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INTERVIEWS SPECIAL SECTION: DEMOCRACY AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: 60 YEARS AFTER THE 1964 COUP

Popular education and military dictatorship: challenges and perspectives for teaching in higher education in an interview with Juarez Dayrell

Educação popular e ditadura militar: desafios e perspectivas para a docência no ensino superior em uma entrevista com Juarez Dayrell

Educación popular y dictadura militar: desafíos y perspectivas para la docencia en la educación superior en una entrevista a Juarez Dayrell

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ABSTRACT

The text is based on an interview with Juarez Tarcísio Dayrell, a retired professor from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) and founder of UFMG's Youth Observatory. The aim was to reflect on the relationships between the university and the military dictatorship, set against the backdrop of his journey as a popular educator and teacher. The interview was conducted as a conversation, following a semi-structured guide. The statements were

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recorded, transcribed, and reorganized to ensure a coherent flow of ideas and arguments. The analysis was grounded in the principles of popular education and the theoretical perspective of Paulo Freire, allowing us to understand the impacts of the military dictatorship on the lives of students and teachers, as well as the processes of social mobilization and resistance constructed by civil society, particularly by popular educators, which ultimately contributed to the re-democratization of political life in the country.

Keywords: teaching; university education; popular education; military dictatorship; democracy.

RESUMO

O texto resulta de uma entrevista realizada com Juarez Tarcísio Dayrell, professor aposentado da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) e fundador do Observatório da Juventude da UFMG. Ela teve como objetivo refletir sobre as relações entre universidade e ditadura militar, tendo como pano de fundo sua trajetória como educador popular e docente. A entrevista se deu na forma de uma conversa, a partir de um roteiro semiestruturado. Os depoimentos foram gravados, transcritos e reorganizados com o propósito de garantir o melhor encadeamento das ideias e da argumentação. As análises foram feitas a partir dos princípios da educação popular e da perspectiva teórica de Paulo Freire, nos permitindo compreender os impactos da ditadura militar sobre a vida de estudantes e docentes, mas também os processos de mobilização social e resistência construída pela sociedade civil, especialmente por educadores populares, que nos permitiram chegar à redemocratização da vida política no país.

Palavras-chave: docência; ensino superior; educação popular; ditadura militar; democracia.

RESUMEN

El texto resulta de una entrevista realizada a Juárez Tarcísio Dayrell, profesor jubilado de la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) y creador del Observatorio de la Juventud de la UFMG. Su objetivo era reflexionar sobre la relación entre las universidades y la dictadura militar, en el contexto de su carrera como educador popular y docente. La entrevista se desarrolló en forma de conversación, basada en un guión semiestruturado. Las declaraciones fueron grabadas, transcritas y reorganizadas con el propósito de asegurar la mejor cadena de ideas y argumentos. Los análisis se realizaron con base en los principios de la educación popular y la perspectiva teórica de Paulo Freire, permitiendo comprender los impactos de la dictadura militar en la vida de estudiantes y docentes, pero también los procesos de movilización y resistencia social construidos por la sociedad civil. sociedad,

especialmente por parte de los educadores populares, que permitieron lograr la redemocratización de la vida política en el país.

Palabras clave: enseñanza; enseñanza superior; educación popular; dictadura militar; democracia.

INTRODUCTION

Sixty years after the 1964 military coup, public universities find themselves threatened by the advance of authoritarian movements aiming to turn educational institutions into instruments of dogmatization for the maintenance of privileges and the reproduction of inequalities. We have recently experienced situations driven by certain sectors of society and State agents seeking to restrict the free expression of ideas in universities through attacks, nominating administrators without democratic consultation within institutions, and the initiation of administrative and legal processes with an intimidating nature.

This context calls for a reflection about the perspectives of teaching and pedagogy in Brazilian universities. To what extent can we conceive of curricular proposals and pedagogical practices that enable the critical development of students? To reflect on these issues, we invited Professor Juarez Dayrell for an interview in the form of a conversation, where we discuss his journey as a young activist in the Catholic Church's pastoral groups and his experiences as a student and faculty member at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG).

The invitation for the interview is due to his experience as a popular educator from 1975 to 1979 in the city of São Félix do Araguaia, in Mato Grosso, an experience he considers foundational to his personal and professional development. In this way, never separating the social/collective, personal, and professional dimensions, he invites us to think about the connections between popular education and university education, from a perspective that leads to the emancipation of individuals.

