

## The Case of the Enfoc/Contag, a Trade Union School in Brazil: Systematisation in Process

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# The Case of the Enfoc/Contag, a Trade Union School in Brazil: Systematisation in Process

Elza Maria Fonseca Falkembach

The article discusses the systematisation of the practice of political and trade union training of the Enfoc: Escola Nacional de Formação Político Sindical; of the Contag: Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura [National School for Political and Trade Union Training of the National Confederation of Workers in Agriculture]. These institutions have their headquarters in Brasília, Brazil, and are part of the MSTTR: Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Rurais [Trade Union Movement of Rural Workers]. The object investigated is the systematisation process of the political and trade union training of the Enfoc/Contag in the national and regional courses held during the 2006-2009 period. In order to meet the aim of presenting “the case”, and reflections on the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and pedagogical processes in which systematisation can involve the subjects it gathers, and which it can launch onto them, the article initially presents, in a summarised manner, information on the object of reflection. It spells out the concept of systematisation used and also presents “theoretical reasons” which show that this kind of investigation: attached to social practices and performed collectively, with the intention of producing knowledge and learning from and for practices, and which flows into a subjectivation process, can lead to reflections that actually surpass the limits of systematised practices. It provides elements for reflections on this subjectivation process which allows the subjects to criticise what has been experienced, gives them freedom to reorient their ways of being in the world (“being-oneself”, “being-together”, “being-relationship”), and submit their political practices to a reflective surveillance that will keep them moving.

**Key words:** systematisation, popular education, experience, care, subjectivation

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The case to be presented in this article refers to the systematisation of the practice of political and trade union training of the Enfoc: Escola Nacional de Formação Político Sindical [National School for Political and Trade Union Training] of the Contag: Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura [National Confederation of Workers in Agriculture]. Both of these institutions have their headquarters in Brasília, Brazil, and are part of the MSTTR: Movimento Sindical dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Rurais [Trade Union Movement of Rural Workers], which is broader than both.

Since this is a broad, continued practice, in order to describe it and analyse some of the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and pedagogical elements that have been underscored by its systematisation, I will discuss part of it, based on a guiding criterion that consists of the moments of training itself in the school, given by a dynamics that crosses strategy and training spaces.

The characteristic of this strategy is a continued education that occurs from a participatory perspective<sup>2</sup> and articulates the daily life of rural workers and the “political and general struggles of the professional group”<sup>3</sup>. It acts to transform society and emancipate individuals, beginning with the “realities” of their organisation and struggles and with the individuals whom it directly affects.

This strategy is sustained by

- a National Training Policy (PNF: Política Nacional de Formação), which is a political-pedagogical framework and a device to articulate theory and practice in coherent perspectives;

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<sup>1</sup> Text presented at the Symposium on Participatory Action-Research held in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil, June 20-22, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Both the educators and the students have decision-making power in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the training processes.

<sup>3</sup> This group of workers includes family farmers, rural wage-earning workers, camped rural workers, settled rural workers, extractivists and riparian workers.

- an Alternative Project for Sustainable and Solidary Rural Development (PADRSS: Projeto Alternativo de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável e Solidário), that is opposed to the currently prevailing neoliberal development project, which is “conservative, excluding and concentrating” and has accumulated “social, economic and environmental problems for the country”, and
- a Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP: Projeto Político-Pedagógico) founded on Popular Education, which seeks to promote the “emancipation of human beings and a methodology for the collective construction of knowledge” (Contag 2008a: 27).

The training spaces<sup>4</sup> privileged in this report will be the national space and the regional ones, even though some references to the state and municipal/community spaces occur occasionally due to their interconnection. This was the same part that took the educational practice of the Enfoc as its first systematisation initiative: “the school’s training practice in 2006-2009”.

Therefore, the object of this report is the systematisation process of the Enfoc/ Contag political and trade union training in the national and regional courses held during the 2006-2009 period. This article is organised as follows:

- The Contag and Enfoc, preliminary information.
- What is meant by systematisation?
- The systematisation of the political and trade union training practice of the Enfoc/Contag.
- Reflections on the systematisation – experience and care.
- The care of the self as a right.

