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## Schools in/from the field during and after the Covid-19 pandemic in the State of Paraná

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**Abstract:** This work aims to characterize education in field schools during the Covid-19 pandemic in Paraná, through documentary study. It takes as references two research reports: one produced by the Paranaense Articulation for Field Education (APECPR) and published by the Association for Studies, Guidance and Rural Assistance (Assesoar, 2022); and the other produced by the Research Center on Field Education, Social Movements and Pedagogical Practices (Nupecamp, 2020). These studies investigated the 10 geographical regions of the state and highlighted the inequalities, contradictions and challenges of pedagogical practice and educational policies. They consist of oral reports from teachers about pedagogical practice and analyses of state documents elaborated during the pandemic. The analysis of documentary content was anchored in the categories of the historical-dialectical materialist method: totality, mediation and contradiction. The conclusion is that education in field schools, during the pandemic, faced pedagogical, political, social and infrastructural challenges, and revealed unequal processes that mark Brazilian education. After the pandemic, there has been a consolidation of the platformization of teaching, the precarization and overload of teachers' work, as well as the weakening of pedagogical practice. From a historical perspective, the logic of Rural Education is reproduced and renamed as Field Education in governmental political discourse. Field schools are in movement in the construction of their political-pedagogical identity and the effort has come from communities and education professionals who understand the political-pedagogical meaning of the Field Education conception.

**Keywords:** field school; pandemic; pedagogical practice.

### 1 Introduction

This paper portrays the inequality and contradictions faced by Field Schools in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic period in the state of Paraná, Brazil. The main objective is to problematize the findings of a study conducted in Paraná on education during this period, across the state's 10 geographic regions. The investigation is grounded in the historical-dialectical materialist method, which enables an understanding of the relationships between totality, contradiction, and mediation (Kosik, 1976; Marx, 2011). It is a documentary-based study, as defined by Cellard (2008), focusing on records of educational practices and policies.

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The historical-dialectical materialist method underpins the analysis, allowing the interpretation of data in light of the structural contradictions of capitalist society, especially in the relationships between countryside and city, and public and private spheres (Marx, 2011; Kosik, 1976). The aim is to unveil the dynamics that structure the reality of field education in the state of Paraná.

Two documents were analyzed in this research. The first is a report produced by the Articulação Paranaense Por uma Educação do Campo (Paraná Coalition for Field Education – APECPR), published by the Association for Rural Studies, Guidance, and Assistance (Assesoar, 2022). The second is a report by the Research Center on Field Education, Social Movements, and Pedagogical Practices (Nupecamp), affiliated with Tuiuti University of Paraná.

These studies play a central role in the production of knowledge about Field Education in Paraná during the pandemic. They were collectively produced by researchers from universities that are part of APECPR, in dialogue with rural social movements, as well as with teachers, principals, and pedagogical teams from municipal and state schools located in the countryside.

The reports were chosen as the foundation of this article because they result from complementary investigations and are the only ones in the state of Paraná that cover the entire territory. The first provides a comprehensive analysis of the educational reality in the 10 geographic mesoregions of the state, using both quantitative and qualitative data. The second brings forth the voices of teachers, highlighting their practices, challenges, and forms of resistance.

Bringing the results of these studies to light means not only exposing the data that reveal educational inequalities but also reflecting on how these inequalities are structurally constituted through the contradictions of the current societal model, guided by the logic of capital and the subordination of rural populations' interests.

This article contributes to the understanding that, under the logic of capital, school closures, the platformization of education, and the State's withdrawal from its responsibilities are interconnected strategies that deepen inequality and further precarize the lives of rural populations. From this perspective, it is not merely a matter of describing the data, but of understanding how economic, social, and political determinants affect the organization of schools located in the countryside, especially during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

The text is anchored in the concept of Field Education developed within social movements since 1998, and in the categories of totality and contradiction. These frameworks make it possible to grasp the structural and situational issues affecting Brazilian education, particularly the reality of public schools in the countryside.

It draws on the work of Souza (2016a), who contrasts Rural Education with Field Education. The author emphasizes that the former is centered on decisions made by government authorities without dialogue with communities and social movements, whereas the latter is the result of collective practices within the National Movement for Field Education. Thus, Field Education presupposes that public policy and political-pedagogical projects must be built in dialogue with the people of the countryside.

Field Education is the result of struggles for agrarian reform and for a societal project aimed at overcoming inequality and social exclusion. In this sense, it supports family farming and a sustainable way of life and work on the land, in the waters, and in the forests.

In this article, it is acknowledged that schools are still not of the countryside; they are merely in the countryside. Many are public schools operating in locations where the State still reflects a patrimonialist perspective—that is, mediating the interests of the dominant classes in politics and economics.

A school of the countryside is one whose political-pedagogical identity is collectively built. In Paraná, state high schools are officially designated as “field schools,” as are most municipal schools. However, not all of them are constituted as schools of the countryside according to the principles of Field Education.

The difficulties faced by many rural schools during the pandemic reveal that they remain predominantly under the influence of Rural Education. In regions where rural social movements are strong, schools tend to organize their pedagogical practices around the principles of Field Education. These principles are presented in the works of Caldart (2009), Souza (2016a; 2016b), Molina and Hage (2019), and various documents produced in Brazil since 1998, when, as Caldart (2009) writes, the term “Field Education” was formally adopted.

The pandemic context revealed the contradiction between the historical need for knowledge acquisition and the limitations imposed by sanitary isolation. Geographical distancing, essential for containing the virus, did not curb the

determination and courage of education professionals who, despite uncertainties, continued to assist students remotely using their own resources.