His perspective is centered on several educational principles of Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1982, 1987, 1996), of knowledge as a collective practice of problematizing reality, constructed by learners and educators, of education as an emancipatory social practice based on solidarity and on the construction of autonomy, and the problematization of reality as a core educational principle through the action-reflection-action process.

INTERVIEW

Juarez, first of all, we would like to thank you for your availability, given the many activities that make up your daily life. Our goal is to understand how your experience as a student, a popular educator, and a teacher in basic education during the military dictatorship impacted your teaching work at the School of Education at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Additionally, we aim to consider curricular proposals and pedagogical practices that enable the critical development of students. This is a reflection on the themes of “teaching”, “higher education”, “popular education”, “military dictatorship”, and “democracy”. With this, we aim to reflect on some of the impacts of the military dictatorship on teaching practices in higher education, on student movements as formative processes within higher education, and on the contributions of popular education to university pedagogy.

In your academic journey, you have dedicated yourself to discussing the condition of Brazilian youth. Your experience as a young person took place during the military dictatorship in Brazil. In your opinion, what were the impacts of those governments on the society of that period? And on the young people born afterward?

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brazil was emerging from a developmentalist period, with a society extremely mobilized around social issues. There was a struggle for agrarian reform, a strong mobilization of peasant leagues, especially in the Northeast, and a rise in the labor movement. The UNE (National Union of Students) held significant influence in mobilizing young people, which was also reflected in the cultural sphere.

The 1964 coup instituted itself gradually censoring the society. It wasn't an immediate action. At the same time, the coup generated something that had never occurred in Brazil before, which were the clandestine left-wing organizations. Many young student activists went to clandestinity and began to work with left-wing groups that articulated themselves until 1968. As the regime became more repressive, these groups faced severe crackdowns. By 1971, the existence of these left-wing groups had virtually come to an end.

What was the impact of the coup on youth? First, they felt the impact of the polarization within society itself, forcing them to take sides. It wasn't the entirety of young people who mobilized and took to the streets, but the youth showed a very strong leadership. From 1964 to 1967, there were many student strikes, marches, and protests led by these clandestine organizations. Secondly, there was very strong censorship in the media. So, with censorship, much of society lived as if nothing was happening. In addition to the silencing of the media, and the censorship, there was an ideological formation process imposed in schools. There were subjects like Moral and Civics and OSPB (Brazilian Social and Political Organization),

which promoted an education oriented towards submission to militarism. Economically, Brazil was experiencing, particularly from 1968 onward, an internationally favorable context that allowed for significant growth. The economy was entirely concentrated, and there was no Congress to discuss or debate. This allowed the military to implement their proposals with almost no resistance. These factors had a significant impact on the formation of young people, in the sense of creating a tendency toward a certain passivity in relation to society itself.

One of the few spaces for greater participation and awareness of the context at the time was the Catholic Church, with the movements of the Youth Pastoral, which were very active. The Youth Pastoral had a significant impact in terms of leadership formation. A big part of the youth leaders who played a leading role in the 1960s and 1970s came from this ecclesial formation. It was a space for critical education. But there was also a lot of fear. The more awareness, the more fear, because you had a clearer sense of how far the repression could go.

You began your undergraduate studies in Sociology in the 1970s, when the military regime was starting to show signs of weakening. How do you see that context within the Brazilian universities? In terms of teaching, considering curricula, educational practices, and the relationship among teachers and students, how do you assess that experience?

The university at that time did not look like the university of today. It was an extremely closed university. The first entrance exam I took was in 1973, for Geology. In Geology, there was the basic cycle of exact sciences at ICEX (Institute of Exact Sciences of UFMG), where we had no space to question anything. The professor was the one who transmitted knowledge, the one who held the wisdom. The professor took pride in failing students. The university was still in the process of consolidating. In 1974, I started the Social Sciences course. The university was essentially limited to teaching and transmitting knowledge. We didn't hear anything about university extension. There were no scholarships. Student assistance was poor and managed by FUMP (Mendes Pimentel University Foundation). The university was even whiter than it is today. During this period, I had the privilege of being part of a very active student union (Diretório Acadêmico [DA]) in my faculty. But it was always with a lot of fear, always with a lot of control, because repression was always trying to intervene. I had access to groups of young people who had this space for political discussion, and the DA, in a clandestine way, was also a bit like that. Through the DA, I had my first contact with a book written by Gramsci. I had never heard of him before. I started reading and didn't understand a thing. The education itself was still very deficient in this sense. Everyone had to figure things out on their own because there was no pedagogical concern.