With this I intend to meet the aim of presenting “the case” and reflections on the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and pedagogical imbricate in which systematisation can involve the subjects it gathers, and which it can launch onto them.

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<sup>4</sup> The training spaces are face-to-face courses, preparatory activities and those resulting from them, networks of popular educators of the Enfoc and trade union study groups.

## 1. The Contag and Enfoc, preliminary information

The Contag: the National Confederation of Workers in Agriculture, is the oldest trade union central organisation of rural workers in Brazil. It was founded in the '1960s, a time of great mobilisation of popular sectors in Brazil that accompanied the Latin American and world wide struggles, aiming at transforming the social relationships and structures which kept vast sectors of the populations under various forms of oppression. It was constituted on the basis of different forms of organisation and struggles of the peasant people in Brazil, such as the Peasant Leagues (which began in the Brazilian Northeast and expanded to different areas of the country), the MASTER: Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra [Movement of Landless Farmers] (which was formed in Rio Grande do Sul in the '1950s), the ULTAB: União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas [Union of Farmers and

**Figure 1: The Contag System**



Source: Enfoc/Contag, Brasília, DF 2011

Agricultural Workers] (which was created in São Paulo in 1954) and the AP: Ação Popular [Popular Action] (which gathered especially the Catholic left in Brazil). All the forms of organisation mentioned were harshly repressed by the military dictatorship (1964-1985), but the latter could not prevent rural workers from finding ways to maintain their struggles for the right to land, justice and freedom (Silva et al. 2010: 24).

The Contag gathers “different people from the field and the forest who make up the professional group of rural workers” (Contag 2008a: 14): family farmers, rural wage-earning workers, camped rural workers, settled rural workers, extractivists and riparian workers.

It co-ordinates and represents the immediate and historical interests of 26 State Federations, 01 Federation of the Federal District and Surroundings and 05 Regional Coordination Offices. The 27 Federations co-ordinate and represent 4,000 Rural Workers’ Unions, beside 296 Poles or Trade Union Regional Agencies. The Trade Unions in turn co-ordinate and politically represent over 25 million rural workers distributed over the 5,564 Brazilian municipalities (Contag 2008a: 15). Figure 2 shows the regional offices of the Confederation.<sup>5</sup>

The Enfoc: National School for Political and Trade Union Training of the Contag, was conceived as a privileged space to strengthen and continually evaluate and reconstruct the National Training Policy. The approval to establish a National School for Trade Union Training by the Contag occurred during its 9<sup>th</sup> National Convention, but there were many initiatives that preceded and followed this event directed at shaping the school that was finally established on August 14, 2006. The Movement of Female Rural Workers struggled very much for this to happen.

The Work Group that became responsible for beginning the actions of the newly created Enfoc (later called the operational team of the school) took on the contributions provided by the different events that debated opening the school: the 3rd National Plenary Meeting (2004), the 9th National Convention (2005), meetings of the Confederation’s Steering Committee and especially the National Training Meeting (ENAFOR: Encontro Nacional de Formação) (2005), which was the main forum that brought together the demands, suggestions, sharing of experiences and ideas about what the Enfoc

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<sup>5</sup> The Contag, its federations and unions are distributed throughout Brazil, which is configured by regions, states and municipalities. There are 5 regions (Mid-West, Northeast, North, Southeast and South), and 26 states (Acre, Alagoas, Amapá, Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais, Pará, Paraíba, Paraná, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Roraima, Santa Catarina, São Paulo, Sergipe, Tocantins) and the Federal District, where Brasília, the capital of the country, is located.

should be and do. Through intensive and systematic work, in the same month of August when the School was created, it took on the responsibility of holding the first national course, gathering a total of 99 students. When the latter graduated from the nationwide training, they became jointly responsible, together with Enfoc's operational team, for conceiving and holding the regional courses, as a result of the training they had received. The national course and the regional ones held during the period of 2006-2009 then became the object of the systematisation described in this article.

**Figure 2: Contag's coverage throughout Brazil**



Source: Enfoc/Contag, Brasília, DF 2011

Since then the school has maintained the practice of the MSTTR: Trade Union Movement of Rural Workers, under constant debate and reflection, and has studied topics present in its “trade union agenda”, as well as the history of the movement and its roots.