In this scenario, teachers stood at the forefront alongside doctors, public health specialists, and nurses in facing the many challenges, such as digital literacy and information infrastructure. In many areas, remote teaching never took place, and printed materials were distributed instead. Accessing and staying engaged in remote learning proved difficult, as materials depended on Wi-Fi access, not always available, or on mobile phone coverage, as well as on families' financial situations. Printed activities required family support, which was hindered by low schooling levels and a lack of digital literacy—factors that made pedagogical support at home particularly challenging.

This article is organized into three thematic sections, in addition to the introduction and final considerations. The first section emphasizes the 10 geographic mesoregions of the state of Paraná, aiming to map them and reflect on territory, diversity, and rurality. The classification of the state into mesoregions is provided by the Paraná Institute for Economic and Social Development (IPARDES), based on geographic, political, and economic territorial history. The second section addresses the policies and practices experienced in field schools across these mesoregions, based on data collected by APECPR and published in Assesoar (2022) on the pandemic context. The third and final section identifies common aspects across the regions in order to highlight the inequalities and contradictions affecting education for rural, riverside, forest, and traditional communities—such as the faxinalenses in the state of Paraná.

Paraná ranks among the states with the highest Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) in 2021. However, this figure conceals the educational reality of rural peoples, since most field schools do not participate in the Prova Brasil (Brazil Exam), one of the tools of the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB), which defines the development index of each school, municipality, and state. Furthermore, the race to achieve better scores has impacted pedagogical practices, resulting in repetitive training in Portuguese and Mathematics, sidelining subjects such as History and Geography. These training sessions are part of a competitive, classificatory educational policy, tied to market interests—dynamics thoroughly analyzed by Freitas (2024) in his studies on educational reform.

## 2 The Mesoregions of Paraná and Field Education

The state of Paraná has 399 municipalities, distributed across 10 mesoregions, namely: Northwest Paraná (61 municipalities); Central-West (25); North-Central (79); Pioneer North (46); Central-East (14); Curitiba Metropolitan Area/Coast (37); Western Paraná (50); Southwest (42); Central-South (24); and Southeast (21). There are eight metropolitan regions in the state: Curitiba, Apucarana, Campo Mourão, Cascavel, Londrina, Maringá, Toledo, and Umuarama. The Paraná Institute for Economic and Social Development (IPARDES) groups municipalities into various regions, including the geographic region, which compiles data on education, demographics, health, agriculture, and more.

With a population density of 59.16 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, the state is considered predominantly rural, according to discussions by Veiga (2003) and Verde (2004). Agribusiness-related activities are promoted by the state government. Amid the grain production for export, there are communities of small farmers, fishers, and Indigenous peoples. These communities face challenges related to education, health, transportation, road conditions, and more.

According to IPARDES (2024), 11.35% of the population in Paraná is elderly. In rural areas, aging poses particular challenges due to difficulties in accessing healthcare and ensuring safety, a reality consistent with broader national patterns. Populations such as family farmers, fishers, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, and faxinalenses remain in the countryside, often with little support from municipal, state, or federal governments.

In 2000, the Paraná Coalition for Field Education (APECPR) was created to advocate for Field Education. It is composed of 22 collectives, including social movements, universities, and research groups, and is affiliated with the National Forum for Field Education (FONEC). In 2003, the State Coordination for Field Education was established within the Paraná State Department of Education. From 2003 to 2010, the Coordination worked actively with APECPR on symposia, seminars, curricular guidelines for Field Education, and the development of documents supporting the identity and political-pedagogical projects of field schools.

From 2011 to 2025, Field Education has remained on the margins of state education policy, amid the growing closure of public schools and the privatization of

education. During the pandemic, APECPR closely monitored the provision of education in field schools and led research across the 10 mesoregions to identify issues, challenges, and collective experiences.

The 10 mesoregions are marked by economic, cultural, demographic, gender, and age-related diversity. Public policies are needed to strengthen this diversity from a multidisciplinary perspective and foster dialogue across state departments. Likewise, educational strategies and curricula must be developed to address diversity and serve the peoples of the countryside, rivers, and forests. These issues must be addressed by policymakers at the municipal, state, and federal levels, in conjunction with Municipal and State Education Councils and school communities, to reduce social inequalities and contribute to the construction of a new rural and human development project.

Based on the research report (Assesoar, 2022), it is clear that social and educational inequalities were exacerbated during the pandemic. The report also identifies business interests in providing teaching materials, organizing assessments, and building digital platforms. The devaluation of education and its professionals has occurred alongside the increasing valorization of business initiatives in the school system. Constant vigilance by state and national collectives has been necessary to resist the continued privatization of education and the erosion of a social right secured through union and social movement struggles.

According to geographic data from IPARDES (2024), the regions are characterized as follows:

1) Central-Eastern Region: Estimated population in 2024 is 782,261, with 667,481 urban and 90,640 rural residents. It covers 21,858.396 km<sup>2</sup> and includes 14 municipalities: Arapoti, Carambeí, Castro, Imbaú, Jaguariaíva, Ortigueira, Palmeira, Piraí do Sul, Ponta Grossa, Reserva, Sengés, Telêmaco Borba, Tibagi, and Ventania. The population density is 35.73 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, indicating a significant rural character. Four of Paraná's ten largest municipalities in territorial extension are in this region: Castro, Ponta Grossa, Ortigueira, and Tibagi. These municipalities struggle with the implementation of educational policies. The policy of closing field schools has intensified, and school transportation to urban centers has expanded accordingly.

2) Central-Southern Paraná Region: Estimated population is 471,075, with 332,274 urban and 128,462 rural residents. It comprises 24 municipalities and spans



21,072.767 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of 22.36 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Guarapuava is the largest municipality in Paraná by territorial area.

