys: *“It was difficult to get to school. Our great joy was when the teacher went by car. She would give us a ride”* (Lucia, 2018). Aspects related to the organization of the school and working methods also emerge, as can be shown: *Every day we had to line up from the smallest to the biggest and divided into two: girls on one side and boys on the other. The second step was prayer. Every day there was prayer.* (Dandara, 2018)

*In my first four years of school, the traditional model prevailed. There was no teacher-student interaction. The teacher arrived and taught their class without first surveying what the class knew about the subject. It was as if we were a blank page, where they would write down that knowledge and only then, after class, would they ask questions about the content. There was no concern about explaining why we studied that, why that content would be useful to us. I came to know only after I was a teenager, reaching the conclusion alone, why we learned to separate syllables or why we learned to write numbers in full. An instrument of torture that was used and still used today is the multiplication table. We had to memorize it and then say it to the teacher orally.* (Maria, 2018).

In this sense, we can infer that the experiences narrated about life at school within mixed grade classes go hand in hand with the knowledge and practices produced in the processes of teacher training. Self-reflection, in this context, emerges in the narratives equally as a denunciation of a precarious situation and as an intolerable situation to be overcome. Thinking about the past helps to critique it and question the present. The account of the use of the multiplication table as an instrument of torture, very common in the past, seems to persist even today. There are discrepancies in teaching practices, but also continuities of practices that mobilize reflections in continuing education, for the creation of intervention projects. They encourage the introduction of planned changes in the organization of pedagogical work in the mixed grade classrooms.

Contradictions related to work on the land affect the execution of the teaching profession in the mixed grade school. They emerge as experiences on the career path, as a challenge to promote mixed grade education, as is the case of the conditions of school infrastructure, access, and the school calendar. *“I went to work in the community of Santa Luzia in a mixed grade class. I had to stay there all week. I faced many difficulties. I had to go to work by bicycle. When it rained a lot, I had to walk.”* (Maria, 2018)

Reports like this leave a mark on the life and work of teachers-educators in the Brazilian countryside, composing a framework of complaints about the precariousness of teaching work and students' access to the right to education. *“[...] I have been working at the school in my community for nine years. It is difficult to get things. There is a lack of educational and material support. Everything goes to the schools in the city, and we are forgotten.”* (Iolanda, 2018)

On the other hand, some narratives, when stressing the difficulties of teaching in the countryside, also make a bet on disruption and the recognition of their producers as transforming subjects in this context. *“I believe in education despite everything, and I know that I can make a difference in the lives of my students”* (Sandra, 2018). They chose, in their writings, a way of thinking that gives them a new

way of getting things done in the face of childhood experiences. In this new age, then, the narratives show conceptions of school, teaching and learning, diversity, culture and rights that to us were built in learning to teach, as theoretical-practical appropriation; and which were in interface to the experiences that, when narrated, became formative reflections, contributing to projecting the narrators as a teachers-educators in the countryside. *The school is not just the building with brick walls. It is a place of learning, rich in memories.* (Maria, 2018) *Concerned with serving all children without exception, and respecting their rights, I try to pay attention to changes in different cultures, in order to be able to somehow serve the children of our school.* (Iolanda, 2018) *As a teacher, my main objective has been to develop quality work that can serve all students. To leave no one behind and work on what makes sense for countryside children, the culture, the care for our waters, forests, animals.* (Ana, 2018)

Anchored in Josso (2006), we understand that the teachers-educators, when looking at their lives and work in the countryside, when self-reflecting and self-narrating also for the benefit of the other when sharing their narratives, occupy in this process of training the place of subjects, with new awareness of social, political, cultural and professional life.

About life and work in the countryside, the biographical experiences of teachers-educators, therefore, tell us much about the struggle of countryside people for the right to education and, consequently, of teachers-educators as to working conditions. Historically jettisoned from public policies and marked by educational processes far from its specificity, the countryside is an area for the daily exercise of resistance, which is raised by caring relationships and belonging. Working and living in the countryside can stimulate this critical thinking in the classroom, as narrated by Iolanda (2018): *“We also need to work with children about the difficulties, struggles and achievements that countryside schools seek. This is also our role as countryside teachers.”*