It gathers, besides rural workers who represent the professional group, activists and leaders of the Contag, of the associated federations, of the regional trade unions and poles of the federations, MSTTR advisers and representatives of associated entities that, in different ways, are in contact with the

movement. Today the students and educators who attended the school are connected in a network, in order to remain in a state of dialogue and learning, and are constructing availability and a capacity to expand the training action to the movement's grassroots, where Trade Union Action Groups (GES: Grupos de Ação Sindical) are being established.

Their political and trade union training work corroborates the assumptions raised by the PNF:

Political training for an action that transforms reality requires going beyond the spaces of the cognitive processes and stimulating the construction of alternatives to the problems identified in daily life. When they have access to the theoretical and methodological instruments, people change their political practice, at the same time as they qualify to act in such a way that they will promote the organisation and the struggle of the rural workers ... (Contag 2008a: 27).

For this reason the school considers it essential to always reflect on its training processes, in order to remain coherent with the assumptions and objectives of the tripod that sustains them: the PNF: *National Training Policy* (CONTAG 2008a), the PADRSS: *Alternative Project for Sustainable and Solidary Rural Development* (CONTAG 2009) and the PPP: *Political-Pedagogical Project* (CONTAG 2008b), which leads it to incorporate systematisation as a part of the training.

## **2. What is meant by systematisation?**

Systematisation refers to a dynamics of *collective production of knowledge*, that is based on social practices, and occurs through a dialogue between experiences, reflections and theories, that promotes learning on the basis of these social practices which anchor subjects, and leads them to discuss their learning and subject-form thereby forged, i.e. to discuss about a “being-oneself” (relationship with oneself), “being-together” (relationship with the collectives one belongs to) and “being-relationship” (relationship with the natural and social environment) in a given time and place (Falkembach 2006: 38). This includes the discussion about the conditions that render such relationships, learning and modes of subjectivation possible.

What is meant is a systematisation that is associated with practices of Popular Education and, for this reason, incorporates the main characteristics and political-pedagogical devices of this education. Therefore,

- it happens based on practices that bring together subjects marked by some form of domination or oppression;
- it fosters the production of knowledge and learning, insofar as it provides space and encourages subjects to give their opinion on what happens in their practices, acknowledges their knowledge, and promotes the confrontation of the latter with technical-scientific knowledge;
- it connects objectivity (events, relationships) and subjectivity (meanings, values) by expressing the daily social practices that it takes as an object of learning and action;
- it assumes the political intention of evidencing, questioning and pointing out ways to transform the social relationships of domination and oppression in society that create obstacles to solidarity and reciprocity, and does this based on the daily reality of these practices;
- it helps to train “subjects of thought and action who transform their practices into opportunities to be in the world in a reflective and at the same time active manner” (Falkembach 2006: 51).

In the systematisation that is meant here, there is a bet on the diversity of the subjects of these practices, and on the asymmetry of relations that it generates. The latter are considered a creative power that animates the reflection process conducted by systematisation, since they create “imbalances” that lead to a confrontation between different elements of practice (forms of knowledge, meanings, relationships). This confrontation takes on the form of a dialogue if the initial approaches inducing systematisation point to an intention of generating resources for changes in practices.

When the Enfoc acknowledged the need to systematise its educational practice, it had not yet faced the universe of possibilities that would be opened for it by systematisation. It was faced with multiple views of systematisation and also with multiple intentions as to the choice to systematise a

training practice that was complex, broad and concerned about consistency between its frameworks of reference and forms of expression.

It wished to construct “recording mechanisms” on the course of the political and trade union training processes of the MSTTR, to create a space of reflections on what was happening, to inventory and debate the perceptions and repercussions resulting from the collective experiences “of this place called School”, which already was proving to be unusual<sup>6</sup>, as well as to communicate what was being done. It was necessary to “systematise our knowledge”, said the educators of the School’s operational team, and to do so with the collective of students; “this is a way to strengthen our action and ensure that our story will be told” (Silva et al. 2010: 19).

