

# Education that awakens

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To understand what *wealth, good life* and *development* actually means to me, it is important to talk about the working context I find myself in.

I have graduated in Education from a public university and I have been working in the field of non-formal education with children, young people and teachers as a teacher/facilitator for ten years. We have developed different educational projects related to plastic arts, literature, video, the environment, circus and theater, using various methods, environments and spaces and with different audiences. Over the past three years I have worked in environmental education in basic education public schools, especially within the theme of basic sanitation.

It is possible to affirm that Brazil is one of the countries with the highest degree of social inequalities in the world – a result of our historical process marked by the colonial and slavery inheritance. This, together with a history of poor or non-existent public policies, has structured a segregated public educational system that was designed to attend to colonial demands rather than to guarantee social rights. Thus, we have not developed an educational culture towards autonomy and emancipation, but one that attends to market interests and the maintenance of status quo. Brazil was one of the last countries to abolish slavery.

The 1988 the Brazilian Constitution was enacted to ensure representative democracy and citizen's rights, putting an end to two decades of a civil-military dictatorship. It was only with the 1988 Constitutional text that education was defined as a civil right, extended to all society. It was only in 1996 that the Educational Laws and Guidelines for the National Education (LDB) were sanctioned.

As a result of these changes and of several public policies towards national education, today we have 97.6% of our young people between 7-14 years of age in school. In 1980 this number was 80.1%. This has represented a great advancement in Brazil. The government in the last twelve years has also achieved significant advances in social policies, with higher investments in education and health, promoting development and social inclusion.

Although the advances in Brazilian education are notable, there is still a long way to go. Public school teachers still are badly remunerated, classrooms are over crowded, with an average of 35-40 students per class, schools do not have enough staff and so on.

Social segregation in Brazil is clearly perceived. Young Brazilians are divided

between private schools and public schools, between 'rich and poor'. Middle and upper class children, who study in private schools present higher quality indexes while the poorest layers of society study in the public schools.

It is also important to highlight the divide caused by race/ethnicity. According to recent data, in private schools 34% of primary students who reported ethnicity claimed to be black and brown. This number is reduced to 30% in high school years (15-18 year olds). In public schools, these numbers are 60% and 57%, respectively.

One of the results of social segregation is easily observed when we consider the access to higher education. In Brazil, approximately 85% of high school students (the final years of basic education) attend public schools. However, only 15% are able to enter a public university. Contrary to the basic education standards in Brazil, public higher education is considered of excellence compared to private institutions.

The Quota Law was enacted in 2012, reserving 50% of the admission spots in federal universities and educational institutes for students coming from public schools, low income families and who are of African, mixed race or indigenous descent. It was a considerable progress in affirmative actions and inclusive policies to reduce racial-ethnic inequalities in certain social groups.

Articles 14 and 15 of the Educational Laws and Guidelines for the National Education establishes a democratic management in school units, with the participation of education professionals and school communities in the elaboration of the school education program, ensuring pedagogical and administrative and financial management autonomy. However, participation and empowerment have not been consolidated in the educational management and even less in the pedagogical proposal of our schools, as a result of a social culture that is still based on hierarchical relationships—those who command and those who obey.

With regard to environmental education, although it is defined by the Educational Laws and Guidelines for the National Education (LDB), it is developed in a very incipient manner in formal education, and in most cases, it is promoted by private companies that aim to mitigate the negative environmental impact caused by their own endeavors.

Today, one of the alternatives to the traditional environmental educational model is non-formal education and can be linked to the schools and to initiatives of civil society organizations. Non-formal education refers to multi-dimensional learning processes, developing educational proposals that do not follow a standard curriculum, with greater pedagogical autonomy and democratic and participatory management, engaging artistic and expressive manifestations, socio-environmental justice, and the use of new educational methods.

However, non-formal education also has its flaws. It is far from being the solution for Brazilian educational problems since in many cases it is funded by grants from the private sector or public-private partnerships; compromising project continuity, democratic management and pedagogical autonomy. It still reproduces an educational logic that represents interests other than those of the young people and of social emancipation.

Although my formal education in pedagogy enables me to work in formal schools as a conductor teacher for children between 0-11 years of age, I have chosen to work with non-formal education that allows me to work with several and diverse methods, people, proposals, despite the difficulties we have to face in this field.

Considering this background I understand the meaning of wealth, good life

and development in my specific work field as – quality public education for all; access to diversity; teacher valorization; pedagogical autonomy; democratic management, participation, cooperation, educational environments that value the multiple artistic languages and social technologies – an educational model that is able to dialogue and interact with the contemporaneous world in a multiple and diverse manner.

I believe in working in an environment and in a community that promotes the valorization of public, natural, cultural, social and human aspects in their community, ensuring local life quality for the present and future generations. Having the space to promote a participatory culture that is socially just, collaborative, involves solidarity, encourages caring for the environment, children, youth and the whole community in a holistic and integrated manner is a step towards that goal. Preserving our natural resources and understanding that all beings are intimately connected and interdependent, composing a single body is essential.

Our local challenge is the recovery of a collective action. We need to promote a culture of cooperation and the development of collaborative communities in different environments: companies, schools, governments, communities, NGOs, in family and social relations. Our challenge is to instrumentalize social groups in the solution of complex problems, the transformation of interpersonal conflicts and the achievement of common goals.

Most of the environmental problems and global injustice and inequalities are the result of a capitalist model, based on production and consumption. Competition has been naturalized and the interests of a small minority is prioritized over the interests and needs of a whole nation, compromising on the quality of life for all.

My greatest encouragement is the possibility to overcome this culture of competition and to strengthen a global, collaborative and multicultural community. In that sense it is fundamental to develop critical actions to promote awareness and to recognize the interrelationships between man and nature and the power of collective and collaborative actions. I understand that no one will be able to make changes on a global level if the subject isn't able to recognize this power of articulation and transformation at the local level.

Therefore, the role that education plays in the promotion of *good life* for all is that of overcoming the school wall restrictions and the thoughts and actions emerging from the curiosity of young people and their local demands that may contribute to the common good. Our methods must lean on the awakening of the young people, their reflections and actions. We must overcome a culture of compliance, standardization, production and consumption. Education should be able to raise thinking and active citizens, contributing to the improvement of quality of life in their local communities. Empowering school communities will allow them to recognize their capacity of collective articulation and of transformation of their social realities.

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You can view her complete profile and the organisation she is associated with at: [http://www.learn2change-network.org/?About\\_Us\\_\\_Our\\_Network\\_\\_Activists#anker\\_GaST](http://www.learn2change-network.org/?About_Us__Our_Network__Activists#anker_GaST)