3) Curitiba Metropolitan and Coastal Region: Composed of 37 municipalities with a total population of 4,014,616, including 3,620,963 urban and 244,798 rural/island inhabitants. It covers 23,104.968 km<sup>2</sup> with a density of 173.76 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Curitiba has the highest population concentration. The region features wide socioterritorial diversity and deep inequalities, with the highest (Curitiba) and lowest (Doutor Ulysses) Human Development Index (HDI) in the state.

4) Northwest Paraná Region: Comprising 61 municipalities with an estimated population of 745,124—643,345 urban and 82,884 rural inhabitants. It spans 24,759.484 km<sup>2</sup> with a population density of 30.09 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

5) North-Central Paraná Region: Composed of 79 municipalities across eight microregions (Apucarana, Astorga, Faxinal, Florai, Ivaiporã, Londrina, Maringá, and Porecatu). It covers 24,552.971 km<sup>2</sup>, with a density of 95.78 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of 2,351,769—2,143,517 urban and 128,103 rural residents.

6) Western Paraná Region: Consists of 50 municipalities within the Cascavel, Toledo, and Foz do Iguaçu microregions. The total area is 22,858.445 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of 63.71 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of 1,456,312—1,251,479 urban and 151,787 rural residents.

7) Pioneer North Region: Comprising 46 municipalities, this region spans 15,733.641 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population density of 35.28 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The estimated population is 555,045—459,169 urban and 87,018 rural. Despite not having the lowest density, the region is marked by rurality and small-scale farming, along with agribusiness activities such as pine cultivation and grain production.

8) Southwest Paraná Region: Made up of 42 municipalities, it covers 16,988.401 km<sup>2</sup> and has an estimated population of 684,363—506,730 urban and 155,949 rural. This region is known for land occupations by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) since the 1980s. Francisco Beltrão, a key municipality in the region, is home to Assesoar, which has supported family farming communities since the 1960s.

9) Central-Western Region: Comprising 25 municipalities, including Campo Mourão and Goioerê, this region spans 11,940.431 km<sup>2</sup> with a density of 29.21 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The estimated population is 348,796—297,726 urban and 44,205 rural.

10) Southeastern Region: Includes 21 municipalities such as Prudentópolis, which has the highest number of field schools in the state. The region has an estimated population of 684,363, with 506,730 urban and 155,949 rural residents, covering 16,988.401 km<sup>2</sup> and a density of 40.28 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

This geographic characterization is essential to understanding the inequalities and challenges in ensuring the right to education. Considering local populations and territorial specificities is a prerequisite for effective public policy design and implementation. It is up to education administrators to understand local particularities and engage in dialogue with the diverse communities that live and work on the land, in the waters, and in the forests.

During the pandemic, the isolation of these communities became stark, along with their social and economic vulnerabilities. The implementation of health and education policies was weakened despite the dedication of professionals striving to ensure that no citizen was left without classes or vaccination.

Pedagogically, it was observed that the adoption of teaching methodologies inspired by Paulo Freire could have mitigated feelings of isolation by restoring dialogue as a transformative principle (Freire, 1996). However, the lack of adequate ongoing teacher training and the fragile coordination among federal, state, and municipal governments compromised the cohesion of education systems and hindered the development of recovery strategies that were both equitable and effective (UNESCO, 2020). Finally, a noteworthy factor is that most municipalities do not have a deliberative Municipal Education Council. As a result, they largely adopted and replicated state guidelines in both educational policies and pedagogical practices.

In the next section, the paper will present the experiences and challenges faced by field schools during the pandemic across Paraná's ten mesoregions.

### **3 Field Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the State of Paraná**

Brazil has 51,889 active schools in rural areas (Inep, 2024). In the state of Paraná, there are 1,205 active schools, a significant decrease compared to 10 years ago when the total exceeded 2,000 schools. Contradictorily, the Central-Eastern Region, despite containing four of the 10 largest municipalities in territorial extension in the state, has few field schools.



According to the APECPR report (2022), this region recorded 108 public schools located in the field and 425 in urban areas. In the region, there are 2 indigenous schools and 4 Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers (CMEIs) in the field. In the municipality of Ponta Grossa, all field schools operate full-time. The municipalities of Arapoti, Castro, Jaguariaíva, Piraí do Sul, and Reserva have multi-grade schools, and the municipality of Sengés has schools with multi-grade classes.

In 2020, in the Central-Eastern region, there were 289 children enrolled in the 4 Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers (CMEIs). The municipal network had 60 schools, totaling 6,496 enrollments. The state network was composed of 42 colleges, with 7,586 enrollments. There were also 2 indigenous schools, serving 251 students.

The organization of pedagogical work during the pandemic in these municipalities was marked by remote activities, such as video lessons broadcast via television channels, YouTube, and the Classroom application. For students who did not have access to technological resources (TV or internet), printed material was delivered on the day school meals were picked up, with a schedule organized for families to come to the school.

Communication with students was done through the WhatsApp application, which allowed sending and receiving messages, notices about material delivery, and answering questions they encountered while doing activities. Materials were delivered to the homes of students in hard-to-reach areas. There are reports from education professionals demonstrating fatigue, the bureaucratization of activities, the absence of students on platforms, disregard for learning, the intensification of work performed by teachers, pedagogical coordinators, and directors, in addition to the financial difficulties of families.

Ultimately, professionals report the expansion of educational inequalities in contrast to the closer relationship between teachers and pedagogical coordinators with families and students, who show recognition and appreciation for education professionals. Also, family members were overburdened with activities; many came home late, already tired, and could not reconcile work with sitting down with their children to deal with school activities. The municipalities followed state regulations expressed in decrees, resolutions, instructions, or advisories. Resolution No. 1,016 of April 3, 2020, is one of the documents mentioned by education professionals, which defined procedural norms during the pandemic for remote classes (Paraná, 2020).