### **3. The systematisation of the political and trade union training practice of the Enfoc/Contag**

The systematisation of the political and trade union training process of the Enfoc/Contag in the national and regional courses held during the 2006-2009 period occurred around the following thematic axis: “*What has changed in me as an MSTTR educator, and what has changed in my practice as an activist?*”

Its objectives were, then, to develop a critical reflection on the training process, on the learning enabled by it, and on the contributions made to promote changes in the practice of the MSTTR, with special attention to the way it affected the students.

Eight moments were involved in reaching these goals.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Unusual because it was creating innovative processes in political and trade union training and in education in general.

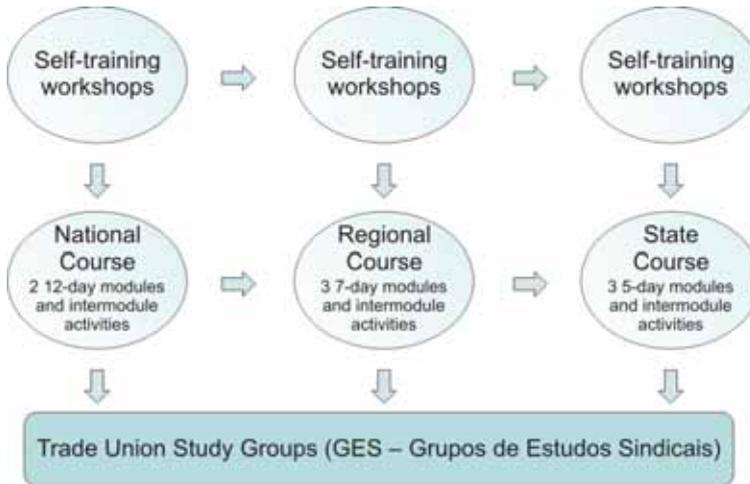
<sup>7</sup> Theoretical-methodological proposal for systematisation (E. M. F. Falkembach, “Sistematização, uma arte de ampliar cabeças”, in Ministério do Meio Ambiente – MMA/PDA, *Arte de ampliar cabeças. Uma leitura transversal*. Brasília: MMA/PDA, 2006 (Série Sistematização, I-XI).

- 1) Gathering the subjects who have already been trained and went on to construct the systematisation: dialogue on their views and expectations regarding systematisation;
- 2) Construction of the systematisation project: delimitation of the object, objectives, thematic axis and its unfolding in guiding questions and spelling out of the justification for systematisation;
- 3) Feasibility of systematisation: constructing pacts and co-responsibilities among the participants to render systematisation feasible by creating teams on the national, regional and state level, with the agreement of the respective organisational bodies (confederation and federations);
- 4) Records and information: inventory of existing records and creation of new ones without losing sight of the axis of systematization and its unfolding in guiding questions;
- 5) Construction of narratives: narration of what has been experienced, including the meanings assigned to it by the training participants;
- 6) Reflections and theorisation: identification of a core of uniqueness in practice, provided by the unique way of experiencing and observing it through the thematic axis of systematisation. Choice of items for theorisation based on the problems and potentials indicated by the systematised practice, which in this case varies from region to region;
- 7) Reconstructions: using what was produced, the learning and the discoveries, presentation of suggestions for changes to be incorporated through practice into the thematic contents, in the ways of working on them, in the power relations identified and among the subjects affected by these relationships.
- 8) Communication: construction of products to communicate the systematisation, in this case a book (both a Portuguese-language and a Spanish-language edition), a video and oral reports.

How was this political and trade union training process organized on a national and regional level? The process of training taken as an object of systematisation, both the one developed on a national level and its regional re-

creations, includes courses developed in modules, intermodular activities, self-training workshops, national seminars and workshops, animated by pedagogical dialogues and by mysticism.

**Figure 3: Enfoc's training strategy**



Source: Enfoc/Contag, Brasília, DF 2011

In the text titled “Enfoc: repercussões de um jeito de ser escola” (Silva et al. 2010; 30-31) we find the following information:

The national courses are composed by 2 modules of 12 days each. They take place in Brasília and receive 4 students from each State; the regional courses are performed in 3 modules lasting 7 days each, in the States of the region, with the participation of 10 people per State, 4 of them from the national course and 6 new participants, as per agreements made previously; and the State courses are performed in 3 modules of 5 days each, including 30 to 40 people per class.

