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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EDUCATION, DISCIPLINE, AND ENGAGEMENT IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: TEACHING STRATEGIES FACING THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

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Abstract

This paper presents a teaching experience report at Public School Gustavo Kulmann, located in the outskirts of Cuiabá-MT, with 6th and 7th-grade students in Elementary Education. Based on classroom experience, the text analyzes challenges related to indiscipline and student disengagement, which are intensified by social, economic, and cultural issues. Most of the students live in vulnerable situations, facing poverty, violence, family instability, and lack of access to basic resources, which undermine their motivation and learning. In light of this, the article advocates for pedagogical practices that take into account local knowledge and engage with the peripheral reality, often undervalued in traditional schools. The central proposal is to promote an active, critical, and inclusive pedagogy, focused on student agency and the educator's sensitive listening. The text emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development, teacher reflection, and the adoption of methodologies that foster student engagement, making learning more meaningful. By linking theory and practice, the study highlights how the ethical and social commitment of the teacher can transform public education into a space for resistance and emancipation.

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Introduction:-

Public education in Brazil faces numerous challenges, especially in peripheral regions marked by deep social inequalities that directly impact the teaching and learning process. In these realities, the school goes beyond its traditional role and becomes a space of welcome, protection, and resistance against the multiple forms of exclusion experienced by students. In these contexts, the social function of the educator extends beyond the mere transmission of curricular content: it expands to encompass ethical, political, and cultural dimensions, demanding from the teacher sensitivity, active listening, and a commitment to social transformation.

This study reflects on the teaching experience in Elementary Education at a public school located in the outskirts of Cuiabá-MT, where daily challenges—such as resource scarcity, indiscipline, disengagement, and the impacts of violence and poverty—require constant reinvention of pedagogical practices. The research focuses on strategies used to promote student engagement and discipline in the face of adversity, valuing the listening of youth

experiences, respect for local knowledge, and the building of emotional bonds as a starting point for meaningful learning.

In addition to discussing the implemented pedagogical practices, the study analyzes the methodological paths adopted to make teaching more dynamic, inclusive, and participatory. By addressing the challenges faced in the school environment, it proposes a critical reflection on the transformative role of education and the importance of building a school that, even in the face of structural limitations, is capable of offering real possibilities for emancipation and citizenship.

Teacher Training and the Reality of Public Schools:-

Teacher training is one of the fundamental pillars for improving the quality of education, especially in a country marked by deep social inequalities. However, it is observed that initial training in most teacher education programs still presents significant gaps when it comes to preparing educators to work in contexts of high social vulnerability. Often, academic curricula prioritize theoretical content and methodologies disconnected from the concrete reality of public schools, overlooking the cultural, social, and economic specificities that permeate the school daily life.

Given this scenario, it becomes evident that there is a need to invest in continuous training processes that promote professional strengthening and the re-signification of pedagogical practice. Participation in courses, workshops, seminars, study groups, and collaborative spaces has proven essential for expanding teachers' theoretical-methodological repertoire, as well as for developing attentive, critical, and empathetic listening of the demands that arise in the school environment. This type of training, by being closer to local realities, favors the construction of more dialogical, inclusive, and contextualized practices. According to Tardif and Moscoso (2018, p. 392)¹, “reflection directly linked to the action that sustains it is one of the most important sources of professional learning.”

Despite technological advances and the growing appreciation of active methodologies, most public schools still face serious structural limitations, such as the absence of laboratories, unstable internet, lack of teaching materials, and environments ill-suited for learning. These challenges require the teacher to be creative, flexible, and capable of continuous adaptation. Thus, training that considers the real working conditions becomes an act of resistance and a tool for social transformation, as it helps form educators who are committed, innovative, and aware of their political and emancipatory role in building a quality public education.

Teaching Methodological Procedures: Building an Inclusive Pedagogy:-

The peripheral educational scenario imposes a series of limitations that go beyond the lack of material and structural resources, extending to emotional, symbolic, and linguistic deficiencies that directly influence the teaching and learning process of the Portuguese Language. In this complex reality, the role of the teacher becomes even more challenging, requiring not only mastery of the content but, above all, sensitivity to welcome and interpret the various forms of expression and communication from students. It was in this context that the need to adopt active and participatory methodologies became evident, which placed students as subjects of language, valuing their linguistic and cultural repertoires, encouraging the production of meaning, and promoting the collective construction of knowledge through reading, writing, and orality in meaningful social practices. According to Paz (2012, p. 2)²,

“We must act – reflect and then act again so that we can truly form critical citizens. The student needs to realize that the language they speak is the same as the one taught at school. We need to go beyond grammar and the notions of right and wrong, demystifying the idea that the Portuguese language is boring and difficult.”

