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**CHALLENGES OF RURAL EDUCATION: BRIEF REMARKS AT MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS IN PORTO NACIONAL – TO****DESAFIOS DA EDUCAÇÃO DO CAMPO: APONTAMENTOS EM ESCOLAS MUNICIPAIS DE PORTO NACIONAL – TO****DESAFIOS DE LA EDUCACIÓN DEL CAMPO: APUNTES EN ESCUELAS MUNICIPALES DE PORTO NACIONAL – TO****Luziane Miranda da Silva<sup>1</sup>**[luzianems@hotmail.com](mailto:luzianems@hotmail.com)**Atamis Antônio Foschiera<sup>2</sup>**[foschiera@uft.edu.br](mailto:foschiera@uft.edu.br)**José Pedro Cabrera Cabral<sup>3</sup>**[josepedro@uft.edu.br](mailto:josepedro@uft.edu.br)

**ABSTRACT:** It's important to understand how the public rural education politics has been developed in the municipalities so that it can be affirmed as a right of the people and not merchandise. Thus, this paper aimed to identify the situation and the challenges of the municipal schools in the countryside of Porto Nacional, Tocantins state, 2018. As a methodology of primary data survey, we've accomplished: interviews, observations, and surveys applications. Secondary data were obtained through the analysis of documents enabled by the Municipal Education Office of Porto Nacional, and academic texts related to the theme. The results show that the highlighted challenges are: insufficiency of financial resources destined for schools; predominance of traditional teaching with absence and/or fragility of principles, policies, and education practices of rural education; lack of continuous education for teachers and financial incentives that decrease the rotativity of these professionals in schools; collapse or delay in public transportation; limited physical structure and schools closing.

**Keywords:** Rural Education; Challenges; Perspectives; Porto Nacional.

**RESUMO:** É importante compreender como a política pública de educação do campo tem se desenvolvido nos municípios, de maneira que ela seja afirmada como direito do povo e não mercadoria. Por isso, esse trabalho objetivou identificar a situação e os desafios das escolas municipais do campo no município de Porto Nacional – TO, 2018. Como metodologia de coleta de dados primários realizou-se: entrevista, observação e aplicação de questionários. Dados secundários foram obtidos através da análise de documentos disponibilizados pela Secretaria Municipal de Educação de Porto Nacional e de textos acadêmicos relacionados ao tema. Os resultados mostram que os desafios em destaque são: insuficiência de recursos financeiros destinados às escolas; predominância de um ensino tradicional com ausência e/ou fragilidade de princípios, políticas e práticas da educação do campo; falta de formação continuada de professores e incentivos

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financeiros que diminua a rotatividade desses profissionais nas escolas; quebra e atraso no transporte escolar; estrutura física limitada e fechamento de escolas.

**Palavras Chaves:** Educação do Campo; Desafios; Perspectivas; Porto Nacional.

**RESUMEN:** Es importante comprender como la política pública de educación del campo se ha desarrollado en los municipios, de forma que ella se afirme como derecho del pueblo y no como una mercadería. Por ese motivo, este trabajo tuvo por objetivo identificar la situación y los desafíos de las escuelas municipales del campo en el municipio de Porto Nacional – TO, 2018. Como metodología de colecta de informaciones primárias se realizaron entrevistas, observaciones, además de aplicar cuestionários. Las informaciones secundárias fueron obtenidas através del análisis de documentos disponibilizados por la Secretaria Municipal de Educación de Porto Nacional y de textos académicos relacionados al tema. Los resultados mostraron que los desafíos en destaque fueron: insuficiencia de recursos financieros destinados a las escuelas: predominio de una enseñanza tradicional con ausencia y/o fragilidad de principios, políticas y prácticas de educación del campo; falta de formación continuada de profesores e incentivos financieros que disminuya la rotatividad de estos profesionales en la escuelas; atraso del transporte escolar; estructura física limitada y cierre definitivo de escuelas.

**Palavras llave:** Educación del Campo; Desafios; Perspectivas; Porto Nacional.

## INTRODUCTION

Caldart (2012, page 259) affirms that Rural Education is an under-construction concept, tied to a social praxis which “is considered an *analysis category* of the situation or education practices and policies of rural workers, even the ones which develop themselves in other places and with other denominations”.

Molina (2014) assures that rural education is a movement that emerges from the struggle for land, and that the schooling process becomes a resistance strategy of the peasants to continue existing and reproducing their new lifestyle, from the work on the land. The rural school has become an essential support instrument for the formation and emancipation of its subjects, thus, it’s important to understand how this public policy has been developed in the municipalities, so it can be effectuated.

According to Arroyo & Fernandes (1999), rural education is defined as a way to fight against social inequality, it’s a practical movement with practical objectives and purposes, that builds theoretical conceptions based on criticism before certain visions of education and its public policies. The problem is that the current rural education model, based on values and the city’s contents, makes the young people not see the potential that the countryside can offer to their stay in the community.

A rural school must work beyond the market’s expectations and competitiveness, which means working in the interests of the peasants, their culture, production, popular knowledge, traditions, and habits. The contents must emerge from the social context. This perception defends the study from the problematization of the practical life of the students,

inserted in a certain social context.

Education, however, is only one of the unsatisfactory items in the Brazilian countryside, there're other needs. When one conquers the land, the struggle for health starts, such as for roads, technical assistance, transportation, etc. That's why it's pertinent to emphasize the agrarian issue: there is in Brazil a cruel reality which is the land concentration. According to the Agribusiness Census – IBGE from 2017, the Gini index – inequality indicator in the countryside – there was a register of 0.867 points, a very high level concerning the verified data in previous research: 0.854 (2006), 0.856 (1995 – 1996), and 0.857 (1985). The closest this measurement is from number 1, the greatest concentration in the agrarian structure. The census revealed that the rural establishments from a thousand hectares concentrate 45% of all the agriculture production area. On the other hand, small producers, who own lands with up to 10 hectares, occupy only 2.3% of the total.