The students are registered by the training offices of the federations, and the latter must bear the institutional co-responsibility for people to be able to participate fully in the courses and also in creative multiplication. The nomination of participants should obey the quota of 50% women and 20% youths.

The pedagogical matrix of the courses includes programme contents guided by thematic axes, and is crossed by pedagogical axes that establish a dialogue with the topics developed in the course modules. In the first national course the thematic axes were: State, Society and Ideology, History, Trade Union Conception, Practice and Structure and Collaborative Sustainable Rural Development. The pedagogical axis worked on, then, was Pedagogy for a New Sociability.

Already during the first national course there was a proposal to make changes in the pedagogical matrix. These changes were immediately incorporated: “the 3 thematic axes became thematic units, articulated by 1 thematic axis and 2 pedagogical ones” (Silva et al. 2010: 33), with the following result:

*Thematic Axis:* Trade Union Action and Collaborative Sustainable Rural Development. *Thematic Units:* State, Society and Ideology, Trade Union History, Conception and Practice and Collaborative Sustainable Rural Development.

*Pedagogical Axes*<sup>8</sup>: Pedagogy for a New Sociability and Memory and Identity.

The *intermodular activities* consist of guided activities performed by the students aiming at the integration of the contents dealt with in the modules with trade union practice. They seek to maintain the coherence of training with the principles established in its Political-Pedagogical Project, such as “the permanent articulation between theory and practice”, “the permanent opening to the different forms of knowledge”, “evaluative posture and permanent critique of action and the training practice” and “the collective construction of knowledge”, among others. They enable the contextualisation of the contents present in the pedagogical matrix.

The *self-training workshops* are meetings held before and after the modules, and are set up to meet the training needs of the trainers, and guide the

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<sup>8</sup> The pedagogy of the training processes is guided by the intention to inform and reflect on the memory of the MSTTR in order to constitute a political and trade union identity and sociability that are also based on PNF’s and PADRSS’s principles (which in turn have that memory as their source). At certain points of the courses such a pedagogy becomes a programme content for teaching-learning.

development of the modules as to topics, concepts and approaches. They are also “a place for methodological construction, rendering didactical-pedagogical material feasible, and reflection on the possible partnerships and collaborations to render the actions of creative multiplication of training concrete” (Contag/Enfoc 2010: 32): a place for planning and evaluation. They take place at the level of the national and regional training and bring together the course graduates as well as Contag and Federation training secretaries. They contribute a lot to systematisation.

The *national seminars and workshops* are events that take place unsystematically and have various specificities; they are context-related and problematise as well as nurture the School’s training process. The national seminars have made systematisation possible and even enabled the exchange of experiences among the regions concerning the systematising practice.

The *pedagogical dialogues* permeate the entire training and their “presence” transforms the processes experienced into spaces with intense participation. They do not consist of an activity in itself, but of an attitude present throughout the training process. They make the interrelationship easier between the contents provided by the thematic and pedagogical axes. They are sources of renewal of interaction, since they exercise the listening, argumentation and tolerance of divergence and diversity. They nurture subjects and processes.

“*Mystic*” is present throughout the training process of the Enfoc/Contag, providing visibility to the way of life that is constituted through the relationships that emerge in the pedagogical process: relationships of the students and educators with themselves, with each other, with knowledge and with social life in all of its breadth. It is part of a culture of the care of the self<sup>9</sup>, the point of entry for the complete problematisation of the subjects so that they are prepared to run the risk of changing while they become part of the School training process. It is a call to an interconnection between forms of spirituality, wisdom and knowledge.

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<sup>9</sup> The care of the self is studied on the basis of Michel Foucault’s view of it: the work of the subject on themselves with a collective for access to the truths of the collective itself, in this case to the ideas on which the trade union culture of Contag is based, expressed in documents that rule training at the Enfoc: PNF, PADRSS e PPP.

Mystic is considered a process present at all times in the course, with steps in consonance with the module's themes and objectives. It is planned and performed collectively based on resources and creative experiences, based on artistic and bodily expression, using rhythms, sounds, the use and reinvention of symbols, re-signification of concerns and feelings. With this it seeks to provide experiences and reflections that nurture the dreams and utopia, in order to strengthen the wish for an egalitarian, collaborative and democratic society (Silva et al. 2010: 33).