The lessons began to be organized based on interdisciplinary proposals, incorporating a variety of resources — such as music, videos, multimodal texts, dynamics, and pedagogical games — which made the school environment more attractive and meaningful. This approach allowed a dialogue between the curricular content and the students' daily reality, favoring a contextualized and motivating learning experience.

Ludic activities, in particular, proved to be a powerful and multifaceted pedagogical tool, with significant impacts on different dimensions of the educational process. Its systematic use in the daily school routine proved effective in addressing school dropout, mediating interpersonal conflicts, and strengthening students' self-esteem. In contexts

¹Original work published in Portuguese; quotes translated by the author.

²Original work published in Portuguese; quotes translated by the author.

marked by social vulnerability, ludic activities, such as games, dynamics, play, and interactive proposals, created a more welcoming school environment, sparking students' interest and favoring their permanence in school. By providing pleasure in learning, these practices contributed to students developing more positive connections with the school space, significantly reducing motivation problems and school abandonment.

Additionally, ludic activities served as an effective conflict mediation tool, as they encouraged cooperation, active listening, respect for rules, and harmonious coexistence among peers. These elements are essential for the construction of a healthy and democratic learning environment. On an emotional level, engagement in ludic activities allowed students to experience success and recognition, contributing to the strengthening of self-esteem and the appreciation of their potentials. This affective dimension of ludicity proved to be essential for stimulating self-confidence, especially among those with a history of academic failure, allowing them to rebuild their relationship with knowledge in a more positive and autonomous way.

The pedagogical planning, in turn, ceased to be a mere bureaucratic formality and assumed a strategic, flexible, and responsive character to the concrete needs of the class. The inclusion of practices of critical literacy and world reading allowed for the discussion of urgent issues such as racism, violence, inequality, and prejudice, establishing bridges between the school and the community, and stimulating students to recognize their identity, history, and social role.

In this process of didactic adaptation, individualized teaching practices were also implemented, aimed at addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities, learning disorders, school lag, and, notably, students in a situation of illiteracy, even in the early stages of elementary school. The presence of these students highlighted the urgency of pedagogical practices sensitive to the structural inequalities that pervade the public education system, especially in peripheral contexts. These individuals, historically invisible to traditional pedagogical approaches, require personalized strategies that take their unique trajectories into account and offer real learning opportunities.

Active listening, continuous monitoring, and celebrating small achievements proved to be fundamental strategies to ensure not only the students' permanence in school but also the effective development of their cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional skills. In the specific case of illiterate students, it was necessary to patiently and respectfully rebuild their bonds with the act of learning and with the school space itself, which was often marked by experiences of failure, stigmatization, or exclusion. Visual resources, multisensory activities, literacy games, and contextualized oral practices were used to spark interest, build meaning, and promote the protagonism of these students.

Such actions reaffirmed the commitment to a genuinely inclusive, equitable, and transformative educational proposal, grounded in ensuring the right of all to access knowledge, regardless of their socio-economic, cognitive, or historical schooling conditions. In this context, teaching practice transcended its technical character and began to assume an ethical and political dimension, fighting for the guarantee of meaningful learning for individuals historically marginalized by the educational system.

The Diversification of Strategies as a Tool for Inclusion and Learning:-

Learning, understood as a dynamic, continuous, and integral process, required the adoption of pedagogical strategies that respected the different rhythms, life stories, and singularities of students. In contexts marked by social vulnerability, it became evident that learning goes far beyond the acquisition of cognitive skills: it is a process shaped by emotional, affective, relational, and cultural dimensions. In this sense, pedagogical practice came to recognize that academic success is closely linked to the creation of trust-based relationships, a sense of belonging, and the appreciation of each student's individual trajectory.