The latifundium is characterized not only by land monopoly and unproductivity, but also its production mode characterized by deforestation of the biomes, soil degradation, river silting, water poisoning, and other actions which scarce all the natural resources according to the capital accumulation of few.

Nunes (2008, p.38) points out that:

the project of development for the countryside adopted in the country in the last decades is guided only by the objective of consolidating the agribusiness, showing that, all the adopted policies are built concerning the capitalist market, with the objective of profit maximization.

The paradigm present in rural education brings an education model which carries the patronal agriculture ideals; it cares mainly about forming a workforce for production; it preaches the use of techniques in the name of high productivity; it explores, expropriates, and excludes what won't contribute with the generation of profit and capital accumulation (MOLINA, 2002).

Thinking about this scenario, this article presents the challenges of rural schools in Porto Nacional, Tocantins state, with the year 2018 as a reference, presenting the situation of the schools through the verification of pedagogical teaching structures and the existence of policies, principles, and practices necessary to build the identity of a rural school. To better identify the challenges and consider that the factors which influence the pedagogical structure are diverse, we've accomplished a characterization of the schools taking into consideration the structural aspects, food, the existence of agricultural practices, and how the dynamics of school transportation works.

## METHODOLOGY

To obtain the primary data we've accomplished an *in loco* observation, interviews, and survey application in the period from March to September 2018. Porto Nacional had in that year, 12 schools located in the rural area, and four are our study object (Image 1), specifically: Faustino Dias dos Santos School (EFDS)<sup>4</sup>, located in the Community of Matança; Antônio Benedito Borges School (EABB)<sup>5</sup>, present in the Settlement of São Francisco; Pau D'Arco School (EPD)<sup>6</sup>, located in the Settlement of Pau D'Arco; and Ercina Monteiro Pereira School, located in the Settlement of Córrego do Prata (EEMP)<sup>4</sup>.

The choice of these schools was made for believing that they could bring a more faithful representation of the municipal reality of rural education, once two of those schools are the ones with the best operation, and the two with the most difficulties in functioning, according to the municipal coordinator of rural education. Furthermore, the schools from the sample are spatially well geographically distributed in the municipality, with two on the left margin of Tocantins River, at about 23 to 80 km from Porto Nacional, and the other two at about 50 to 30 km from the right margin of the river.

The geographic factor was taken into consideration due to the distance from the city which can influence the functioning of the schools, once the closest schools have more access to resources, books, supervision, and the teaching staff can get there easily. During the visits to those schools, we observed: structural aspects, school organization, routine, if there were agricultural practices, the existence of policies, practices, and principles of empowerment of rural education, how the students' transportation dynamics worked, etc.

The survey had open and closed-ended questions, being applied to 12 educators from the four schools, and to 80 students, which represented 20% of the total, which was 398. Each educator was identified numerically to preserve their identity.

The interviewed subjects were: an employee of the current management of rural education of the municipality of Porto Nacional (2016 to 2020), a former administrator (2005 to 2009), a leader of the community (president of the association), parents of students, and teachers of the researched rural schools. The samples amount in the interviews was determined from what was proposed by Minayo (2015, p.48) which called

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<sup>4</sup> Assists students of Early Childhood Education (Pre-school - 4 and 5 years old) and First Years of Elementary School (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade).

<sup>5</sup> Assists students of Early Childhood Education (Pre-school - 4 and 5 years old) and First Years of Elementary School (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade).

<sup>6</sup> Assists students of the First (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade) and Final Years of Elementary School (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade).

progressive inclusion “without demarcating *a priori* the number of participants, that is interrupted by the saturation criteria, in other words, when the conceptions, explanations, and senses attributed by the subjects start having a regularity of presentation”.

To obtain the secondary data there was a document analysis which characterized the reality of rural education in the municipality of Porto Nacional. Among these documents we’ve analyzed: letters, annual evaluation reports, memos, students’ performance evaluation, continuous formation reports, Pedagogical Political Project of schools, and other statistical data enabled by the Secretaria Municipal de Educação of Porto Nacional- TO (Municipal Department of Education).

## THE STUDIED CONTEXT

According to the data from Secretaria Municipal de Educação de Porto Nacional (SEMED), 2018, which gave support to 6,537 students, including 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> periods of kindergarten, and from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> year of Elementary School. From this total, about 2,038 students studied in rural areas, and they were distributed at 12 schools (Table 1). There are 131 teachers who work at those schools.

**Table 1:** Relation of municipal schools and number of rural students in the municipality of Porto Nacional – SEMED, 2018.

School name	Location	Number of students	Grades offered	Multiseries classes
Antônio Benedito Borges	Reassentamento São Francisco	42	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Antônio Poincaré	Comunidade Jacotinga	43	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Carmecita Matos Maia	Reassentamento Flor da Serra	111	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Chico Mendes	Assentamento Santo Antônio	94	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes

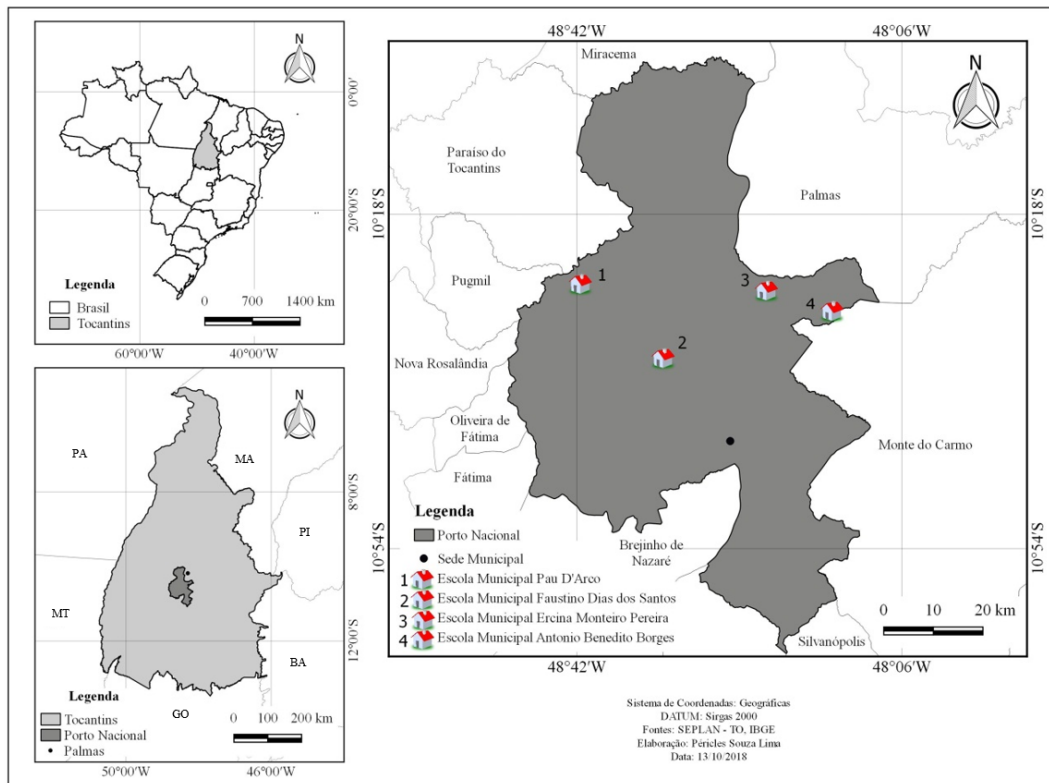
Ercina Monteiro Pereira	Reassentamento Prata	168	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Eliza Barros Lopes	Distrito Escola Brasil	65	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Eulina Braga	Assentamento Capivara	122	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Faustino Dias dos Santos	Comunidade Matança	141	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Maria de Melo Sousa	Reassentamento Luzimangues	553	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	No
Oswaldo Aires	Pinheirópolis	112	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	No
Pau D'arco	Assentamento Pau D'arco	33	1 <sup>st</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Yes
Jacinto Bispo <sup>7</sup>	Luzimangues	700	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> period 1 <sup>st</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	No

Source: "Adapted" from Secretaria Municipal de Educação de Porto Nacional (2018).

From 12 municipal schools located in the rural area of Porto Nacional, four are our study object: Escola Faustino Dias de Sousa, Escola Antonio Benedito Borges, Escola Ercina Monteiro Pereira, and Escola Pau D'Arco. Their location is in the following map (Image 1):

<sup>7</sup> Escola Jacinto Bispo is located in the district of Luzimangues, that despite being urban, isn't categorized by IBGE yet.

**Image 1:** Location map of the schools



Source: Lima (2018)

**REGARDING THE STRUCTURAL ASPECTS**

The history of the creation of the studied schools influenced the quality of their physical structure. Escola Antônio Benedito Borges was founded in 1970 by the municipal management, however, with the construction of Usina da Hidrelétrica Luiz Eduardo Magalhães (Hydroelectric Power Plant of Luiz Eduardo Magalhães) by Investico (the company responsible for this enterprise), about 60 families of farmers and riverside dwellers, were then moved to São Francisco Settlement, and, therefore was built a wide and new scholar structure inaugurated in 2002 (Image 2), replacing the previous school. The current school presents the following structure (Table 2):

**Table 2:** Structure of Escola Antônio Benedito Borges

Premises	Quantity	Use	
		Proper	Unproper
Classroom	5	X	2 disabled classes
Library	1	X	-

Director and Coordination rooms	1	X	-
Secretary	1	X	-
Teachers' room	1	X	-
Bathrooms	2	X	-
Canteen	1	X	-
Deposit	1	X	-
Leisure space: covered courtyard	1	X	-
Cafeteria	0	-	-
Lab	0	-	-
Sports court	0	-	-
Other premises	1 auditorium and 1 teacher's support abandoned.		

Source: Author, (2018)

**Image 2:** Structure of Escola Antônio Benedito Borges



A) Classroom ABB; (B) Front view of the school; (C) Library; (D) Covered courtyard.

**Pictures:** Author, (2018).

The school Ercina Monteiro Pereira (Image 3) is located at Reassentamento do Córrego do Prata, located about 50 km from the municipality of Porto Nacional, it was also built by the expropriation caused by the construction of Usina Hidrelétrica Luiz Eduardo



Magalhães. The settlement Córrego do Prata, received initially 50 families, coming from different locations. Currently, the school attends 131 students, and has the following structure (Table 3):

**Table 3:** Structure of Escola Ercina Monteiro Pereira

Premises	Quantity	Use	
		Proper	Unproper
Classroom	8	X	-
Library	1	X	-
Director and Coordination	1	X	-
Secretary	1	X	-
Teacher's room	1	X	-
Bathrooms	3	X	-
Canteen	1	X	-
Deposit	1	X	-
Leisure space: covered courtyard	1		Revitalização do telhado
Cafeteria	0	-	-
Lab	0	-	-
Sports court	1		Falta cobertura e revitalização
Other premises	Computer lab inside the library.		

Source: Author (2018)

**Image 3:** Structure of Escola Ercina Monteiro Pereira



(A) Classroom; (B) Library; (C) Sports court; (D) Damaged roof.

Pictures: Author, (2018).

Escola Faustino Dias dos Santos School (EFDS), located 23 km from Porto Nacional, had a small structure, and it was in the region of the Matança community, where it started working in the 1970s at a straw shed, and with only one class, until 2011 when Municipal Department of Education closed some schools that weren't nucleated, in order to improve the quality of the education and centralizing the resources, improving the structure of the scholar unity which would become a reference in that location. The new Escola Faustino Dias dos Santos (Image 4), which currently attends 141 students, from 6 communities and 4 settlements, has the following physical structure (Table 4):

**Table 4:** Structure of Escola Faustino Dias dos Santos

Premises	Quantity	Use	
		Proper	Unproper
Classroom	5	-	Some of them need roof maintenance
Library	1	-	The space is not organized, and it isn't used as a library
Director and Coordination rooms	1	-	Coordination room is shared with the secretary
Secretary	1	-	-
Teacher's room	1	-	-
Bathrooms	2	-	-
Canteen	1	-	-
Deposit	0	-	-
Leisure space: covered courtyard	0	-	-
Cafeteria	0	-	-
Lab	0	-	-
Sports court	0	-	-
Other premises	-		

Source: Author, (2018).