We invoke the thought of Adélia Prado (2011), a Brazilian poetess, for a reflection on the theme. She says that mystic is a non-discursive expression which "escapes the limits of reason"; it leads subjects to perplexity, because it escapes logic and rationality. It connects these subjects to "a center of significance and meaning" and thus reaches them, touches them, affects them completely.

In the training process of the Enfoc/Contag mystic has instigated students and educators to experience intense relationships, recurrently qualified as collaborative and reciprocal. These relationships anticipate and, at the same time, give meaning to what these subjects say that they seek in terms of the transformation of society and of themselves.

In turn, mystic is also present in the systematisation of this training process insofar as it expresses the unutterable "form of production of meanings and senses" on what was experienced and based on it. In this way, the subjects of systematisation find themselves as creators of knowledge, of ways of life and relationships (relationships with themselves, with others and with processes that they experience and systematise). And they build belonging.

This way of conceiving and making systematisation happen makes it close to artistic production, since it is an entrancing and attractive way for the subjects to deal with an object that for some reason they want to "make seen", "show". In systematisation processes the object is represented by social practices in which they participate.

In systematisation, however, there is a movement that proposes to transform mystic into a pedagogical device that can favor participation and the acknowledgement of the subjects of practices as epistemic subjects (subjects of knowledge, able to produce knowledge). This is a movement that seeks to

capture by the word what “escapes” (construction of meanings and senses) in order to embody it in what was experienced and became an object for knowledge and action by transporting it to “forums of reason”. Because of this, in systematisation processes, besides seeking to deal with what happens in social practices and to recognise the socio-historical conditions that favor these events, we emphatically seek to apprehend the ways how the subjects talk about “what happens” in their practices, and how this “marks” them, how it “transforms them”.

This entwinement between objectivities and subjectivities leads us to say that the object of systematisation is built and that this construction tends to de-fragment what is experienced, the experiencing and those who experience it.

The re-creation of the training process at the School on a regional level was a little different from what was reported as a national construction; it maintained the pedagogical matrix of the national course, incorporating into it characteristics of each region. The regional peculiarities are expressed also in the orientation of systematisation. The same thematic axis of systematisation was maintained in all regions – *“What has changed in me as an MSTTR, educator and what has changed in my practice as an activist?”* – but not the same guiding questions

- unfolded the thematic axis of systematisation and guided the narrative in each region;
- guided the testimonies on the marks produced by the training process on the students;
- enabled the theoretical elaboration of points that emerged with systematisation, when dealing with the practice of training regionally.

Among the re-creations of the training process and corresponding systematisations which occurred in the five regions of the country, I will present and reflect on two of them in this text, because of the peculiarities they presented both in re-creating the pedagogical itinerary of training and in their systematisation: that of the Mid-West region and that of the Northeast region. The former was chosen because of its faithfulness to the projects of training and

systematisation, narrating what was done in details and highlighting “reflections” on the subjects and spaces of trade union action; the latter because it focused on the experiences, expression of diversities, conflicts, explosion of emotions and possible creations, which marked both processes (the training process and the systematisation process), leading the subjects to live at their “limits”.

### ***3.1 Systematisation in the Mid-West region***

When presenting Enfoc’s training itinerary, in its national construction and how it was re-created by the region, the programme contents and the ways of developing them were described in detail, and the reflection on the aspects presented below was given priority:

- a) The unity in approaching the topics worked on and the coherence with the “premises of popular education” in the way of developing them:
  - the theoretical contents helped to understand the practices of the students in their actions as organisers and grassroots activists;
  - the methodological approaches aimed at enabling the participants to appropriate the contents worked on and methodologies, which favored the collective production of knowledge and learning;
  - mystic contributed to the integration among the students and the intensification of their participation and relationship with knowledge and with trade union practice:– a change in the way of being activists.
- b) Some tensions were detected by the systematisation in the training process. The main one emerged when the course participants returned to their spaces of militancy (especially in intermodule activities). People who had not participated in the national or regional training processes felt threatened because “their ‘stage’ of understanding or situation of power” had remained below the level of that forged by the newly arrived. Because of this “disarrangement” in the power relations, the systematisation recommended a discussion in the course modules about the way of sharing the contents covered in training “with the comrades who occupy positions in

the trade union structure” and for some reason had not participated in the training activities.