## WHAT DO TEACHERS-EDUCATORS SAY

### ABOUT TEACHER TRAINING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE?

As important as thinking about life and work relationships is reflecting on training in the midst of biographical narratives. From this perspective, the narrated experiences are diverse; they set off from childhood, passing through the old teaching, as well as graduation until the graduation from the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course. In addition, the narratives translate formative stories that emerge as learning, which take place in the daily gaining of knowledge and actions produced in the exercise of the profession and in the relationships with the other. Going back to childhood, the narrators share:

*I remember that I suffered a little in my math classes because I still didn't know how to do the division, and I remember perfectly the day I learned. This fact impressed me even more, because teaching the 5th grade of Elementary School for 9 years, as soon as I became effective, when I entered the last semester, in the catch-up classes, I managed to make a student learn division, and the joy and his gratitude was the same I felt when I was able to learn.* (Alida, 2018).

*Things at the countryside school have always been difficult. When I studied there, the teacher made the lunch, and we helped to clean everything. For the child, this was very cool. Today, as a teacher in the countryside, some things persist, and other things have changed. We can understand and talk about it, and it is good to understand if we have advanced or if we are still behind in relation to schools in the cities. I still see difficulties at work, in valuing the school, in training that is always focused on schools in the city and other things. With this course, we can write about all this and talk about the countryside, and our work becomes valuable. (Iolanda, 2018).*

The training experiences in the narratives were not limited only to the professional training in teaching, but also to that carried out at school, marked above all by the achievements that today serve as an experience of know-how in their own teaching practice. It is a bet, in addition, on the possibility of the movement of writing about oneself and about this reality, as Cunha (1997) tells us, that can transform the reality in which teaching is practiced.

The narratives also tell us, in a very special way, about the choice of training for the practice of teaching, pointing out, on the one hand, the protagonist role of the subjects; and, on the other hand, the absence of an analysis about eventual circumstances, present in the materiality of life, that provoked such choices. *“I took the entrance exam and went on to study Pedagogy. I always thought about doing Psychology or Pedagogy, but I ended up doing Pedagogy and here I am. I think I made the right choice”* (Maria, 2018). We are alerted to the need to stress our choices and the crossings that occur in the midst of them, recognizing that all protagonism takes place in the historical conditions of the materiality of life.

Furthermore, the biographies of countryside teachers-educators reveal the importance of the supervised internship as a space and time for recognizing teaching and validating their choice in education. *“My first year was complicated, because I was still not sure of my decision, but in the second year, with the internships, I fell in love with teaching.”* (Alida, 2018)

Aspects related to learning for teaching in the mixed grade classrooms and the absence of training also emerged in the narratives: *“It is not easy to handle so many classes together. We need to prepare, learn to plan classes for all of them together. There are many difficulties!”* (Dandara, 2018). In governmental speeches and measures to close the mixed grade classrooms and the appeal to transport students to the city, the narratives opened the space for discussion in training meetings about the struggle of countryside peoples for the right to be educated in the place where they live (Arroyo, 2012). Hence the relevance of listening that denounces the absence of training, and thus recognizing its emergence. The teachers-educators have also taken this role. Although there are many difficulties, the discussions signalled the importance of the mixed grade school as a possibility of meeting the basic right to education in the countryside. Single-grading is not sought in this reality, but possibilities for work that considers the diversity and specificity of the mixed classroom. Likewise, complaints about the lack of public policies for countryside schools emerge. *“I believe that one of the biggest difficulties encountered has still been the lack of*



*public policies, including training teachers to work in countryside schools. This is the first course I take in the countryside.” (Márcia, 2018)*

As a process resulting from the reflection stimulated by the biographical narratives, we read about the self-awareness of the efforts made in training and the commitment to learning for a different kind of education. “*My life as a teacher has always been one of constant improvement. As technology advances, pedagogical thoughts improve, and the world changes!*” (Rose, 2018). And also:

*Talking, writing, and reliving part of our childhood has been fundamental so far. The contents and activities asked for have led us to remember facts hidden in memory. I had never stopped to think like that, let alone write like that. I see that we need to bring present situations in our scope and try from then on to change what becomes necessary. Our education in the countryside is not neutral. It has a different role and so do we teachers. (Marcia, 2018)*

In this way, the expression in words of the teachers-educators about the understandings they make of themselves tells us that spaces and times of teacher training constitute *loci* of knowledge and actions in motion; of recollections-references that are amalgamated to the reflections on being a teacher of education for the countryside in our time. Personal narrated journeys promote encounters with different realities and cultures. The training narratives are therefore multifaceted and, in turn, mark the uniqueness of the experiences. Remembering and narrating experiences, with a training intention, allows theoretical-practical constructions about the teacher training itself in education for the countryside as an inaugural movement.