**Image 4:** Structure of Escola Faustino Dias dos Santos School



(A) Damaged classroom; (B) Preserved classroom; (C) Side view of the school; (D) Improvised space to play volleyball.

**Pictures:** Author, (2018).

Escola Pau D’arco is the smallest and the furthest one, about 80 km from the municipality’s head office, and it was built initially by the community, and posteriorly renovated by the city hall (Image 5). Nowadays the school attends 33 students and has the following structure (Table 5):

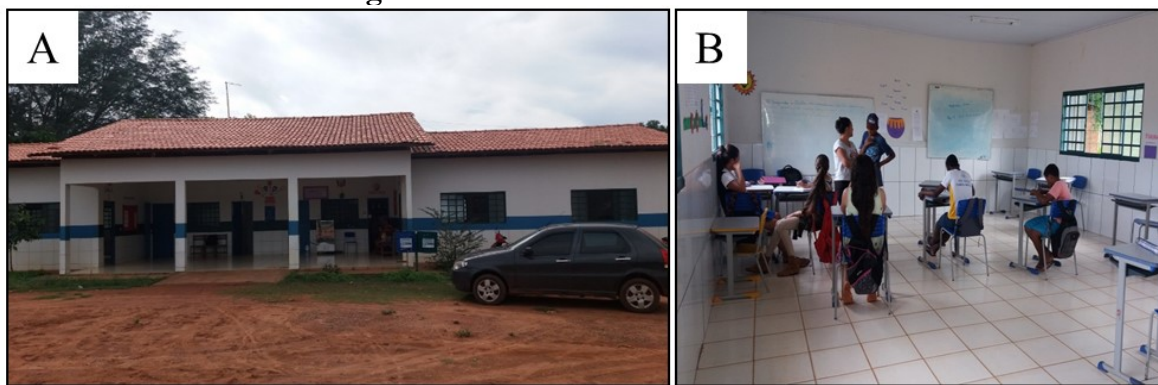
**Table 5:** Structure of Escola Pau D’arco

Premises	Quantity	Use	
		Proper	Unproper
Classroom	2	X	-
Library	0	-	-
Director and Coordination rooms	0	-	-
Secretary	1	X	-
Teacher’s room	0	-	-
Bathrooms	2	X	-
Canteen	1	X	-

Deposit	0		-
Leisure space: covered courtyard	0	-	-
Cafeteria	0	-	-
Lab	0	-	-
Sports court	0	-	-
Other premises	-		

Source: Author, (2018).

**Image 5:** Structure of Escola Pau D’arco



(A) Front view of the school; (B) Classroom.

(B) **Pictures:** Author, (2018).

On the whole, the schools have good aspects in their structure, as it was possible to see in the pictures, and opinion of the teachers while recognizing that it’s possible to supply the demand, that some classrooms are wide and airy, on the other hand, they’re still insufficient concerning the lack: climatization of the classrooms, bathrooms for employees, accessibility, and maintenance. In the students’ opinion, the schools have a regular structure, because at some there’s a lack: sports court, fan, library, rooms, air conditioning, outside walls, renovation, lack of maintenance (renovate the bathroom, fix the roof). Having a sports court was the most cited item by the students as a priority, because they are children and teenagers who also see the school as a place to have fun and leisure (Image 6).

**Image 6:** Improvised court at Escola Ercina Monteiro Pereira



**Pictures:** Author, (2018).

The schools can provide, “besides the learning related to formal knowledge, learning through leisure and the ludic universe” (FONSECA, RECHIA & MORO, 2015, p.3). Thus, the existence and the use of leisure space at school are elements essential to the citizen education of the students, because they potentialize human relations, generate learning, and humanize.

According to the interview given by the teacher Doris Kowaltowski from Faculdade de Engenharia Civil, Arquitetura e Urbanismo (Civil Engineering, Architecture and Urbanism College) from Unicamp, to Estadão newspaper, and published on the website on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the school environment works as “a third teacher”. She explained that the physical space influences interactions and learning. For instance, the bad or good aspect of the building creates a positive perception, and the student tends to dedicate much more to the activity. On the other hand, if the building is in bad shape, the student will have the opposite reaction. She also explains that the feeling of well-being makes the difference, “if it’s too hot or too cold, if the student needs to carry notebook sheets of paper so they won’t fly or if they can’t see because of the sun, they can’t dedicate, and focus on the teaching, and won’t learn all they could”.

Due to this perspective, and according to what’s been watched in field trips, the schools have many structural limitations, because none of them have labs, which deprives the student of the opportunity of making certain experimental activities as a teaching strategy. Only one school, during the period of research, was receiving a computer center, even if the computing subject is part of the curricular proposal, however, the schools have no conditions to work the content in practice. Only one educational unit has a sports court, it’s not indoor, which makes it difficult to be used, and takes away the opportunity for