- c) Changes were also seen: the methodological processes of training at the School, by promoting participation, acknowledgement of the different subjects and forms of knowledge, as well as the contextualisation of programme contents and the reflection on the political and trade union practice, have provided an opportunity of significant changes in the “being oneself” and in the “environment of trade union practice”, the collective space of militant action: secretariats, committees and other collectives of the Confederation, Federations and Trade Unions.

The testimonies of the course participants<sup>10</sup> presented below narrow down what was found:

- “My didactic-pedagogical attitude changed, as I now give more priority to facilitating the knowledge of the social actors involved in the teaching-learning process than to simply teaching” (D1).
- “In the collective space I feel the need to discuss a sustainability project. I used to look for paths, now I call people to construct them with me” (D2).
- “My training ability improved, along with a great will to do battle with the activists who do not want to give space” (D3).
- “In the collective it is difficult to bring this new dialogical attitude to the grassroots because of the lack of resources and the mindset of some leaders” (D4).
- “My participations changed and my vision became clearer. I had great difficulty in interacting with people. I feel that it has brought the region closer. I see myself as a different person. I was motivated to go back to studying” (D5).
- “In the collective space only the will changed” (D6).

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<sup>10</sup> In this text we reproduce the statements (of D1, D2... Dn) presented in R. de R. de O. Silva, C. Watanabe and E. M. F. Falkembach, *ENFOC, repercussões de um jeito de ser escola*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Brasília: Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura – Contag, 2010.

- “In some spaces, planning and implementation of training are being done as a team, which did not happen previously” (D7).

Therefore, learning about being a teacher, more intense relations with knowledge, changes in power relations, empowerment of subjects (despite the tensions they began to live with in their relationships with the trade union structure), consistency of the process with the principles of the PNF, PPP and PADRSS, participation of women and youths in training, but also a need for greater participation by trade union and federation directors in educational actions, were some of the findings and recommendations for training made by the systematisation in Contag’s Mid-West region.

### ***3.2 Systematisation in the Northeast region***

In the Northeast there was a concern with transforming training into a dense process that would truly integrate contents, ways of handling them and subjects. “In each module we experienced a new way of doing and savoring the construction of knowledge” (Silva et al. 2010: 70), says the Northeastern systematisation team. This new way required much involvement by the team of 9 women and 2 men set up to problematise what had been experienced and to re-create the training process on a regional level. The systematisation followed this process to describe it, understand it and find out what and how people felt as they underwent it. It focused emphatically on experiences.

“This lively way of learning interested us greatly. Besides experiencing we wanted to learn how to do it, to the point that we had a workshop on Workshop and a workshop on Time Lines, all of this to meet our wish to provoke in others what was being aroused in us” (D8).

“The reflections were made, they became deeply rooted in us and it is only now that, having the opportunity to relive this process through the systematisation, we realise that a lot remained, that we truly learned something significant. We perceive the effect of methodology precisely when we manage to make this reflection, realising that we did not simply undergo the process, that it continues in us, that it transcends in our life, and it is this that makes a methodology be effective” (D9).

Since the systematisation occurred at the same time as the regional training, it required a lot of effort from the team to keep up the estrangement that is needed to problematise what has been experienced and also to re-create it, tell it and identify some points for theorisation.

Both in the courses and in the systematisation process acknowledging the diversity of the subjects was considered very important. There was a concern with giving a voice to as many of them as possible, covering racial, gender and age diversity and their position in the trade union structure. Then, a set of dynamics and techniques was created that favored participation, integration of the students, identification and work on the conflict, as well as the deconstruction of attitudes of resistance to interaction and work with knowledge: mandalas of wisdom, literary workshops, pedagogical dialogues, reading circles, mental maps, movie sessions, workshops on workshop<sup>11</sup>, letters, listening sessions, exchange of e-mails and conversations.

“In the first module there was a very marked difference in behaviour among the people who had attended the national course. Often their presence inhibited participation. What they said was not to encourage participation, it appeared to us that it was always to show knowledge, as though they were an elite. We emphasise that this occurred only in the first module, in Sergipe the module was already less troubled” (D10).