It was from there that I decided to go to São Félix do Araguaia, in Mato Grosso, where I stayed from 1975 to 1979, after my first year in Social Sciences. In 1980, I returned to the university to finish my Social Sciences degree, and the university was already different. The Brazilian reality itself was already different. In terms of context, we had been living since the Geisel government (1974-1979) under a “slow, gradual, and secure” opening, a speech that was strongly proclaimed at the time. So, the atmosphere at the university had already changed. There was a higher level of participation. Society itself was a little more open. There were much more significant cultural movements. In music, there was the whole gang: Caetano, Gil, Milton Nascimento... There was an engaged side to music that led the way, that raised awareness, that called attention to the reality itself. The LGBTQIAPN+ movement was on the rise. Society was seeing the rise of social movements. And the social sciences were living in this atmosphere. I remember that our faculty had the privilege of having a group of new professors who had just returned from abroad, bringing new ideas and new authors. This generated a great deal of excitement, a much larger process of discussion. And there was the possibility for us to participate in the construction of the curriculum. We had a student group, and this group would invite professors and propose new subjects. There was a much more flexible curriculum, which allowed us to build a syllabus together with the professors. There was a significant excitement in that sense. I believe that, in terms of the university, it followed the openness that came from the Brazilian society itself.

Were there still many marks from the dictatorship during this period?

Much more diluted. There was an economic crisis, and with that, a great public discontent. An absurdly high inflation. In 1981 and 1982, inflation reached 200%. This generated a great sense of discontent. Alongside this, there was the mobilization of popular movements, starting with women, a very strong women's movement.

What about your experience in São Félix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso, between 1975 and 1979? You worked as a popular educator and as a teacher in basic education in the context of conflicts and violence in the region. What was that like? What challenges and issues could you share with us?

The work at the Prelature of São Félix do Araguaia, in Mato Grosso, reflects the entire movement within the Catholic Church, which emerged primarily after 1964, with the Second Vatican Council, under Pope John XXIII, which brought significant renewal to the Church. In Latin America, there was a movement to build a theology that dialogued closely with the reality of the region and that articulated the social movement with ecclesial action. In this context, Liberation Theology emerged, proposing a greater role for the faithful, with special emphasis on the popular classes, and a perspective of politicizing pastoral actions. In the 1970s, the CNBB (National Conference of Bishops of Brazil) had a very progressive character

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and clearly supported popular movements. The CEBs (Base Ecclesial Communities) began to emerge, aiming to provide religious, political, and social formation from the grassroots level. That was one of the few public spaces, clearly recognized, for access to activism. This is what led me to São Félix do Araguaia. The idea was for me to go and do an internship. I was somewhat lost between Sociology and Geology. I went to stay for six months, and I ended up staying for four years.

When I arrived in Araguaia, I met Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, who was one of the prominent figures of Liberation Theology in Brazil. It was during that time that the CPT (Land Pastoral Commission) and CIMI (Missionary Indigenous Council) emerged.

What did he do? He gathered a group of about 30 lay young people, some married and others single, who went to work in the region. There wasn't always a priest or a nun available. So, he would divide the group into teams and, with that, choose several villages in the region where we would develop the pastoral work.

We lived in a village with about three thousand inhabitants in a very large rural area. The majority of the population was of Northeastern origin, who had migrated to Mato Grosso or Goiás. They came in search of land, housing, food, and decent work. It was the "promised land". They were basically farmers, smallholders, who would arrive and occupy land with no owners. These were unclaimed lands of the Union. As a result, the category of "squatter" was created. These people did not officially own the land, and this created a great deal of tension. In a nearby region where we worked, the Araguaia Guerrilla was established, which was one of the most well-known armed guerrilla experiences in Brazil.