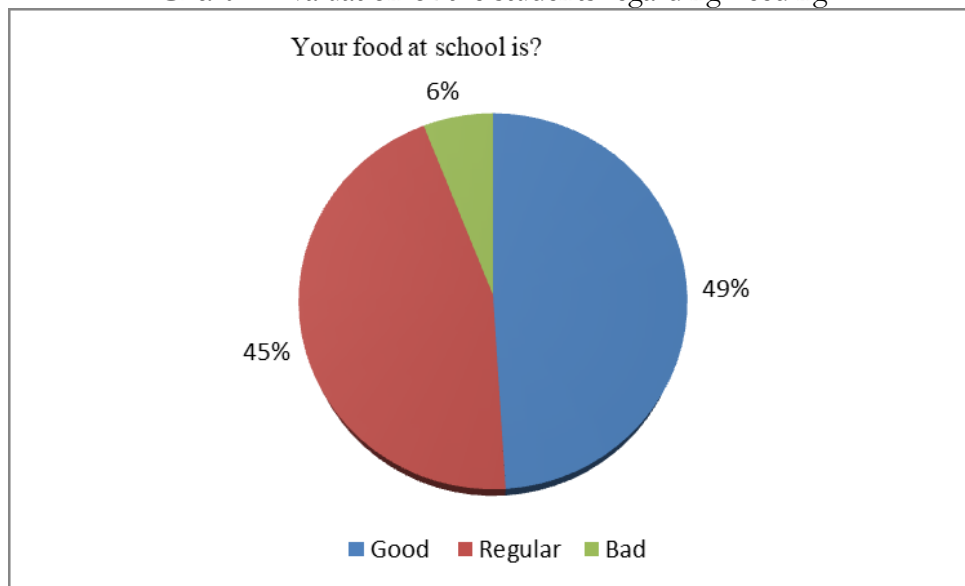
leisure, already reassured as a means of formation. The climatization of the classrooms is done mainly with fans that don't offer the necessary comfort, once the climate in the state is very hot. Of the 12 schools, the minority didn't have a library, which creates a deficiency in access, and the opportunity for reading and learning. Although one of the schools has a student in a wheelchair, none of them are adapted for people with disabilities.

Therefore, the verified physical structure is regular, however, it's insufficient because it doesn't offer all the necessary physical conditions for the teaching-learning process of the students, creating a challenge to be beaten at municipal rural schools at Porto Nacional – TO.

### REGARDING THE FEEDING

The item feeding was evaluated as good by 49% of the students interviewed, regular by 45%, and only 6% considered it bad (Chart 1).

**Chart 1:** Evaluation of the students regarding Feeding



**Source:** Author, (2018).

In the schools there's nutritionist support, there's the participation of the students to choose the menu, however, the resources sent by the National Program of School Feeding were considered very scarce, destined only 0.53 cents per student/day in kindergarten, 0.36 cents per student/day for elementary school, and 0.71 cents per student/day for students of the Programa Mais Educação (More Education Program). The latter one isn't at all schools.

As the resources are scarce, the school principals end up paying for cheaper food, that fits the budget, compromising, therefore, the quality of the feeding. Another factor is that the length of stay of the student at school exceeds the regular time, from 7:30 to 11:30 a.m., because the distance from home to school and the dynamics of the transportation make the student spend longer than expected. The students who live further need to wake up at 5:00 a.m. and leave at 11:30 a.m., however, many students need to wait for a second van trip and get to go home after noon, with only one snack served around 9 a.m. Thinking about this dynamic, the ideal would be for the schools to offer a second snack or lunch for the students.

The transference of resources through FUNDEB, which stipulates de national value per student/year, needs to consider that the educational cost of this student is more expensive due to being in a rural area. The legislation already recognizes the specificities of rural education, however, the resources destined for this audience need to be increased, then it will be possible to increase the amount of food and improve its quality.

## **REGARDING THE TEACHING AND AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES**

All 4 (four) schools present a majority of traditional teaching, directed to the transmission of historically systematized knowledge, with shy initiatives on the development of pedagogical practices based on the principles of Rural Education, which, on the other hand, must consider: transmission of the classic content, the relation between the peasant life and the land, work, culture, and connection to social movements.

According to Caldart (2005), rural education is based on three pedagogical matrixes: Socialist Pedagogy, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and Pedagogy of Movement. The first helps us think about education, culture, work, and culture as formation elements and human emancipation. The second considers “the poor people on the countryside as legitim subjects of an emancipatory project, and, thus, educative” (CALDART, 2005, p. 14). The third builds its conceptions and practices while forming rural education. All of them are linked to each other because they are based on dialogue and on the relation with matrixes that form rural education: Land, Work, and Culture.

The understanding of the importance of a diverse formation and for life permeates the text of the Permanent Group of Work of Rural Education at Secretaria de Educação Mídia e Tecnologia (Education, Media, and Technology Department), which according to Ramos et. al. (2004, p. 39), produced a material entitled: References for a National Rural Education Politics: subsidy notebook, where presented six principles of rural education: I) The Pedagogical

Principle of the school hole as people's educator articulated to a human emancipation project; II) The Pedagogical Principle of valorization of different education areas in the teaching process; III) The Pedagogical Principle of the spaces and time of formation of Learning subjects; IV) The Pedagogical Principle of the place lined to the reality of the subjects; V) The Pedagogical Principle of education as a strategy for the sustainable development; VI) The Pedagogical Principle of autonomy and collaboration among rural subjects and the national teaching system.

Without being connected to reality, the transmission of classical knowledge refers to a seat-of-learning education, which seeks to deposit on the student's empty contents, with no creativity, no transformation, it doesn't help the task of the liberation of the processed one. Before, however, it immobilizes them and put them into a passivity condition. "The more the students exercise in storing the deposits that people are making for them, the less they will develop a critical conscience that would result in their insertion in the world, as its transformers" (FREIRE, p. 60).

Overcoming seat-of-learning education is done by overcoming its marks, in this change the educator teaches and learns in a dialogic relation. It's not only about depositing content, but it must also be problematized, and there must be a reflection about it and its importance in the student's life as a citizen of the world, with the possibility of creating, transformation, and not only repetition.

The dialog in education starts when the teacher discusses and chooses the program content from the reality of the student, and with their participation. Education must be done with the students, not for them.

Thinking about these principles, the rural schools of Porto Nacional need to develop discussions, formations, and reflections on these principles, so the school teams can think about developing in their pedagogical project formative activities which create strategies and actions to reach an emancipatory formation for the peasant student.