In the Central-South Paraná Region, only the municipality of Virmond does not have field schools. There are 253 schools located in urban areas and 190 in the field, with 114 municipal schools enrolling 10,591 students; 64 state colleges enrolling 14,703 students; 11 indigenous schools enrolling 1,004 students; and 1 CMEI with 65 enrolled children.

In this region, the inequality in the provision of Early Childhood Education is notable, since, among 190 field schools, only one is a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center. Although national and state documents express the right of children to early childhood education, it is considered that childhood in the field has been neglected.

There is a contradiction between what is stipulated in legislation and what is presented in reality, highlighting the need for a reorganization of public policies, particularly in regions with low demographic density municipalities and a diverse rural population, such as Quilombola, Faxinalense, and indigenous communities. Children are in the field, and CMEIs are in the city.

In some cases, schools offering the initial years of elementary education are "adapted" to serve children from 2 years of age. Regarding pedagogical work in the context of the pandemic, the means used for remote teaching in municipal and state field schools in the Central-South region of Paraná were: printed material, in both state and municipal networks; and the use of WhatsApp and Facebook.

The state education network provided its classes on open TV, YouTube, and the "Aula Paraná" application. The main means of interaction between educators and students was the Google Classroom platform, a tool used to start video calls, create and manage classes, activities, add videos, slides, and other materials. The research team identified that, in this region, there is difficulty with the identity of the field school and with Early Childhood Education.

As in other regions, educational inequalities became very visible in the municipalities, especially due to the difficulty of access and use of digital means provided by the State by field students. This reality reflects political projects that marginalize family farming and its subjects. In this sense, the pandemic exposed fragilities in the realization of rights such as education, health, and transport.

In the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba and the Coast, out of 37 municipalities, only 4 do not have field schools. They are: Curitiba, Matinhos, Pinhais, and Porto

Amazonas. There are 24 CMEIs in the field, with 3,521 enrolled children; 228 municipal schools, with 19,461 enrollments; 53 state colleges, with 14,720 enrollments; and 5 indigenous schools, with 110 students, totaling 310 field schools. It is registered that, in the region, there are many schools with administrative duality, meaning an establishment that has municipal classes during one period of the day and state classes during another period.

According to the data survey, there are only specific CMEIs in the field serving children from 0 to 3 years old in the municipalities of Araucária, Campina Grande do Sul, Campo do Tenente, Campo Largo, Colombo, Paranaguá, Piên, Piraquara, Rio Negro, São José dos Pinhais, Tijucas do Sul, and Tunas do Paraná, totaling 12 municipalities. From the age of 4, children attend elementary school, making it difficult for working mothers, as there is no full-time care in Kindergarten IV and V. The bathrooms, cafeteria, and classrooms are not adapted, only the children's tables are highlighted.

Therefore, it is reiterated that Field Early Childhood Education needs attention in terms of public policies so that the provision has the necessary quality for the effectiveness of the social right. Families end up leaving their children with grandparents to work or pay neighbors to take care of them. Often, children travel to urban CMEIs, a tiring journey for those just starting the schooling process.

Some municipal schools group Kindergarten IV and V students (multi-grade class), for example, in the municipalities of Doutor Ulysses, Cerro Azul, and Rio Branco do Sul. It is found that, in some field schools, there is still no Kindergarten IV and V care, and children need to travel from their communities by school transport, taking from 40 minutes to 1 hour and a half to reach the place where Early Childhood Education is offered.

The invisibility of younger children by the State is observed, denying access to the right to Field Early Childhood Education compared to the care of children in urban areas, where there is also a lack of daycare vacancies, precarious infrastructure, among other disregards for childhood. Another aspect observed in the research refers to the Multi-Year proposal, a form of organization of pedagogical work forwarded by the Paraná State Department of Education (SEED/PR), which began to be implemented, from February 2020, in several field schools.

What is proposed by the multi-year approach is a precarious multi-grade system. This is because it places classes of different years—for example, 6th and 7th grades or 8th and 9th grades—in the same room, with the same teacher, who needs to adapt content to work with both classes at the same time. In this context, there is an absence of continuous teacher training, a lack of didactic-pedagogical materials, low investment in infrastructure, poor and/or deficient methodological approaches in terms of support for effective learning, among other issues.

Reports from teachers, in research carried out by Nupecamp (2020), indicate that there is an emptying of the theoretical debate of the proposal, as the focus is on reducing investments in schools that have a student contingent of less than 40 students. A possible analysis is that this proposal strengthens the destabilization of field schools, promoting their closure, centralization, and displacement of students to other schools.

The image of the field as a place of deficient school education is still widely disseminated socially. According to Arroyo (2010, p. 10), the "[...] such negative images of the field and its schools had and have a perverse political intentionality: to reduce the field, its forms of existence and the production of its peoples to non-existence."

On the coast of Paraná, it is observed that schools in communities are already being threatened with closure, and what still guarantees their operation is community organization and struggle. However, the strategies on the part of the maintaining entity to weaken school actions, the lack of investment in structural repairs, didactic materials, the absence of incentives such as teacher training, career and salary plans, and working conditions, facilitate the school community's acceptance of centralizing schools and transferring students to municipal centers.

In communities of artisanal fishermen and island residents with fewer students, the closure of schools has contributed to the destabilization process of these communities. This measure favors the interdiction of their lives in these territories, with the support and approval of public power in alliance with private initiative.

In the Northwest Region of Paraná, there were difficulties in collecting data, and some responses were obtained only via email. Reports from education secretaries, school principals, pedagogical coordinators (pedagogues), school transport chiefs, and teachers reveal that field students encountered difficulties in accessing materials

prepared in schools and delivered fortnightly by pedagogical teams to children and adolescents.