The construction of knowledge was stimulated through collaborative and dialogical practices, such as interdisciplinary projects, discussion circles, collective text production, and oral and written activities that encouraged autonomy, critical thinking, and mutual respect. Proposals such as writing letters, sharing personal experiences, conducting interviews, debating, and creating opinion pieces allowed students to practice active listening, argumentation, and coexistence with diverse opinions and realities. These practices fostered student protagonism and bridged the gap between school content and students' lived experiences.

A situated learning approach, anchored in the students' sociocultural context and the appreciation of their potential, was also prioritized. Errors were reframed as an essential part of the knowledge-building process, creating an

environment of support and freedom to experiment. Affection emerged as a key element, particularly for students with a history of academic failure, contributing to their engagement and retention in school.

Peer interactions were encouraged as a form of learning mediation, with the intentional organization of heterogeneous groups to promote knowledge exchange, respect for diversity, and the appreciation of differences. This strategy not only contributed to students' cognitive advancement but also played a critical role in developing socio-emotional competencies such as empathy, active listening, solidarity, and cooperation. By interacting with peers from different educational backgrounds, proficiency levels, and life experiences, students were challenged to reassess their own beliefs, exercise patience, and recognize the value of others as an essential part of the knowledge-building process.

More than a pedagogical technique, the intentional organization of peer interactions emerged as a political and ethical act of resistance to meritocratic and competitive logics that often permeate the school environment. By promoting collective and collaborative learning practices, a space was created where errors were no longer stigmatized but understood as part of the formative process, fostering a safer, more inclusive, and democratic environment.

In this context, the school became a true learning community, committed not only to content acquisition and academic performance but also to the holistic development of the individual. This commitment involves cultivating ethical values, developing critical thinking, and encouraging active student participation in their social environment. In the context of Portuguese Language teaching, this translated into practices that promoted reading texts from various genres, such as chronicles, open letters, reports, poems, and opinion articles, linked to a critical reading of the world. Through these approaches, students were invited to reflect on urgent social issues and propose concrete interventions aimed at improving their local reality. In this way, language ceased to be merely an object of study and became a tool for expression, resistance, and transformation, strengthening the development of individuals who are conscious, compassionate, and capable of contributing effectively to the creation of a more just, democratic, and inclusive society.

Formative Assessment as a Tool for Transformation:-

In this context, assessment was profoundly redefined, moving away from its historically punitive and exclusionary role to become a central component of the pedagogical process, guided by listening, monitoring, and reflective mediation of learning. The classificatory and meritocratic logic was abandoned, as it often exacerbates inequalities, marginalizes non-hegemonic knowledge, and disregards the multiple ways of learning and expressing knowledge, especially in contexts of social vulnerability. Assessment thus came to be viewed as a dynamic, continuous, and dialogical process, one that values the individual learning pathways of each student, acknowledging that the learning process is neither linear, uniform, nor universal. As Rêgo and Lima (2010, p. 41)³ affirm, assessment “should be a means for both teacher and student to move toward the objectives, considering progress and the journey in relation to what has been learned and what still needs to be learned.”

Based on a formative approach, various assessment tools were incorporated into the school routine throughout the year, such as systematic observation records, portfolios, self-assessments, discussion circles, oral and written productions, as well as practical activities grounded in students' realities. Each of these strategies aimed not only to evaluate performance but also to understand processes, map progress, identify needs, and build more effective and contextually relevant pedagogical interventions. In this scenario, feedback became redefined as an exemplary pedagogical moment: an opportunity for a horizontal dialogue between teacher and student, grounded in empathy, respect, and commitment to the holistic development of the individual.

This practice also took on an ethical-political dimension by recognizing errors as constitutive of learning, rather than as failures to be punished. Embracing errors allowed for the creation of a more humane and encouraging school environment, where students felt legitimized to try, fail, revise, and start over. This approach fostered not only students' confidence and self-esteem but also the development of metacognitive and socio-emotional competencies, such as self-reflection, persistence, and intellectual autonomy.

³Original work published in Portuguese; quotes translated by the author.

In this context, the importance of self-assessment and metacognition stands out as powerful strategies to promote student autonomy. Self-assessment occurs when students reflect on their own learning, recognize what they have learned, where they struggled, and what needs improvement. Metacognition is the ability to “think about one's own thinking,” that is, to monitor, plan, and adjust learning strategies. These practices were developed through activities such as logbooks, where students recorded their perceptions about their progress and difficulties at the end of selected lessons; self-perception scales with statements like “Today I made an effort” or “Did I understand on my own or with help?”; as well as the encouragement of setting personal learning goals and engaging in paired reflections to share study strategies and promote self-regulation. These practices significantly contributed to the development of intellectual autonomy, emotional self-regulation, and greater student engagement, as they began to understand how and why they learn, assuming greater ownership of their own educational journey.