A formation directed to the recognition of rural education, its basis, and its principles is a necessity for rural schools. In this process, the teacher is the main character, however, most of them, according to Nascimento (no date, p. 2)

there's no relation whatsoever with the social movements. The professors and public employees of certain municipalities have a high degree of disengagement with the socio-economic means of the students that prevent an interactivity process, knowledge, and dialecticity with the representations which form themselves in the history of each community.

Most of the teachers can't see the difference in rural education beyond the geographic matter (urban, rural), ignoring necessary principles and practices so rural education can be efficient, according to the guidelines. In Porto Nacional this reality still



exists, however, an advancement was detected.

During the research, a group of teachers formed by representatives of each rural school received an Improvement Course offered with resources from Escola da Terra, which is one of the actions of PRONACAMPO, a program launched by the Federal Government on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012, which is a politics of education specified to the countryside (Image 7).

**Image 7:** Improvement Course Escola da Terra for educators of rural schools



**Pictures:** Author, (2018)

The project was written by Universidade Federal do Tocantins (Federal University of Tocantins), in partnership with Secretaria Estadual de Educação (Education State Department), with the collaboration of Secretaria Municipal de Educação of Porto Nacional, organized the logistic of the course, which had the main objective to promote a continuous specific formation of 200 teachers to supply the needs of rural schools and the ones located in Quilombola communities by offering didactic and pedagogical resources which attend the formative specificities of rural and quilombolas populations of the state of Tocantins (PROJETO CURSO DE APERFEIÇOAMENTO, UFT, 2017, p.1).

On the whole 23 educators from the municipality of Porto Nacional participated, who had theoretical and practical activities, with enriched classes concerning discussions on peasantry and teaching. The continuity of this politics materialized through the improvement course is crucial to mitigate the divergence of specific formation for teachers of rural schools. National wide, the National Council of Education (CNE), through Resolution No. 1 of Abril 2002, instituted Operational Guidelines for primary education at Rural Schools, predicting in its article 13 specificities in the formation of teachers of rural schools:

Art. 13. The teaching systems, besides the principles and guidelines which guide primary education in the country, will observe, in the complementary standardization in teacher's formation to teach at rural schools, the following components:

I – studies concerning the diversity and the effective protagonism of the children, teenagers, and adults of the countryside in the construction of the social quality of individual and collective life, of the region, of the country, and the world;

II – pedagogical proposals that value, in teaching organization, cultural diversity, the interaction and transformation processes, democratic management, the access to scientific and technological advances, and the respective contributions to the improvement of living conditions, and fidelity to the ethical principles which guide the solidary and collaborative coexistence in democratic societies.

Assured by law, teachers' formation was one of the items mentioned by a manager of rural education in the municipality of Porto Nacional, as the main challenge of rural education. It was also emphasized in the manager's speech the need to value the teachers, and the importance of specific tests for rural teachers, however, he recognized that this discussion is not solid at the department.

Another obstacle to the realization of the rural education principles in Porto Nacional, and the majority of Brazilian schools is that the curricular proposal used isn't very different from the ones from urban schools, except for the Agricultural Techniques subject, present in the schools which offer the second phase of elementary school. The previous fact, along with the lack of formation by the teachers, and the scarcity of financial resources, makes it hard the occurrence of actions, contents, and practices linked to peasantry reality.

However, an advance was verified during the research, because there was a meeting of Fórum de Educação do Campo (Rural Education Forum), in 2018,<sup>8</sup> with the presence of representatives from Cooperativa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural – COOPTER (Technical and Rural Extension Assistance Cooperative), Movimento de Atingido por Barragens (MAB) – Movement of People Hit by dams, Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (Agriculture Workers Federation)- FETAET, teachers, and students from Universidade Federal do Tocantins, students from the Degree in Rural Education Course, from Colégio Agrícola Che Guevara, professionals from the EFA of Porto Nacional, Colinas, São Salvador, and EFA de Campos Lindos (GO), which discussed besides the creation of the Associação Tocantinense das Escolas Famílias Agrícolas (Association from Tocantins of Rural Family Schools), the construction of Rural Education Guidelines of

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<sup>8</sup> I participated in this meeting as a guest, during the development of my research for my master's degree, which was about rural education.

Campo do Tocantins, bearing in mind that this is believed to be an old demand. Concerning the subject, the referral was so this guidelines proposal to be sent to the e-mails of representatives of the present institutions so everyone can contribute to the writing of the text.

This document would be substantial for the creation of curricular proposals for rural schools in the municipalities of Tocantins state, and that in Porto Nacional are in progress. It's important to remember that the development of this document must count on the participation of teachers, parents, students, social movements, and representatives from the academic community, especially researchers in the area.

It's necessary to emphasize other initiatives involving institutions that defend Rural Education in the state of Tocantins. Partnerships between Escola Família Agrícola Porto Nacional with Comunidade de Saúde, Desenvolvimento e Educação (Comsaúde) – Health, Development and Education Community, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST) – Movement of Workers with no Land, Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) – National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform, MAB, FETAET, COOPTER, Universidade do Estado do Tocantins, among other ones organized by PRONERA courses:

- 2014 to 2016 – courses of Technician in Agroecology Integrated into High School, and High School with Teaching modality (Magisterium);
- 2009 to 2011 – Teaching Course High School level (Magisterium);
- 2006 to 2008 – Teaching Course High School level (Magisterium) (BEZERRA, 2017);
- 1999 to 2001- Course: “Rural Education: the richness of its production”, to promote lettering, schooling, and qualification of Young people and adults in settlements in Tocantins state (PERREIRA, 2008).

Other initiatives promoted by the previously mentioned institutions created regular Higher Education courses on Rural Education at Universidade do Tocantins, at campus Tocantinópolis and Arraias, which had their course projects approved in 2014.

Nascimento (no date, p.12) says that the curriculum would be the fourth transformation that needs to happen at rural schools. According to him, the curriculum must be adequate to reality, and the school mustn't be only a transmitter of theoretical knowledge of memorization and information, but human formation. In this document, there must be contents and actions which include relations with the work on the land, the

bond between education and culture, and making the school a space of cultural development for the community.

