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SUMMERHILL "DIALOGUES" WITH THE VIVA OLHO DO TEMPO SCHOOL AND GRIÔ PEDAGOGY[8]

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Abstract: This paper presents the pedagogical proposals of Summerhill School (Leiston, England, 1930) and the Escola Viva Olho do Tempo (Joao Pessoa Paraiba, 2004). Both experiences are guided by happiness and non-compulsory education for children and youth revealing the amplitude of democratic schools in different socio-cultural realities.

Keywords: democratic schools. Autonomy. Culture. Griô pedagogy.

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Introduction

Summerhill[10] is known as the "school without doors"[11]. The mystification that has developed on it is reasonable. Its admiration is, however, so little productive as the critics that surround its nearly 100 years of operation. Some people have overcome these two possibilities and have developed similar projects.

In Brazil and in the world there are various experiences of democratic schools, happiness or without doors. Those that existed in the 1960s and 1970s were closed or forced to alter their practices.

This article will point some observations about the Summerhill school and seek an arbitrary dialogue with Griô pedagogy practiced by Viva Olho do Tempo School, or CHP-EVOT (in Portuguese).

Alexander S. Neill founded Summerhill in 1921 in the town of Leiston, Suffolk region, northwest of London. It is the oldest, notorious and controversial school based on libertarian education and to dispel confusion, we considered more appropriate to call it school of freedom or democracy, which the English language causes fewer problems, since the term libertarian education for Latin languages always approaches of socialism, anarchist or autonomist.

AS Neill died in 1973, leading to assume the school, Ena Wood, his second wife, who was in place until 1985, when her daughter with A.S. Neill, Zoë Neill Readhead (1946) became the principal of Summerhill, and has been it ever since.

Its headquarters is housed in a Victorian townhouse, donated by a benefactor interested in Neill's ideas, and it is flanked by trailers, huts and temporary buildings, a swimming pool and an area of about two hectares for the students free walking. The initial project was designed to assist children in

[10] During doctoral studies, a short visit in Summerhill in 2008 was held.
[11] For up-to-date information, visit the official website: http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk

trouble, but later it was opened for any child whose parents were interested in the experience.

The international character of the school is visible. Gribble (1998, p.8) states that in 1994, British children were only a third of students, while another third came from Japan and the other from several different countries.

From the beginning, Neill included subjects of the official curriculum in school, following the Compulsory Education Law; however, at Summerhill teaching is informal, there is no rigid schedule of classes, and children are free to come and go when they want to watch them. No obligation to attend classes did not prevent former students to became teachers of various levels, doctors, engineers, painters and writers. This corroborates the words of A. S. Neill who claimed to be preferable that the person was a happy street cleaner than a neurotic minister.

In this school, according to Gribble (1998, p. 6): "The child is free from family tyranny, escapes the Oedipal conflict, loses the fear of paternal authority figure and learns that it is not wrong to masturbate". As an example, the author reproduces the testimony of a former pupil of Summerhill that elucidates the school effect on those who attended it: "Here you learn by asking questions, Summerhill let you do that. I also learned many things through mistakes without feeling stupid as it was in other schools "(Gribble, 1998, p.11).

The essence of Summerhill, according to Gribble, is to allow students to take control of their own lives, which is separated from the adult world and protected from inappropriate practices related to this world, apart from advice and paternal expectations and bad influence of adult authority: “Kids put by themselves their limits on their freedoms, ensuring that their lives are more secure and happy and likewise decide when it is important to attend classes” (Gribble, 1998, p.21).

Much of what is said about this licenseness in Summerhill derives perhaps from the shock that the observers get to see young people smoking[12] or performing any feat that seems negative to hasty glances. The use of illegal drugs is not a current concern, as this has not been observed and its acceptance is not a moot point. Readhead says there is frank dialogue on this issue and the responsibility of each one with one's own life.