Inclusive assessment, in turn, became one of the pillars of the educational process by respecting the different learning rhythms, styles, and modes of students, with special attention to those with disabilities, learning disorders, school delays, or histories of failure. Methodological and instrumental adaptations were implemented, such as the use of accessible language, visual support, extended deadlines, and individualized mediation, ensuring the right to learning and full participation for all students, thereby strengthening the principle of equity.

By adopting this emancipatory perspective, assessment transcended its technical-administrative nature and revealed its transformative potential: it became a pedagogical act committed to social justice, the appreciation of individualities, and the democratization of knowledge. Instead of functioning as a tool of control and exclusion, assessment began to assume a humanizing role, allowing for the recognition of the multiple ways of learning and the diverse paths that characterize students' everyday lives, especially in contexts of social vulnerability.

This redefinition of assessment led to the construction of more dialogical, ethical, and sensitive practices that took into account the realities of students, where performance analysis criteria were not limited to homogeneous, decontextualized standards, but considered individual processes, efforts, and progress. Thus, assessment solidified its role as a tool capable of strengthening students' connections with school, promoting youth protagonism, and reaffirming the role of public education as a space of acceptance, belonging, and critical formation.

In this sense, evaluating ceased to be merely a moment of verification and became a space for listening, reflection, and guidance, where students are invited to understand their own learning journeys and actively participate in the construction of their knowledge. This approach contributed not only to improving academic performance but also to strengthening students' self-esteem, intellectual autonomy, and citizenship awareness, reaffirming that quality education is only possible when guided by the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Final Considerations: The Transformative Role of Education in the Periphery:-

The experience lived at Public School Gustavo Kulmann, located in the outskirts of Cuiabá-MT, demonstrated that teaching practice, when guided by an ethical, social, and political commitment to students' realities, can take on a truly transformative role. In a context marked by inequalities and multiple vulnerabilities, the school becomes not merely a place for content transmission, but a space of resistance, care, and the possibility of reinventing life trajectories. According to Freire (1996, p. 47)⁴:

“All teaching of content demands that the one in the position of learner, from a certain point on, begin to assume authorship of the knowledge of the subject as well. The authoritarian teacher, who refuses to listen to students, shuts themselves off from this creative adventure.”

It was found that teaching in peripheral contexts requires sensitive listening, a critical stance, and the ability to promote a pedagogy that engages with students' lived experiences, recognizing their subjectivities and knowledge as central elements in the teaching-learning process. Valuing local culture, investing in active methodologies, adapting lesson planning, and incorporating inclusive practices proved to be essential for building meaningful and equitable education.

⁴Original work published in Portuguese; quotes translated by the author.

According to Freire (1987, p. 47)⁵, critical education demands a deep commitment to the transformation of reality, since “authentic education is not carried out from ‘A’ to ‘B’ or from ‘A’ over ‘B’, but from ‘A’ with ‘B’, mediated by the world.” Education alone does not change the world; it changes people, and it is those people who change the world. In this sense, the educator is eternalized in each person they educate, understanding that teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but the creation of conditions for it to be produced or constructed. According to Freire (1996, p. 67)⁶:

“There is no teaching without learning. They are mutually explanatory, and their subjects, despite the differences that define them, are not reduced to the condition of being each other’s objects. Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning.”

However, despite the transformative power of teaching practice, it is necessary to recognize that it cannot be sustained in isolation. For experiences like the one described here to expand and become consolidated, the implementation of public policies is essential—policies that ensure adequate infrastructure, high-quality initial and continuing teacher education, professional recognition, and democratic participation mechanisms for the school community.

It can be concluded that teaching in vulnerable territories demands more than technical competence: it requires sensitivity, courage, and hope. It requires believing in education as a political act capable of promoting the emancipation of individuals and social transformation. By humanizing educational practices, fostering dialogue, and building knowledge collectively, the teacher becomes an agent of change who contributes to the formation of conscious, critical individuals who take ownership of their own stories.

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