Another primordial concept that must be in school curriculums is the conceptions and practices of Agroecology because there's an inseparable relation in this theme with sustainability, which is one of the pillars of rural education. According to Guhur and Silva (2021, p.70) “[...] agroecology guides the objectivation of productive agrosystems of healthy food, potentialized by ecological biodiversity, and socio-cultural diversity; which are based on peasant practice, from original and traditional peoples [...]”.

In Porto Nacional the curriculum of two of the researched schools, which offer the second phase of elementary school, there's the subject of Agriculture Techniques, which is taught once a week. According to the students, they are taught content such as agriculture; family agriculture, technological advances, soils, horticulture, landscape; notions of agropastoralism, and the like.

In practice, when asked, most of the students answered that they work in the vegetable garden performing the following activities: making seedbeds, clearing off weeds, planting; watering the vegetable garden; planting seeds, fertilizing, and clearing the school's surroundings. Even though they are simple, the vegetable gardens are the only support points for the accomplishment of the practices, however, the studied schools don't have the financial resources, professionals, and structure to expand, or even develop the practices more effectively. At one of the schools, a pedagogue is the one responsible for the subject, and in another a geography teacher, both with no technical formation. Besides that, there're problems with the scarcity of water in the schools, which makes it difficult to maintain the vegetable gardens during the drought (Images 8, 9 and 10).

**Image 8:** Vegetable Garden at Escola Ercina Monteiro Pereira.



**Pictures:** Author, (2018)

**Image 9:** Vegetable Gardens at Escola Antônio Benedito Borges and Escola Pau D'arco



(A) Active vegetable garden EABB; (B) Inactive vegetable garden EPD.

**Pictures:** Author, (2018).

**Image 10:** Vegetable Garden at Escola Faustino Dias



**Pictures:** Author (2018).

The agricultural practices at rural schools are essential to link the study to reality. Thus, the existence of productive unities that can promote the practice of farming activities is essential for the formation and awaken the students at rural schools.

It's necessary to work on the land, plant, harvest, graft, separate the cattle, milk the cows, perform artificial insemination, castrate pigs, slaughter chickens, make cheese, and the like, so the student can start thinking about developing these activities on their properties according to their reality, that they can produce and create a way to stay on the countryside, instead of migrating to the city in search of underemployment. Therefore, this is the main mission of a rural school, and to reassure it, the CNE (2002, p.1) wrote in its only paragraph:

The identity of the rural school is defined by its link to inherent questions to its reality, based on the student's own time and knowledge, on the collective memory that signalizes the future, in the network of sciences and technology available in society and social movements in the defense of

projects which associate the solutions demanded by these questions to social quality of collective living in the country.

Based on this paragraph, without a bond of the contents to reality, without thinking about the nuances derived from it in the alternatives of development, and life organization in the countryside, the rural school will be only one more institution with an inefficient role.

For the teachers, the greatest challenge is to improve the pedagogical and technological matters such as to incentive the students to study, work inside mixed-grade classrooms, improve the relationship with the community, have an internet connection, and more technological resources. The answers to the surveys affirmed the lack of essential materials such as textbooks, playful materials, computers, maps, games, auxiliary textbooks, computer labs, pedagogical toys, and sportive materials.

Along with these demands, we may add the need to improve the work condition of the teachers who also wake up early to face daily bad roads, long distances, some under the rain or sun, and when arriving at school still have to pay for their food. Due to those difficulties, many permanent teachers think about leaving the rural school and going to the city, also because the existing bonus of only R\$100,00 reais (paid only for permanent teachers) is not motivating. These difficulties in working conditions generate another problem which is the rotativity of teachers, a factor that disturbs the good functioning of the schools, because there's no bond nor experience, and there's no continuity in the formation processes.

Another factor observed as primordial for the good functioning of the schools, which is a challenge pedagogically speaking, is school management. The work of the directive team, and the way it articulates to request and motivate the accomplishment of activities by all the team, with the exploration of new material resources available at school, makes all the difference in the performance and development of the school. What we've noticed is that at some schools the available educational resources seem not to be much used, being kept in cabinets, and mainly forgotten (Image 11).

**Image 11:** Used and unused Educational resources

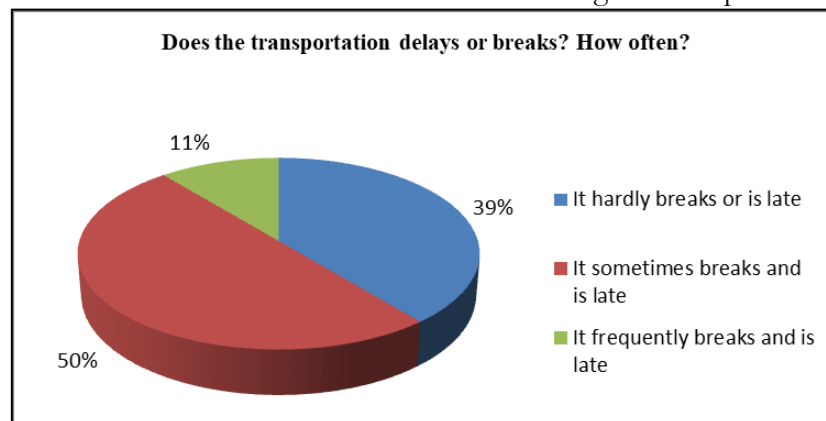


**Pictures:** Author (2018).

To the former manager of rural education in Porto Nacional, the greatest challenge is the teachers' formation. He affirmed that “there’s a culture that the field (countryside) is bad, a father says that to his son, to study so he won’t have the life they’ve had working hard, that they must study to run away from it because life in the city is much easier”. The sensibilization of the young peasant student in this context becomes a challenge, that is making him believe that they can have a good life in the countryside. According to the former secretary, this is a process that depends on how the school works on these issues, and the teachers are the main agents.