When I arrived in 1975, the army conducted operations every six months. They would patrol the entire region. Where I lived, there was me, a layperson, two nuns, Mada and Bia, and a priest. So, we did small-scale work. The first major challenge was living together as a team. I was 20, the priest was older, and the two nuns were about 30 years old. How do you build a collective life with different ideas if you want to create common actions? That was the first challenge.

Another big challenge was dealing with a population that had a different reality. We were urban people arriving in this rural environment. The big question was how to form leaders. This was, for us, a major issue. What we did was largely based on the pastoral work of the Catholic Church. For example, the Bible circles. We would do a reading once a week. You would gather the neighbors from that house, discuss a part of the Bible, and relate it to the local reality. There was a whole process of reflecting on reality through the Bible. Catechism work with children and youth, celebrations, rosaries, novenas, etc. And always trying, in some way, to respect the religious tradition and the rural tradition, which is very much about

festivities, novenas. This was done in homes, in the streets. And we would accompany all of this. All of it served as a space for meetings and awareness-raising. That was the key word.

On the other hand, there was the struggle for land, which connected all of this. And these were very concrete situations. Landowners would arrive, take the residents, expel them, and throw them into the street with police support. The police clearly had a side. They supported the landowners, who were also in the process of settling in the area. But they arrived with resources, machinery, police and government support, which strongly encouraged agricultural expansion. The first to arrive, of whom we heard, were The “gaúchos” (people from Rio Grande do Sul) in 1978. And it was a huge cultural shock, because they arrived with the work tradition of the South. A different logic, not the peasant logic. They came with an industrial capitalist perspective. They favored monoculture and used large stretches of land. They worked morning, afternoon, and night. The workers were exhausted from the exploitation and fatigue.

It’s no wonder that the Church created the CPT (Land Pastoral Commission), precisely to pastorally accompany these conflicts. Then we had health care. Bia, the nun, had a Nursing degree. It was the only access [to health services] within a 300-kilometer radius. She would treat people at home. People would come in wounded from gunshots, stabbed. You had all sorts of things coming in because there was no access. The roads were very poor. The alternative was small planes.

What challenges were present at that context? The first challenge I would point out is this daily exercise of self-criticism about our white, urban, intellectualized posture, alongside a population that had a different cultural origin, with a different perspective. How does this relationship unfold? There is no recipe. It is the relationship between scholarly knowledge and popular knowledge. Many times, we fell into a paternalistic approach. This relationship is always a tense one. It was a challenge that was always present. What we could say in today’s language is: dealing with diversity. How do you deal with difference?

Another issue that I think is very relevant to us today is the dimension of recognizing and valuing popular knowledge. How do you start from the knowledge, from the worldview of the other? This has everything to do with teaching and learning for us educators. We encouraged many popular practices, for example, the “mutirão” (community work). We tried to strengthen solidarity and stimulate bonds between the groups. The fact that it was a small place made it much easier. We had a constant practice of visiting homes, talking, those intimate conversations. We spent time listening. The dimension of listening was something that was very important. The daily visits to the homes, besides bringing us closer and building bonds, allowed us to reflect on what was happening in the local reality.

The formation of leadership was a huge challenge. We had, at the school, a Parents' Committee that tried to discuss strong and significant moments that were happening in the area. There was a moment, for example, when the city council dismissed us. I was the principal of the school and we received an order that we had been fired. There was a strike by the parents, who didn't send the children to school. There was a lot of pressure, and we managed to resume the work.

Along with the Parents' Committee, there were mobilizations around health, aiming to create a popular health commission. There was not yet the idea of SUS (Unified Health System), of having health posts or similar services. We also had the challenge of the violence triggered by the dictatorship and the land dispute. In the place where we lived, there was the murder of Father João Bosco Burnier, but the real target was the Bishop, Dom Pedro Casaldáliga. We can say that this is the expression of the violence that dominated the region. There were the people of the priests, who were our group, and the people of the sharks, who were more aligned with the landowners and large landowners of the region. This issue was present.

It was an immense stretch of land, only for cattle. Development was associated with destruction. And this destruction was part of the mindset of the time. Deforestation was terrible. Huge trucks and tractors with chains would pass, destroying and burning everything. That was the practice. So, thousands and thousands of kilometers were devastated. Today, you walk there and that is the reality. It is the result of that time. And this was also present in education.