Readhead (2006, p.82), also a former pupil of Summerhill, reports that in her time, children of the same age and both genders slept together as in their own homes. Currently, they have been forced to adopt "silly" rules about the number of toilets and sinks that the school must have, and also different dormitories for boys and girls over eight:

> What a crazy illustration of the world in the new millennium. So many regulation, só much fear of litigation – but is it really any safer than it was in the 1960s? I don't think so! I might add that youngest, the 'San' kid (aged 6-10), are still sleeping in mixed-sex rooms – and we fully intend it to stay that way (Readhead, 2006, p. 82).

According to Gribble, A. S. Neill believed that children should accept the rules of care related to health, food, clothing and bedtime, but that these requirements should be based on mental health and their learning. This means that these recommendations could be changed in assemblies: "Sometimes this belief went against the decisions of the assemblies, and from time to time, children were withdrawing the bedtime until health effects becomes obvious, then they re-establish the previous rules" (Gribble, 1998, p.6).

The existence of compulsory syllabus (by law) does not change the decision about "letting children be" and about when they want to learning. Still, the curriculum is unconventional. But there is a mechanism, the "Special

[12] Summerhill is currently anti-smoking and only students over 14 years old can smoke, but there are fines. If a student smokes outside the school one must pay a fine of £ 5 and doing so within the premises, £ 10. These questions are put to discussion during meetings about health and smoking (Readhead, 2006, p.155).

Attention List" to cover learning gaps, which usually are emotional driven difficulties (Readhead, 2006, p.152). In Summerhill, newcomers teachers need to learn to control their anxiety to teach:

> Every teacher who comes to Summerhill has to face the reality of children sometimes not turning up for a lesson. I think it would be wonderful it all teachers had to face this reality. It would certainly make them think about what they teach and how they present it! There are some important points about being an experienced Summerhill teacher, as opposed to just an experienced teacher. Some of them find that whereas they were used to being the nice bloke in a more repressive system, suddenly when they get to Summerhill they seem to be 'Mr Strict'. Summerhill demands that you reevaluate what you are doing (Readhead, 2006, p. 98).

According to Readhead (2006, p. 99), there is no correlation between doing a good job and a full class, nor the requirement to measure students by the number of evaluations submitted, much less by the grade they get from these exams. This means that not only the student is free from pressures, but teachers as well as.

The syllabus in question was formed by the usual disciplines of England and several others countries, including math, science, geography, history, wood with neat, English, foreign language (Chinese, German, Japanese, Spanish), music (piano, percussion, guitar, singing, trombone, trumpet, music technology and sound engineering), dancing (scratching and breakdancing), theater and cooking. In addition to these disciplines, teachers are free to offer different ones or at the request of students, working themes such as magic or the lives of elephants. There is still interest in democracy, citizenship and international relations.

Readhead (2006, p. 98) states that when a member of Summerhill decides to study, one does not accept the new teaching methodologies and rejects facilitation strategies:

> On the whole, our teachers teach in a fairly conventional way. The Summerhill kids tend to be a conservative bunch when it comes to classes. They like to sit down and have the subject dished up to them. Occasionally we have had teachers who wanted to try new contemporary ways of teaching, but the response was usully that the children thought it silly and just wanted to be taught 'normally'. If you choose to go to class you are usually ready to learn and don't need the work to be sugar-coated to make it palatable (Readhead, 2006, p. 100).

This is the result of an educational work that advocates that students are responsible for their own learning. So this facilitated learning package, constantly trying to seduce students, ends up being something really childish and boring at Summerhill. Some newcomers teachers have great difficulty to adapt to this principle, as it shows part of the testimony of Jason Preater, English teacher:

> […] The Summerhill system protects teachers from their own neuroses about achievement and it protects children from teachers' anxiety. The school says that children will come to learning when they are ready for it. They may have a lot of other important stuff to do before they make it to the classroom. They may make it to the classroom several times before they eventually decide to do some serious work there. They won't have to sit in classrooms for months on end achieving nothing and feeling like a failure (Readhead, 2006, p. 101).