“The experience that passes by word of mouth is the source that all narrators turn to. And, among written narratives, the best are the ones that are the least modified from the oral stories told by countless anonymous narrators” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 198). In this sense, the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* training has created a space and time to stimulate and promote the narratives and experiences that spring from it. Training is the basis that constitutes the stories narrated and favors knowing-recognizing and self-knowledge as a theoretical-methodological strategy and processes of reflection and research in education for the countryside.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The training work produced by the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course touched 83% of the municipalities in Espírito Santo, with significant uptake in the North region, which has the highest occurrence of countryside social movements. In its two editions, 2,354 course participants were trained and certified. More than its wide remit, the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course reached out to the teachers of mixed grade classrooms with a possibility to bring to the spaces and times of continuing education, the rural specificity and its teaching. In addition, it stimulated teams from the university and the education sector of the state government to undertake collaborative actions. This implies listening to teaching groups and organized

movements, which contributes to the production of training projects in the course of training itself, while respecting the plurality and ethnic-cultural singularity of countryside peoples and their territorial occupation.

In the pursuit of reaching the objectives of the training and this research, we understand that the *Escola da Terra Capixaba* course has been creating a significant possibility of thinking and transforming the teaching practice in the mixed grade classrooms of the countryside. In addition to the issues and contradictions that constitute the historicity of knowledge and daily practices of this work, the training discussed the political, social, environmental, and cultural relations that occupy the discursive and demanding agenda of social movements in dialogue with the curriculum of schools. The work with biographical narratives proved to be powerful, with the voices and experiences of teachers-educators who work daily in the midst of all the issues already seen in their narratives. The work with the biographical narratives recorded how much the individual's agency matters in the awareness of freedom in the interdependence of their collective. For Josso (1988, p. 49), narratives and memories are the basis for the training of a teacher, "an actor who becomes autonomous and assumes his responsibilities in learning and in the horizon that they open up."

The self-awareness, the stories of lives related to countryside areas, expressed in the biographical narratives, show us the apprehensions produced in the scope of the subjectivities of each teacher-educator, as well as in the discursive propositions of the teaching collective. According to Josso (2004), such issues can be thought of as a sociocultural know-how-to-be, a know-how-to-do, a continuous awareness of life, work, struggle and existence in the countryside, as Ana (2018) tells us: "*The training has expanded our knowledge so that we can serve classrooms with a great diversity of social and cultural classes and especially values linked to the countryside.*"

As Lúcia (2018) emphatically states, "*We have to enforce our rights as countryside teachers*". In this way, this research, which was intertwined with the training process, demonstrated that biographical narratives are highly effective because they stimulate knowledge of oneself, of the other and of the world. This dynamic is materialized through the sharing of selective, systematized and intentionally placed experiences at the service of learning-becoming-being and teaching in education for the countryside and, in particular, in the work of the teacher in the mixed grade classrooms. When talking, the teachers-educators recognize weaknesses and strengths, thus allowing themselves to reorient their actions and transform reality. We also understand that the narrative is not an objective truth of the facts, but a choice of memories and experiences full of meanings for the individuals. The writing and sharing of teaching narratives allow the reconstruction of life story journeys, with substantial reflections, to stress continuities and discontinuities, traditional knowledge and practices in interfaces with progressive educational assumptions, combining living and working in the countryside in dialogue with cultures, in communities and with agroecological and sustainability practices.

The work produced in the *Escola da Terra* Program in the state of Espírito Santo, through biographical narratives, demonstrates that narrating a story is not

just reporting facts, but also sharing experiences with reflections, promoting the creation of subjects capable of intervening in their own lives, learning and training processes that favor and reorient them (Josso, 1988). In this way, the reflections resulting from this work indicate the need for continuity of their theoretical-methodological practices in the third edition of *the Escola da Terra Capixaba* course in 2021. We understand that the teachers-educators, their life stories, training, and work in the countryside school, constitute interchangeable experiences (*Erfahrung*) in the training process of teaching, and that the biographical narrative provides an opportunity to look at oneself, to listen to the other and to engage with the world, in non-linear temporalities, but relational and in context.

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