The school only went up to the 3rd grade because there were no teachers beyond the 4th grade. So, I joined as a 4th grade teacher, and from there, I became the principal. During that time, we offered the cycle from 5th to 8th grade for those who would later work as teachers in the early grades. In this process, we had an extremely participatory school. And it was when I began to learn how to teach. I had never taught before.

With intense participation from the local population, the vacancies and space for classes ran out. We organized a collective effort and built another classroom, which we couldn't get from the city hall. And that's how the mobilization went.

We encouraged the teachers to visit their students. And there was something new for them: the process of teacher evaluation. The parents would evaluate the teachers who taught that year, and they decided who would stay and who would not. We did a pre-selection of the teachers, and it was up to them to decide who would teach the following year. We managed to create a greater openness between the school and the families.

Our learning of teaching was very much centered around reflection based on practice. In that sense, there wasn't much pedagogical reflection on the construction of knowledge, or things like that, but, on the other hand, the teachers had a very strong commitment to the work they were developing.

So, you have a commitment to those with whom you are developing a teaching and learning process. A lot based on the thinking of Paulo Freire (1987). In this dynamic, I am clear that political commitment generates much greater engagement in terms of action. Because technical competence can be learned in the process, in a constant movement of action-reflection-action.

In this process, we talked a lot about awareness. But what does it mean to make someone aware? There is a very serious risk into which we kept falling: the idea that to make someone aware is to take your worldview, your political view, and pass it on to the other, making the other repeat the same principles, the same worldview [as yours], meaning a process of transmission. So, awareness would fall into a deviation, where it is up to me to transmit my consciousness to the other who doesn't have it. There is a denial of this other, of the subject, as someone capable of having their own understanding of reality. This idea of awareness is still very present today. It is the same stance of the teacher who thinks they must transmit what they know to the one who doesn't know. This stance doesn't recognize that the other, with whom you are working, no matter the field, already comes with a set of knowledge, a set of experiences that must be taken into account.

I believe that this issue is not posed for the university. It is as if it makes sense for a certain segment, when you are dealing with popular classes, as if in the educational process this were not a significant principle. Today, I can see clearly how the work we developed there reflected this central principle of popular education. The educational process is, first and foremost, the stimulation of an ancestral practice, which is the very presence of the constitution of the human: that formula of giving, receiving, and returning, which is at the core of the principle of reciprocity. And it is impressive how strong this principle is in popular classes. So, I think that many times our pedagogical discourse or the political discourse itself does not take into account the centrality of this dimension of solidarity as a strong and founding educational and political principle.

During this period of experiences in Araguaia, what lessons learned have marked your trajectory as a university professor?

The Araguaia gave me ruler and compass. After this period, I returned to Belo Horizonte to complete my degree in Social Sciences, and in 1993, I began working as a faculty member at the School of Education of UFMG. What I know about the pedagogical process as a concrete

experience began there. I feel that this experience shaped the way I conceive education. The educational process must recognize the other with whom one interacts as a subject who arrives with knowledge, concrete experiences, and a worldview. This is the starting point of any educational process, whether inside the university or outside of it, in social movements, for example. The starting point are the specific demands posed by the sociocultural context in which each individual is embedded. It is a central educational principle that guides me.

Another issue is the centrality of interactions. The more comfortable an individual feels in the group they are in, the more they expose themselves and engage with the group, the more open they are to the learning process. For me, this also becomes a principle, a fundamental dimension that I learned from these experiences. In other words, if a person does not feel comfortable in a space, it is very difficult for them to establish an educational relationship in that space. If they are completely tense and insecure, they will not open up or engage.

Another aspect that is the foundation of popular education itself, of a whole set of elaborations within a critical pedagogy, is the idea of the centrality of experience. That is, the educational process starts from the concrete reality in which the learner is situated. Experience is understood in a broad sense, as what you do, what touches you, what moves you toward a greater elaboration. This implies recognizing the knowledges, the knowledges of each individual. For example, for my entire life I taught at the university in the area of teaching practice, and the starting point was the experience [each student] had in school. How do you think you learned? Who was the most significant teacher you had? Why were they significant? Who was the least significant teacher? Why? What was their attitude? In other words, the reflection on a person's educational experience as a principle from which they reflect on their own pedagogical process.