In Summerhill no one is forced to say "thanks", if it is not sincere. One should thank the other if the situation between them deemed worthy of appreciation. There, "thank you" is a precious expression. This is something that is also part of British culture, but in community life, rules of politeness end up being a burden. And none of this means that Summerhill children are hostile and cold.

In 2005, Summerhill had 88 students and did not change much, it was more than the average of 60 enrolled and had no significant change from the time it was conducted by A. S. Neill. Readhead (2006 p. 72) said that there was no major change in the behavior and philosophy of school in these years and

stated: "How could I change the simple philosophy that children should be free to make choices about themselves and we all live as equal members of the community".

However, there are changes in other aspects: there is more emphasis in the classroom, the effect of the new generation that comes to the school and its priorities. Assumes Readhead (2006, p. 73) that this is a result of external influences or pressures from family environment, but not directly from parents.

Readhead (2006, p. 152) discusses that there are genuine reasons and not genuine that keep students in school. As true reasons, she mentions the fact that students have many interesting things to do, such as playing football, instead of studying, or exercise their freedom and make their own choices. On the contrary, aversion of formal classes system, inhibition and constraints caused by a default pattern for people, such as fear of failure and learning difficulties, are considered non-genuine, in which case it becomes necessary to support the monitors of "Special Attention List".

Readhead (2006, p.107) writes about the time she was invited by a former student for her graduation in mathematics at the University of Leicester. At the graduation Readhead said to the student that she had never seen her studying mathematics, and the girl replied that she had never studied this discipline during the four years she spent in Summerhill. Therefore, Readhead states:

> When they have left formal education our ex-pupils are very diverse lot. Many of them go in for work that gives them a degree of freedom to make their own route. We have artists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, university professors, carpenters, scientists, musicians, chefs, actors, gardeners, farmers, newspaper reporters, filmmakers, technicians, photographers, cancers, computer programmers, writers, illustrators and careers for disable people. They also make fantastic entrepreneurs – a result, perhaps, of the creativity they developed at school as well as the talent they have for dealing with people (Readhead, 2006, p. 107).

Other aspects that Summerhill are proud of are individuation, the relationship between groups of different group and how sexuality is seen among

students. Readhead said how enthusiastically she watches a child playing by herself or doing things without being involved with others, because this is a safety test.

Sexuality follows the path of self-knowledge for these young people, and the teacher is enthusiastic when, even with no difference regarding how the school deals with boys and girls, he/she realizes that girls are more confident about themselves, and boys are lighter and gentle. There are among them great friendships and romantic love affairs, without the occurrence of malicious or speculative comment.

It is very hard to believe that self-knowledge is a different thing from the understanding of life itself. In a free school, to know oneself and how one is with others is more important than skills and information.

The same behavior occurs in different democratic schools, that is, knowing oneself driven, according to Paideia School (Merida, Spain) of anarchist pedagogy; Being before knowing! Formal education in the world the principal is reverse: Having before being! (cf. Martin, 1993).

Viva Olho do Tempo School (Joao Pessoa – Paraiba - Brasil)

My first contact with the Congregation of Paraiba Holistic Viva Olho do Tempo School - CHP-EVOT was in 2014. It is situated in a ruro-urban area of João Pessoa in the Valley of Gramame, which flows into the sea between mangroves and sandbanks of Gramame bar, south coast of Paraiba.

My first impression came from the sound of music instruments played at the the Brazilian rhythm of Maracatu. A pathway, made by tiles and mosaics, with a hopscotch pattern in this multicolored floor, is in the middle of two two-story buildings. One of them is the place for management, kitchen, community library, studio and Viva Olho do Tempo Museum. The other contains the house of its creator, Master Doci, the dance and digital station areas, and the children's library. The garden and vegetation flank all buildings and in the lower part of

one of these blocks there is the theater and in its opposite site there is a small dining room that can fit 30 children.