The research also showed that many field schools were closed and that children are transported to the city. Two aspects are noteworthy: the exclusion or marginalization of rural populations in public policies and the intensification of school transport. Many field schools have been closed since the military government, and thousands of school buses have been acquired by municipalities and used to transport children within the field and between the field and the city. The closure of field schools has been significant in the Northwest region, which is eminently rural in the context of Paraná.

By revealing difficulties of access during the pandemic, a new front of school closure actions is opened, instead of allocating more investments to facilitate the lives of field children and youth. The greatest contradiction in Brazil is the concentration of land and the low valuation of life and work in the countryside, in the waters, and in the forests, due to the neglect of accessibility, education, health, and family farming policies.

In the North Central Region of Paraná, there are 151 field schools, including CMEIs, municipal schools, state schools (including indigenous schools, Itinerant Schools, and Rural Family Homes), and one private confessional school. There is one private school in a rural area in this region. The data survey from the APECPR report available in Assesoar (2022) shows that the organization of pedagogical work during the pandemic was marked by kits of activities directed for students to do at home and return on pre-established dates (generally, every week or 15 days).

In cases where guardians could not pick them up, municipalities organized for a professional (teacher, coordinator, director, or driver) to take the printed activities to the students' homes. In the state network, activities took place through a smartphone or computer application, access to the website and YouTube channel, and on open TV channels.

For students who did not have internet access, printed activities were sent. Regarding indigenous state schools, indigenous professionals guided the students' guardians at the schools, so that only these indigenous professionals were allowed access to the schools (Assesoar, 2022). As in other regions, it was found that students

in field schools faced numerous difficulties in accessing activities and services carried out via the internet (via YouTube, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp).

According to Assesoar (2022), in the West Region of Paraná, schools are called rural, multi-grade, district, camp, settlement, quilombo, island, faxinal, or belonging to traditional communities. The research revealed that there are a total of 195 schools identified as field schools and 675 located in the urban centers of the region's municipalities. Indigenous schools and CMEIs account for 8.3% of school institutions and represent 7% of total enrollments in 2020.

Among the field schools present in the region, the municipalities of Cascavel and Lindoeste have schools in agrarian reform settlement areas. In Lindoeste, the two institutions are the only field schools in the municipality. In Cascavel, there is the State Field College "Aprendendo com a Terra e Com a Vida" (Learning with the Land and with Life) and the Municipal School Zumbi dos Palmares, in the Valmir Mota de Oliveira Settlement. Cascavel also has two schools in communities affected by dams: the Municipal School and the State College São Francisco de Assis. In the municipality of Catanduvas, in the São Marcos Resettlement, two schools for resettled families are located: the Municipal School and the State College São Marcos (Assesoar, 2022, p. 215).

There are agricultural colleges in the region and schools located in the city that have a "field" identity, due to receiving predominantly students who live in the field. In the West Region of Paraná, there are 13 CMEIs located in the field, especially in rural districts. There are 86 municipal schools, with 9,000 enrollments; 91 state colleges, with 11,277 enrolled students, and 5 indigenous schools, with 647 enrolled students. In total, there are 195 schools located in the field and 675 in the cities (Assesoar, 2022, p. 216-217).

In the Northern Pioneer Region of Paraná, data collection was carried out in 33 municipalities. It was found that Field Education presents a series of adaptations announced by municipal and state public authorities as a way to guarantee access to education during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include: 1) Classes via the Aula Paraná application; 2) WhatsApp groups for school-student/family communication; 3) Printed didactic material for students without regular internet access, including public servants making themselves available to take the material to the student (Assesoar, 2022).



As in other regions, a significant portion of students do not have regular internet access. The research highlights the need to consider the quality of the work developed, since satisfactory performance of remote education presupposes internet access and adequate equipment, such as a computer.

A phenomenon identified by the research was the closure of field schools and the transport of their respective students to urban schools. Approximately 7.5% are in this condition, totaling 253 students. This fact does not stem from the advent of the pandemic, but from a previous process. In the municipality of Jacarezinho, for example, there is a camp and a settlement coordinated by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which organize an Itinerant School as a way to guarantee field education for workers and their children.

In the 33 municipalities where the research was conducted, there are: 11 CMEIs in the field, with 505 enrolled; 22 Municipal Elementary Schools, with 984 enrolled; 24 State Schools, with 1,571 enrolled; 5 State Indigenous Schools, with 169 enrolled; and 1 Itinerant State School, with 60 enrolled.

The Southwest Region of Paraná is organized into 3 Regional Education Centers – NRE: Francisco Beltrão, with 20 municipalities; Pato Branco, with 15 municipalities; and Dois Vizinhos, with 7 municipalities, totaling 42 municipalities. The region has 4 micro-regions and a Regional Forum responsible for political actions and articulations. The 4 micro-regions are: Fronteira, which encompasses border municipalities and those close to the border with Argentina; Vale do Iguaçu, which encompasses municipalities circumscribed by the course of the Iguaçu River; Marrecas, which encompasses municipalities circumscribed by the course of the Marrecas River and its tributaries; and the Pinhais micro-region, which encompasses municipalities circumscribed by the area with greater density of Araucaria forest (Assesoar, 2022).

There are 190 field schools. A total of 10 municipalities do not have field schools, which represents 24% of the municipalities. These municipalities displace field students to schools in the headquarters, as they are municipalities with a population of up to 6,859 inhabitants. Education during the pandemic and its implications in the Southwest region further accentuated a set of threats and fragilities for field schools, farming communities, educators, and students. These threats are in all orders:

pedagogical work and curricular organization, administration and management, as well as political and financial (Assesoar, 2022).