Then there is another challenge. How to relate the knowledge they already bring, from these experiences, with the knowledge I also bring? In the educational process, in the Teaching Practice subject, I tried to reflect with the future teachers on the vision of education they brought through readings, videos, and other activities that introduce new elements to their knowledge, but starting from the recognition and appreciation of their own knowledge. The creation of reflexive situations is made through the act of reflecting on oneself and on one's own experience. I believe that one of the great challenges we have in teacher education is this division between theory and practice. You teach everything to this young person and then you have them practice it. It is the incorporation of what we call meaningful learning. That is, you only learn when you can give meaning to the content you're dealing with. This is also a very important dimension in the practice of popular education. The meaning of the teaching-learning process is not only given by the theoretical dimension, but also by the way I make it concrete in an educational practice.

Another point that stands out to me, which was a key learning from all this period of popular education practice, is the dimension of autonomy. The learner is involved, participates, and is the protagonist in their own learning process.

Besides that, another very important aspect, which is difficult for us teachers, but which we need to be very attentive to, is the dimension of active listening that tries to grasp what the other is saying, stimulating the other's reflexivity based on the questions raised by them. It is a matter of recognizing the other as a subject who brings elements that make sense to them and that will strengthen their formation.

Another thing that was central for me is the fact that I lived there with people from popular classes, with whom I became friends, living in close proximity with people from another culture. This was, for me, a fundamental exercise in building horizontal relationships. That is, not recognizing the other as a "poor thing", but placing oneself in front of the other as someone who is together, building something in that moment. I emphasize this a lot because there is a tendency for the teacher to be the center of the educational process in the classroom. And even more so in the university than in basic education. Academic knowledge is seen as something much more elaborate compared to other forms of knowledge, which often leads you to assume a posture of superiority in relation to the students. It is that story of recognizing the prejudice you have. Where does your prejudice lie? I believe it is very important for us to become aware of the prejudices we have in the teacher-student relationship. All of this we could refer to as "affection" in Paulo Freire (1996). That is, this does not happen without affection. Therefore, the affective relationships that are established are important for the educational process.

Based on all this experience, from your trajectory, what can we think in terms of teaching in Brazilian universities today? What lessons can we draw?

I think the first thing we need to consider is that the university is a reflection of society. If we live in an authoritarian, conservative, military, and dictatorial society, the university tends to be as well. There is a conservative bias present here, which I attribute to slavery and the colonization process of the Americas. Our elites have always been very competent in their ability to adapt to new realities. We need to be very careful not to passively accept that our society is conservative. It was built to be conservative. And this is reflected in the university.

I believe we are dealing with a dispute of educational conceptions in universities. In this dispute, there is a tendency to reproduce the values and principles of an unequal, hierarchical, and authoritarian society. This dimension of authoritarianism is very strong for us as teachers. In my school experience, the teacher was the only one allowed to speak. It was he who imposed silence, he who conducted the classroom. We were nothing. And in my

experience as a student at the university, it was much the same, as we were seen as those who had to learn. We didn't know anything, and nothing of what we knew was taken into account. In other words, it was the opposite of what my experience in popular educational processes taught me. When we change this approach a bit in everyday schooling, there is total estrangement, because there is a common sense that the teacher is the one who knows, and I am the one who learns.

Another point we need to be very attentive to is the great emphasis placed on research, which implies the construction of knowledge that often does not translate into the teaching dimension. Furthermore, research is also very technically constructed.

What stands out is that you abandon the approach you take in the research process when it comes to teaching: the encouragement of curiosity, the problematization of reality, a constant investigative posture... I believe this is a result of a content-based structure. The university curriculum structure is extremely rigid, which connects research and teaching very little. I have experienced three curricular reforms in Pedagogy. There is a battle to create a communication bridge between disciplines. And still, in practice, you cannot implement it. This rigid structure is internalized, and there is a difficulty in building a transdisciplinary curriculum. This tends to make you ignore the very reality of the students. For example, Pedagogy, even before affirmative action, has always been a space for access of people from popular backgrounds in universities. So, the person who enters Pedagogy comes with real learning deficiencies. Deficiencies in instrumental skills such as reading, knowing how to read, knowing how to synthesize, knowing how to translate their experiences into written language. And the professor and the curriculum do not take this into account. They treat everyone with the same logic. I believe, for example, that we have made great progress with affirmative action, but we have made very little progress in recognizing the importance of taking this diversity into account in the teaching context. In other words, this person who arrives, arrives with their own needs that the university should address and not exclude. The university structure is opening up, but this opening is still slow to reach the teaching level.