Beyond the building, there is a strong slope and a remnant of the tertiary Atlantic Forest with trails that goes along some springheads that lead to a floodplain. This trail holds places for observation and contemplation; and it can also host meetings and classes.

Since 2004 people have been asking Master Doci about his plans for a place that had nothing!? And his answer is: I will plant humans! I will plant dreams!

This region is divided between a rural community of peasants, quilombolas[13], fishermen with indigenous features that also culturally bear these arrays of coastal people of Paraiba and recently a working-class urban low-income, it is almost a dormitory neighborhood if it there were low unemployment.

In Paraiba, as in many places in Brazil, the access to boarding schools are not widespread and despite the criticism and difficulties that these schools have to deal with, they make a huge difference in the quality of life of these children. To fill this gap, the CHP-EVOT develops a project to attend part of the children and young people through which they call Eco-Education. This project does not conflict with regular school hours.

The CHP-EVOT is managed by a non-profit association with certification of "Organization from the Civil Society for Public Interest" (OSCIP in Portuguese). It has two focuses: the preservation of 8 springheads around campus headquarters and to attend children and teenagers of the surroundings. Its creators have been trying to offer:

[13] This refers to settlements established by refugees African-American slaves between the 16th and the 19th centuries.

> [...] an educational alternative to outline ways in which the inhabitants of the region can start the search for self-knowledge as collective beings, and thus strengthen the sense of community in their living spaces. This quest is nothing more than the most powerful establishment of a cultural identity that arouses in the residents a sense of belonging to their space and their ethical, moral and cultural values, bringing to oneself the comfortable feeling of living in community (CHP-EVOT, 2015).

The eco-educational goals of the CHP-EVOT acknowledges the importance of integrating environmental, culture and education protection. There is, therefore, an effort to enhance the memory and social interaction with the community seeking to build sustainability projects that take action in the local reality.

There are many actions in the defense of Gramame River and the popular culture, such as the social museum built with community support and by offering regular education art workshops in the field of performing arts, singing, dances and popular games, storytelling, community library, Brazilian rhythms, digital stations, planting trees, creating eco-educational trails, events and celebrations in support of communities. In addition to these local actions, there is participation of children in concerts and festivals with local and national renowned artists who know the proposal and identify with it.

The proposal to adopt the Griô Pedagogy came later, but initially they had already established an official effort to protect socio-cultural, social memory and tangible and intangible heritage. To the extent that these educators were approaching the community, the more they start to appreciate and understand the popular knowledge and oral tradition, which arethe pillars of what is now called the Griô pedagogy.

Griô or Griot is a term from Africa with a French accent and therefore it receives criticism and disagreement about the relevance of foreignness and not all these oral traditions should be flushed to popular masters of orality without this classification. However, if there is this level of disagreement and claim of a name, concerning the delimitation of Griô Pedagogy, its pedagogic

properties have characteristics that make it a specific crop with less resistance. A Griô a master cannot serve the Griô pedagogy.

The Griô pedagogy combines art, culture and popular games, mysticism and enchantment by the oral tradition and, through those elements, seeks to bring people close to reading and the appreciation of local social memory and the Brazilian people.

The various experiences of reading groups, and other sotry-telling are included in Griô Pedagogy and can be confused with those reading approach approaches. In appreciation of Lilian Pacheco:

> For Griô Pedagogy, relations between the included and the excluded open an infinite field of obvious dichotomies, hidden contradictions, and epistemological errors. And our focus of reflection happens between the following dualities: experience and consciousness, mind and body, popular and erudite, emotion and reason, institution and community, tradition and modernity, myth and reality, identity and ancestry, I, the other and the whole (Pacheco, 2006).