According to the representative of the current rural education management of the municipality, the greatest challenge is school transportation, used by 71% of the students. It’s necessary to solve the matter of the route, of country roads which make it difficult so a Van with air-conditioning to pass through, the time issue that the student stays in the car, the hot climate, the vehicles don’t have air-conditioning. When we asked the students if the car breaks, and how often it happens, we got the following result (Chart 2):

**Chart 2 – Evaluation of the students concerning the transportation**



**Source:** Author (2018)

The chart showed that 100% of the students confirmed that the vehicles break, and are delayed, some more than others, demonstrating the need for inspection, and better distribution of the routes by the transportation company, whose work must be imposed by the department to get a quality service.

It was also seen that the municipality has only four rural schools that offer the second phase of elementary school (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades), and none of them high school. Therefore, these students will be transported to schools in the city, where they get an urban education without any link to their reality, unaware of what the guidelines of rural education propose, and all the principles, laws, and norms that were conquered, hardly, to guarantee rural education. In these cases, transportation is no longer an option, but an imposition.

The rural school enriches the community, it's a space for generations to meet. When students are taken to the city, many times, they lose their reference as a peasant, with the possibility of being discriminated against by city residents, once the idea of the peasant as a countryman, and hick is still present. Thus, usually, the schools in the city are overcrowded, which makes the learning process harder. On the other hand, in the countryside, usually, schools don't face this kind of problem. Another factor considered is that when a rural school is closed, entire families end up moving to the city, where they face unemployment, violence, and a precarious life in the suburbs.

Another important factor considered a challenge is the little or inexistent relation of the researched schools with some kind of social movement, even though the communities are mostly formed by settlements. According to Caldart, (2005, p.21)

the connection of Rural Education with Social Movements points out, besides that, some dimensions of human formation which can't be forgotten in their political and pedagogical project: thinking that we need to help educate not only rural workers, but also social fighters, militants of collective causes, and cultivators of libertarian social utopias.

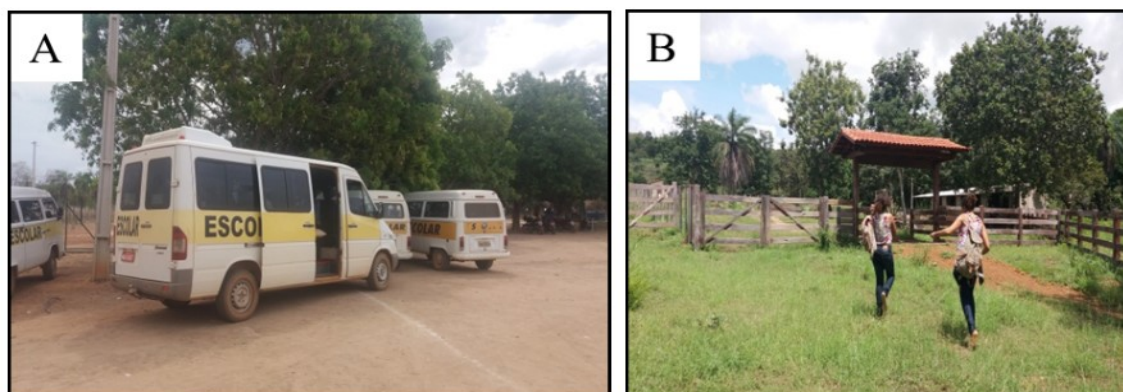
Therefore, the few community organizations existent as an association or the school itself, need to seek these partnerships with social movements, thus the school community will have more conditions to be stronger, and claim the necessary improvements.

Through the verification of the pedagogical structure and identification of the challenges, we verified an evolution of education in Porto Nacional as registered by the Educator (No. 8, 2018) "there's been evolution step by step, the straw shack was



exchanged by a reasonable building, the stools by chairs, the beaten ground by flooring, the bowl by a drinking fountain”. Besides the improvement in the physical structure, we’ve considered the evolution of the following items: teachers with higher education, all the vehicles of school transportation are closed (Image 12), and there’s an election for school principals with the participation of the community.

**Image 12:** School transportation



(A) School transportation vehicles; (B) Taking students to their residence.

**Pictures:** Author (2018).

At last, another important factor is the presence of three schools with a reduced number of students. This fact made the pedagogical and administrative teams of Secretaria Municipal de Educação discuss and cogitate the possibility of nucleate or close two of those schools: Escola Antônio Benedito Borges and Escola Municipal Pau D’Arco. The secretaria claims the high cost to maintain the schools and transportation working. However, observing the reality of both schools and based on the deposition of parents, students, teachers, and leaders of the community, as well as the result of other research concerning the closing of rural schools in Brazil, we concluded that the best decision would be not to close them. We also noticed the need to have better communication between these schools, and education department, observe the current legislation and community organization, so, together, they can get to an agreement that better fulfills the educational and social concerns of students and their community.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The results showed that the emphasized challenges are: insufficiency of financial resources destined for the schools; predominance of traditional teaching with the absence

and/or fragility of principles, policies, and practices of rural education; lack of continuous formation to teachers, and financial incentives which decrease the rotativity of those professionals at school; breaking or delay of school transportation, limited physical structure, and schools closing. Therefore, it's necessary to reaffirm the importance of the struggle collective organization, in perspective of getting: to fight the closing of schools through the organization of the community; partnerships with law institutions, and dialogue between these schools and education department to build arrangements that better meet the educational and social interests of the students and their community; that the government thinks about education as an investment, and not as an expense; that discussions, formations, and reflections be done about eh principles, practices, and policies to create actions that enable a pedagogical structure according to what the guidelines advocate; more supervision, and better distribution of the routes of school transportation, and guarantee of proper structure that enables educational quality.

Despite the challenges, the subjects of rural education keep moving, with good perspectives, and dream of quality education, and at all levels, where they live. The rural school must work based on principles such as solidarity, sustainability, valorization of peasantry culture, linking classical knowledge with reality, learning through work on the land, development of peasant agriculture, and the bond to social movements. Only this school can perform the role of contributing to the formation of sensible citizens and is capable of act consolidating a fairer countryside, avoiding rural exodus, and consequent increase in urban misery.

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