Another thing that is very complex in the university is that, despite the discourse of the triad of teaching, research and extension, in practice this does not happen. In practice, research comes first, followed by extension and teaching, fighting for second and third place. With the risk that extension becomes something formal. What we see is that we begin to see deviations in this area. So, extension, which should be the privileged space for the university's relationship with society, becomes a space to develop proposals that are inherent to the course itself.

We cannot forget to consider the advances that have occurred largely due to the internal pressures of these disputes. The Intercultural Training for Indigenous Educators (FIEI), the

Licentiate Degree in Rural Education (Lecampo), and the Transversal Training experiences at UFMG, for example, bring significant advances for teacher training. It is unfortunate that there is little dialogue with Pedagogy, so that it can incorporate these teaching advances, because these initiatives work with a totally flexible curriculum structure, much broader than just with subjects. They have a lot to teach us.

And the extension itself too... I believe that the actions developed by the Youth Observatory (OJ)... Do you want better teacher training than what the Interagindo Project offers?⁵ From the testimonies of those who participated in this project, it provides a training experience that deeply marks their personal and academic trajectory.

In this sense, the university is still very lagging when it comes to forming a critical consciousness in students. Apart from a few islands, the spaces for building critical reflection on one's own reality, on one's own future profession, whatever it may be, are very limited. In the current context of societal polarization, there are young people who lack the basic elements to take a more critical stance on what is happening. So, I believe the university must be a space for reflexivity and action on its own reality. I would say it's not just a matter of content, but of how to share experiences. Because an authoritarian professor may speak critically about Brazilian reality, but then what? How does that translate into academic practice, that is, into the experience of the university student? This experience is what can help form critical subjects. I see, for example, the occupation experiences at the university in 2016. What did that mean as a space of formation for those who participated? In the analysis of the school occupations in 2015 and 2016, the individual formation impact is very evident.

Juarez, to conclude our dialogue, could you comment on the current context of the far-right, the authoritarianism, and the attacks on universities? How do you see this movement, and how does it relate to the discussion we are having?

First, we should remember that the Brazilian university was the last to be established compared to other countries in Latin America. In this sense, there is already an elitist perspective. For centuries, the elite sent their children to Europe to study. Those from here didn't need education. This is a reflection of an authoritarian, unequal society that wants to ensure access to knowledge and a critical stance for their own children, not for society as a whole. I think the expansion of universities in the 2000s reflects this to some extent. The expansion of universities became a progressive action. What should be a universal right became an action, in the ideological dispute, of one of the sides of this dispute. It is no coincidence that one of the first things the Bolsonaro government did was cut education

⁵ See: DAYRELL, Juarez. *Por uma pedagogia das juventudes: experiências educativas do Observatório da Juventude da UFMG*. Belo Horizonte, Maza, 2017.

funding and undermine teaching. All the proposals we see today for public education in states like São Paulo, for example, are about returning to that authoritarianism. It is about placing police, military-civic schools, curricula that cannot address LGBTQIAPN+ issues. In other words, it is about curbing knowledge. And there is a whole discourse from the right-wing today that education should be the primary space for ideological dispute.

In the National Congress and throughout society, they are trying to cut off the possibility of an education that allows for questioning reality, of an education that equips you to develop a more effective action in society. As we said before, to create a democratic culture in the university, you have to incorporate democratic actions into your daily life.

The more we incorporate democratic practices into the university, the more we contribute to the formation of a more democratic and less authoritarian society. This, for me, is the great challenge. The management of teaching goes through the democratic experience. I believe this idea of conscientization, in Paulo Freire's perspective (1982), is crucial here. That is, to make sure that, regardless of the area of knowledge, regardless of the level of value given to each course, the university assumes its role in contributing to the critical formation of citizens. I believe we could contribute a great deal in this regard.

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Popular education and military dictatorship: challenges and perspectives for teaching in higher education in an interview with Juarez Dayrell

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