So the practical actions are not based on the formal education but incorporate suggested precepts and developed by Paulo Freire and social educators. In other to defend this perspective Pacheco says that the Griô Education:

> It's a walk on the earth, in the alleys, streets, squares, OSCIP, points of culture, in the yards, in the yards of the houses, in the kitchens, in the fields, groups and traditional organizations in socially excluded world, in education informal among the people. Empty and musical listening, body and feelings delivered to the motion, vision committed to integration between the various forms of elaboration of knowledge through art, science and the oral traditions of our people. Committed to the potential of human identity and the diversity of emotional and cultural intelligence of people to express themselves, bind, celebrate life and knowledge passing it from generation to generation in the diversity of ethnicities, epistemology and ecological systems in which they live.

According to this, Griô Pedagogy is part of the scope of a popular education based in the oral tradition and socio-cultural memory, so incorporating what is called ancestry and social constructions that are not present in formal school.

One of the elements that the CHP-EVOT uses are group discussion. These are hardly something like the junior assemblies of democratic schools, but they meet the need to discuss in a more intimate way with children and young people about their wishes and difficulties.

At times, there are volunteers from the field of psychology that accompany some children and young people, as some come to school with a past life of absences and short of affection that need to be worked so they can gain greater attention and follow both their desires and face the facts of their daily lives.

There are cases of children who are at risk of child labor or other vulnerabilities arising from their families or social environment, these children are sheltered and receive both affection and care.

The homophobia, religious intolerance and other biases are worked out in ongoing discussion; after all, these people are in touch with a society that has not yet fully reached the understanding of human rights.

Artistic involvement and activities associated with affective shelter try to put an end to these children and young people concerns that, for various reasons, do not enjoy the peace they deserve.

From this work, a few important cultural groups have been formed such as the Maracatu group, Drummers from the Valley, the Culture Point "Memoirs and Oral Tradition in the Valley of Gramame", the Cirandeiros of Gramame Valley, the Valley Lights young singers.

The main projects developed by the CHP-EVOT are:

1) Program Ecoeducação Culture and Memory Valley Gramame, developed since 2008 is a non-formal education action with activities covering the fields of culture, environment, digital inclusion, sport/leisure and reading in order to provide children and adolescents knowledge building, experiences and practices to enable greater ownership of reality, seeking alternatives to transform it, for improvement in quality of life. The activities are also aimed at educators and families through educational experiences and community life, making everyone involved feel they are protagonists of a process built collectively, considering the completeness of the human being, including one's desires, knowledge and practices. The activities are developed considering its core to be the identity and ancestry, taking into account the living history, the environment, the oral tradition and the Gramame Valley memoirs. The program seeks also establish partnership with the government and the private sector targeting fund raising and improvement of public policies.

2) Cultural Encounter of Gramame Valley, which is in its edition, started in 2006 from the need to put the philosophy of EVOT at service of a project that would encourage the residents of the valley to express themselves artistically through their creations and reflections, focusing on the reality of the region where they live, and that would result in contemplative and reflective works, but it would also challenge them before the daily facts, sharpening, especially their critical capacity. All this is condensed in a celebratory event, of full enjoyment, without competition, with the participants around the beauties and problems of their community life. Every year the meeting produces a CD or a DVD with the compositions presented by the residents of the Valley communities. The project aims to interact city professional musicians

with community amateur musicians through the proposal entitled "musical godfathers". These professional musicians voluntarily contribute to this project

3) St. John's Rural, developed since 2005, aims to strengthen the traditions surrounding the June festivities, from its religious aspect to ingrained cultural traits as the cuisine, costumes, music, dance and everything that exists in hearts of the Northeast, but that has suffered interference that seriously jeopardize them. It takes place on March 19th, the day of Saint Joseph, which begins the St. John's Rural programming. From there it holds a party every month, covering the Gramame Valley communities and exploring the cultural expressions of the region. The St. John's Rural closes in July, with the Santana celebrations. This project is developed in partnership with the entity making up the Agenda 21 Lower Gramame and with the support of the local government.