In the Central-Western Region, there are no field schools in 7 municipalities: Altamira do Paraná, Corumbataí do Sul, Farol, Fênix, Janiópolis, Quinta do Sol, and Rancho Alegre D'Oeste. The policy of closing field schools has been continuous. There are 2 CMEIs in the field, with a total of 123 students. In this region, care for field children is also practically invisible. Many schools operate with administrative duality, with the school building being used by both state and municipal networks. The nomenclature of schools has been changed to "field school," although there is a political-pedagogical fragility in the appropriation of the concept of Field Education.

Regarding pedagogical work during the pandemic, the research showed that conditions were precarious in terms of access to technologies, or even without access to them. This led to learning losses, either due to lack of access, the remote format of classes, families' difficulties in accompanying their children's studies, as well as the overload of work for educators, who, in several situations, provided online support (Classroom, WhatsApp) and with printed activities (Assesoar, 2022).

In the Southeast Region, as described in the Assesoar (2022) publication, there is a predominance of peasant family farming, with the sustainable and economically viable development of agricultural production and natural ecosystems. The communities are composed of indigenous people, faxinalenses, agrarian reform settlers, peasants, and quilombolas. The intensification of agribusiness in the production of soybeans, corn, eucalyptus, and tobacco, as well as in other regions of Paraná, has been observed.

During the pandemic, remote teaching was the alternative for the continuity of studies, although it was marked by the social inequality of the communities, such as access to internet connection, libraries, and books, as well as the absence of virtual learning environments. Problems similar to those in other regions were highlighted, such as the difficulty in accessing WhatsApp groups, video calls, online meetings, video lessons, etc. Restricted access to phone signals in the field is still a reality in the state of Paraná. During the pandemic, educational experiences that did not depend on connectivity were identified, such as the delivery of textbooks, handouts, and printed materials directly to field students.

According to Assesoar (2022), specific support actions for field school students during the period when classes were suspended occurred mainly through printed materials (100%), WhatsApp groups (90%), textbooks (43%), groups with parents, and recorded classes or video lessons (52%). All municipalities established communication to maintain connection with families and students, through guidance and activity schedules for parents, via WhatsApp, through school groups. Families not covered by this strategy were contacted by the pedagogical team via phone, notes, or home visits.

Aspects highlighted in the APECPR data survey, published by Assesoar (2022), include: infrastructure difficulties, the need to value peasant identity, flexibility in school organization, adaptation of the school calendar to agricultural cycle phases and climatic conditions, and social control through the effective participation of the community and rural social movements in decision-making. A flaw was also perceived in multi-grade schools and classrooms, mainly in the structure, the scarcity of adequate didactic material, and the lack of time to meet all students' needs in the classroom.

Another issue was the closure of schools, and how much this affects the teaching and learning of rural subjects. Many need to travel by school transport, also emphasizing that some of these schools deviate from the reality of these students, as they are located in urban areas, with pedagogical practices that little value rural culture, work, and life.

In summary, field schools, their students, families, and education professionals faced infrastructure challenges, such as phone signal, digital literacy, and road conditions. There were also difficulties related to the distance between families—especially in low-density demographic territories—and socioeconomic conditions.

In all regions, there are reports of the fragility of remote teaching and the overload of work for teachers. Recognizing the existence of children, youth, and the elderly in the field is one of the challenges in a country focused on urban relationships, which are also marked by challenges of sanitation, security, housing, violence, among other relevant issues.

By describing the policies and pedagogical practices implemented in the 10 mesoregions, the need to consider the territory and its subjects in the elaboration of public policies is evident. It is also necessary to observe the historical structural conditioning factors that generate social and regional disparities, such as land concentration and the clientelistic policy present in Brazilian society.

#### **4 Pedagogical practices during and post-Covid-19 pandemic: Field Schools in Paraná**

Based on the concept of Education and Field Education developed within social movements and systematized by Caldart (2009; 2024), it is possible to identify three major issues. First, the prevailing conception of the countryside in Brazil is marked, on one hand, by economic activities focused on agribusiness aimed at export production, and on the other, by family and peasant farming, which resists political, economic, and climatic adversities. Second, the conception of education and schools is centered around the urban world, resulting in policies of school closures and the expansion of school transportation networks. Third, state-level policies are moving towards the privatization of education.

In the state of Paraná, these issues are more acute, given the state government's disregard for Field Education experiences over the past 15 years. The same is true at the municipal level, as the vast majority of municipalities lack deliberative municipal education councils. As a result, state directives tend to be followed in most municipalities across Paraná.

The state includes municipalities with vast territorial areas and a diverse rural population that works with the land, water, and forests. Buczenko and Souza (2023) analyze the diversity of rural peoples in the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba and highlight their absence in municipal master plans. This contradiction is evident in education, where a generalized approach is taken to address educational problems in both rural and urban settings, leading to exclusion with respect to sociocultural diversity, the subjects involved, territories, and their specific ruralities. Social and union movements have been disregarded, as have the demands and struggles of teachers concerning working conditions, wages, and continuing education policies.

As stated in Assesoar (2022, pp. 231–233), digital platforms, tools, and remote education practices intensify school exclusion. This occurs not only due to the lack of universal access but also because of an instrumental, pragmatic educational conception that lacks meaningful content and formative possibilities. This situation particularly harms children from the working class, both in rural and urban areas.

By shifting the responsibility of mediation between teacher and student onto the family, remote learning not only undermines the role of teachers and students' right to

access knowledge but also creates an environment of pressure, parental stress, and psychological violence. Additionally, remote teaching has led to the precarization of teaching work, exposing educators to Covid-19, depriving them of guaranteed working conditions, and subjecting them to pressure and long working hours.