4) Reading Incentive developed since 2004, working to encourage reading and formation of readers that takes place systematically through reading circles and storytelling, making use of the Community Library institution's collection. This work also involves circles of conversations with teachers and community griôs by sharing stories, myths and legends of Gramame Valley, as well as sieves of experiences, square dancing, poetry and storytelling with these teachers and griôs.

5) Memoir / Patrimonial Education/ Griô Action. The actions involve traveling, training meetings, workshops, seminars, partnerships, joints, cultural shows, nature trails, experiences with griôs and teachers of oral tradition. Actions based on Griô Pedagogy are developed as a patrimonial education process taking since they are grounded in

recognition and appreciation of local cultures and identities of the Gramame Valley region. In this context, EVOT has been building spaces in which teachers share their stories, knowledge and practices through circles that take place at the organization's headquarters, as well as in the classrooms of formal schooling, squares and other community spaces. The experiences take place also in the backyard of the masters, who welcome the community and visitors who integrate their palys.

6) Environmental Education facing the predatory development of natural resources, the EVOT maintains, since 2007, a reforestation project of the green areas of Gramame Valley region, which is, so far, in the planting of more than a thousand Atlantic native trees, especially in the Lower Gramame region. This activity is included in the environmental education activities developed by the organization, involving children, youth and adults who are growingg an understanding of the importance of green in their lives, beyond the urgency of revitalizing the Gramame Rio and springheads in the region. More than planting trees, this project reinforces the purposes of Agenda 21 by promoting, through environmental education, the political thinking founded on the preservation of nature, essential to the present time.

Establishing some dialogue between Summerhill and CHP-EVOT

All schools that prioritize happiness have in common some level of Children and Youth democracy. Not all can move forward in radical freedom and the right to self-assertion of that freedom.

The social context of the country formation and its economic constraints can guide the pedagogical projects within the margins that tend to separate its goals from its needs. It is also common that in many of these schools for happiness and democracy the radical approach of the arts, which involves some

anarchist base of schools, such as Walden School in Berkeley in the U.S.A. (Sobreira, 2009).

However, projects are distinguished by their creators and in rare cases they are a government initiative. Denmark, Israel, Finland and Japan carry examples of government schools. In Brazil there are very few government schools who targets anti-authoritarian education.

Summerhill receives funds from rich parents and mothers, so they guarantee to work without the need to generate income. In addition to this factor, the students are not engaged in environmental and social causes as a priority, but in individuation.

A school like CHP-EVOT has traces a path of social movements for better education thus it does not abstaining from the social emergency of family and society in which they operate. In this sense, even not making specific policy choices, its practice targets a just, equitable society that considers the condition of social exclusion an element to be fought against.

The maintenance of CHP-EVOT is both carried out by voluntary work and in competition invitations to bid, agreements with the federal, state and municipal governments, but also by campaigns of individual and corporate partners involved with offering services or resources as well as was mentioned earlier, through solidarity events.

The affection, emotion and shelter for these children are the most important concerns of CHP-EVOT and such parallel cannot easily be done with Summerhill for its cultural characteristics. The issue of Summerhill is to eliminate neuroses.

It does not seem that this educational line can easily take place in Brazil, where the affective demand is, in many cases, the central issue for the educators. In the English case, the kind of autonomy is subject to arrive in hedonism streaks, while in the case of CHP-EVOT pedagogical decision is itself

affectionate first, before any other measure, which means dancing, hugging and express affection are encouraged.

The Griô pedagogy is consistent with this feeling of CHP-EVOT and presents a question for the children and young people that has not yet been evaluated. During the time they spend in the happiness of school, they are concurrently under the conditions of public schools and its difficulties and inability to meet these children and young people in their intellectual and emotional needs.

It is difficult to imagine a child of 8 years in Brazil leaving for a boarding school, including, with the clear objective of separating them from parental neuroses. These are cultural issues that are better accepted in England, given its boarding school tradition.

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