The deposition of a teacher reveals the reality experienced during the pandemic:

We need to be connected, in our homes, working remotely (which now demands hours far beyond the usual). We attend to parents, students, and colleagues. They ask us to record lessons and stories to connect with children who are so distant right now (how?? When?). We need to grade assignments with extreme care and sensitivity, because through them we'll have to evaluate our students (YES! Evaluate, even though trainings tell us it's not the time for that! The system demands it!). We need to notice the child who's struggling, contact families, and help in any way possible (at least, I try to provide as many pedagogical resources as possible for each specific need of my students). This was shared on social media by the teacher herself. As if that weren't enough, detailed reports of our steps in remote work are required, just to PROVE we're working! We're making up the hours from April (no, we weren't asked if we wanted to stop!! They closed our schools and sent us home!!!) now, we're working on Saturdays to reduce our negative (and non-existent!) time bank (because we don't know how it's recorded! We can't control our own lives!), not to mention the mandatory continuing education! We are not heard, we are not respected, and we don't have support from those who should be looking out for the collective rather than just themselves! The demands are huge! And our strength, ever diminishing (Assesoar, 2022, p. 232-233).

The teacher's testimony reveals the intensification and precarization of teaching work, as well as signs of illness and the advancing privatization of public education. It reiterates that the pandemic exposed deep social inequalities, especially among rural, riverine, and forest communities, as well as the urban poor living in the outskirts of cities.

After the pandemic, labor relations in schools became even more complex with the platformization of education, as teachers reported having to manage numerous reports, spreadsheets, and digital platforms (Nupecamp, 2020). Pedagogical coordinators also struggle to perform their actual roles, as they are increasingly tasked with bureaucratic control over pedagogical work through the completion of data sheets.

The consolidation of education platformization in the state of Paraná and the closure of rural schools are not isolated phenomena. Taken together, these developments express the contradiction between a vision of education as a social right and its commodification under the logic of capital accumulation (Mészáros, 2005).

The massive presence of private companies offering digital platforms and teaching materials reveals a clear trend toward the privatization of public education,

further deepening historical inequalities. This confirms Caldart's (2009) analysis that the struggle for Field Education is also a struggle against the advance of capital over territories and the rights of rural peoples.

Educational inequalities became particularly evident during the pandemic, especially in contexts where families with low levels of schooling were expected to assist students with schoolwork. Digital literacy requires specific public policies, as the challenges extend beyond the school environment and affect daily life, including commerce, banking, and healthcare platforms.

And what about pedagogical practices? Drawing on Souza's (2016c) reflection on the multiple determinations of pedagogical practice, it is clear that teachers went to great lengths during the pandemic to ensure the continuity of children's and young people's education, especially in rural areas.

Among the factors shaping pedagogical practices during this period were: countless official documents guiding remote teaching; monitoring mechanisms; imposed or nonexistent teaching materials; intensified workloads beyond contracted hours; geographical distance and limited access to communities and students; and various mechanisms for assessing academic performance, among many others.

Pedagogical practice, as a dimension of social practice, was realized through individual and collective efforts to ensure that no child was left without educational materials. In this sense, it can be said that the formative process continued due to the collective intentionality of its subjects—teachers and students. Despite the fragility of the educational process, all regions recorded the presence of remote teaching, the distribution and collection of printed materials, video lessons, and digital tools provided by the state, which functioned only where cell signal access was available.

A statement by a teacher, recorded in the Nupecamp (2020) research report and cited in Souza, Pereira, and Fontana (2020), captures the contradiction that plagued pedagogical practice during the pandemic. The teacher described feeling exhausted by repetitive work, likening it to an assembly line. Reflecting on the pandemic period, she said:

I feel like I'm on a production line that will produce nothing! On the contrary, this will be a year that will be legally counted, a year in which students will advance from one grade level to the next without having acquired the necessary skills and knowledge. In the case of students with disabilities, it will be an irreparable setback for their learning process, one in which they will continue to be excluded. As a PhD student in Education, I would very much



like to be in the Department of Education to take part in these processes and defend our profession. But I am just another person excluded from this political system of appointed positions given to campaign friends. (Souza; Pereira; Fontana, 2020, p. 1622)

A sense of powerlessness in the face of the imposed reality and political relations. Another teacher shares an image of her home table, covered with printed materials prepared to be sent to rural students. Her house has been transformed into a permanent workplace, while she simultaneously cares for her own children. In this context, it is noted that teachers—especially women—had their workloads tripled at home, having to perform countless tasks.

In the post-pandemic period, reports of teacher illness have become frequent, particularly cases of depression, panic disorder, and burnout syndrome. The greatest contradiction lies in the ongoing neglect of education and its professionals, whose wages have been stagnating for a long time. The neoliberal logic that permeates educational policies in Brazil has reinforced the centralization of teaching and the withdrawal of investments from rural areas.

The implementation of multigrade classes, coupled with school closures, is often used as a justification for the “rationalization” of resources, ignoring the social, cultural, and economic impacts this causes in local communities.

The challenges faced by educators working in multigrade classrooms are numerous. Many teachers report difficulties in meeting the diverse needs of students, who differ in age, learning levels, and specific requirements. This situation is further worsened by the lack of appropriate teaching materials and the absence of ongoing professional development to prepare teachers for such demanding contexts.

Finally, the reflection of Molina and Hage (2019, p. 66) is worth considering:

It is important to emphasize that the construction or transformation of the concept of school in rural communities must be grounded in praxis as a guiding principle. The rural school is embedded in the complex changes that need to occur: in the organization of pedagogical work, in the training of field educators, and in the structure and operating conditions of these schools. Historically, such institutions have contributed to the construction of knowledge disconnected from the lived realities of their subjects. Therefore, the rural school can only become a concrete reality if its subjects understand that their work, culture, and way of life are inherently educational.

In the post-pandemic period, one of the ongoing challenges has been maintaining schools in rural areas. As Caldart (2024, p. 1) writes:

We must move forward together, and with greater strength, in the struggle to establish and preserve public schools *in and from* the field. These schools must be treated as a common social good: they belong to everyone and must serve the common good. They are not the property of the State, governments, or private companies. They belong to the people and should be the social and pedagogical construction of the diverse subjects who, through their daily efforts, shape these schools—ensuring that this construction moves in the direction of the common good. A school is not a "business," and education is not a commodity. *It is our right, the State's duty, and an active commitment of each community.*

In summary, education reflects the deep-rooted contradictions that have historically afflicted Brazilian society: the contradiction between public and private interests; between rural and urban territories; between public service and clientelism; between inclusion and exclusion, among others. Education is a public good, and the strength of a sovereign nation depends on it. In this sense, knowledge is one of the paths toward the liberation of both individuals and the nation. Schools must not be treated as businesses, and in this regard, the communities of the countryside, the waters, and the forests remain vigilant in defending their right to education.

## **5 Final Considerations**

Education in field schools during the pandemic in the state of Paraná was marked by challenges ranging from geographical to public policy spheres. Historically, these schools face difficulties regarding infrastructure, human resources, didactic materials, continuing teacher education, and the organization of pedagogical work.

The Paraná Articulation for Field, Waters, and Forests Education (APECPR) mobilized knowledge to develop an analysis of educational provision in the pandemic context. It sought organizational foundations in the National Forum for Field Education (FONEC), so that the situation of disparate scenarios could be analyzed by articulating conjuncture and structure based on the categories of totality and contradiction.

The commitment of teachers has been constant in communities where family and peasant agriculture predominates. Two difficulties were particularly notable during the pandemic: a) infrastructure, which refers to telephone signal coverage and the distance between families hindered by roads that are not always accessible; b) the work overload of teachers, who had to travel to students' homes and guide families on the use of digital platforms, especially WhatsApp.

According to a teacher's report, recorded in Nupecamp's research (2020), the work was around-the-clock, with WhatsApp messages arriving 24 hours a day. It can

be said that a third problem was amplified during the pandemic and has gained prominence in the post-pandemic period: the presence of companies that treat education as a commodity, negotiating platforms, content, evaluation processes, didactic materials, and continuing teacher education.

The results of this article reaffirm that education in field schools, especially during and after the Covid-19 pandemic in the state of Paraná, expresses historical contradictions that are inherent to dependent and peripheral capitalist society. The analysis, anchored in the historical-dialectical materialist method, reveals that educational inequalities are not conjunctural phenomena, but structural ones, intensified by processes of education commodification and the systematic denial of the countryside as a space for knowledge production, culture, and life.

From a theoretical perspective, this article reaffirms Field Education as a counter-hegemonic political-pedagogical project (Caldart, 2009; Molina; Hage, 2019), which tensions the urban-industrial education model and affirms the countryside as a territory of resistance, knowledge, and life production. The analyses demonstrate that the contradictions experienced during the pandemic period – and aggravated in the post-pandemic – cannot be read merely as management failures or administrative inefficiency. They represent the concrete expression of capitalism's structural determinations, which subordinate education to market dynamics and accumulation.

From a political perspective, this work denounces the advance of public education privatization, the precarization of teaching working conditions, and the systematic violation of the right to education of populations from the countryside, waters, forests, and traditional communities. At the same time, it evidences the power of resistance built by social movements, unions, forums, and collectives, which, despite adversities, continue affirming that field schools are a right, a common good, and a space for constructing another societal project.

In the post-pandemic period, the great challenge has been the entrepreneurialization of education, the continued closure of field schools, and the platformization of education. The government of Paraná state has invested in the platformization of school relations and the educational process. Although union entities resist, teachers and pedagogical coordinators who participate in the Research Center for Field Education, Social Movements, and Pedagogical Practices report the

pressures they have suffered regarding the use of content available on digital platforms and spreadsheets that control actions and attendance.

The situation is even more delicate in communities like the coast of Paraná, where artisanal fishermen and island residents depend on local schools not only for formal education but also for preserving their cultural and social practices. Furthermore, the precariousness of working conditions, combined with teacher overload, often contributes to discouragement and weakens professionals' resistance to remaining in field schools.

The struggle against school closures and the precarization of field education is, therefore, a struggle for preserving territories and the cultural identity of rural and traditional communities. Concretely, the expansion of different economic interests in the countryside results in the uprooting of field populations. The unfolding of this process lies in workers' loss of land as well as cultural identity. For this situation to be reversed, it is necessary that educational policies be reformulated, guaranteeing adequate funding for field schools, teacher valorization, and the construction of curricula that dialogue with the realities and needs of communities.

In the state of Paraná, there is a governmental discourse that the state education network offers excellent quality education, outstanding in the country. However, the reality of field schools and the struggles of social movements reveal the contradiction in education, that is, a government that speaks about education quality while simultaneously treating it as a commodity.

In summary, the research reports conducted by APECPR and Nupecamp converge on political-pedagogical aspects. Research in the 10 mesoregions indicates, in detail, how education was offered during the pandemic. Teachers' reports from Nupecamp research portray work overload and denounce that platformization was consolidated during the pandemic period.

It is hoped that this article will continue contributing to strengthening struggles in defense of Field Education, reaffirming that understanding educational inequalities necessarily requires confronting the historical determinations that structure capitalist society. Therefore, guaranteeing public, free, socially quality education linked to field territories implies confronting processes of life commodification, neoliberal policies, and agribusiness logic, which invisibilizes and permanently threatens field subjects.

Field Education is thus a project of resistance, emancipation, and construction of a horizon of social justice.

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