“And so we begin to test our ideas in the daily task of running things, where there is a certain resistance to understanding what is new, new discoveries, about the true meaning of the trade union movement, that is where sometimes what we learned and shared with the other comrades at the School, during training, frustrated us a bit, because we do not see things happen, since it does not depend on a single individual” (D11).

“As we went through the modules (and topics) studying and discussing together, pointing out new ways and learning new forms, trying out new methods and instruments, all this favored empowerment” (D12).

In the methodological construction of the (training and systematisation) processes there was a concern about combining action and reflection, practice

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<sup>11</sup> Workshops (*talleres*) designed to get to know and practice methodologies to construct and co-ordinate workshops.

and theory. The processes, in turn, enabled the surfacing and working through of feelings: insecurity, fear, joy, pleasure, camaraderie were expressed. They became objects of reflection and influenced relationships among the subjects and of the latter with knowledge and trade union practice.

“In the second and third module, there was a strong cultural presentation by the states. We saw the similarities in colors, in joy, in creativity and flavours, as well as diversity” (D13).

“I also include the space dedicated to mysticism, which enables an inner and personal ‘plunge’ to become sensitive to what is new and to humanise relationships” (D14).

Paulo Freire’s legacy was intensely sought to broaden the understanding of the other, the similarities and differences as well as conflicts resulting from the training processes, as well as to understand that the immenseness of “what remains to be done” can be diminished by the hope that emerges from “what has already been done”, of what has already been experienced.

It is the tension to which they expose themselves because they are different, in the democratic relations in which they promote themselves. It is the tension that they cannot escape because they are constructing, creating, producing at every step their own multi-culturality, which will never be ready and finished. Therefore, tension, in this case, is that of *unfinishedness* that is assumed as the *raison d’être* of the search itself and of *non-antagonistic conflicts*, not that created by fear, by highhandedness, by “existential fatigue”, by “historical anesthesia” or by the exploding vengeance, by despair at seeing injustice that appears to be self-perpetuating (Freire 1992: 156, quoted by Silva et al.: 80).<sup>12</sup>

The challenges related to the creation of the Trade Union Study Groups (GES – Grupos de Estudos Sindicais<sup>13</sup>) in the communities and the construction of

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<sup>12</sup> Citing Freire’s work as a “citation of a citation” was the resource we used to show the theoretical choices of the Northeastern systematisation team designed to guide “reflection and theorisation”, the 6<sup>th</sup> moment of the systematisation proposal in “Arte de ampliar cabeças” [The art of opening minds].

<sup>13</sup> The GES are training spaces at the grassroots level that aim at bringing together rural workers and leaders of the trade union structure to reflect on local reality and trade union action and the study of correlated topics.

the Network of Educators, the creative multipliers, were presented and taken up by the participants in the Enfoc courses in the Northeast and especially by the region's systematisation team. The testimonies below show how this was seen by the students.

“The network of educators, especially in the Northeast, is a highly important component in the systematisation process... This is not a “lazy hammock [= net] to lie in”, but rather a network that is constantly pulled by many hands, and we can say that this is not predatory fishing, on the contrary, it is the only net in which fish feel happy that they were fished. In our net the fishes and/or dreams are nourished by a very rich food which is solidarity, the strings of the net are united by many feelings that motivate us to continue in the process that is normally very hard, because it has no space in the work time of most people involved” (D15).

“At the grassroots, training fights for space with many other activities in the daily life of federations, and in most of them it is not a priority. Thus there is a struggle, and in this place we are alone, so we feel that it is the links in the net that sustain us” (D16).

“But I think that the GES brings us closer to the grassroots, it is a way of making the people at the grassroots level get to know the MSTTR project. It provides an opportunity for everyone to get to know the projects, also to identify our weaknesses. The people will tell us where we are going wrong, where we should fix things, where we should go. And, of course, within the knowledge that we have based on the school, on the PNF, we will contribute a great deal to this new way of seeing the world, of reading the world. This is a space to confront our theory with our practice, where we will experience, feel and debate with them what we want with this new view of the world. It is a space to confront our ideas with the reality of the people and train new subjects for a new way of making their world, the world where they experience, where education and leisure do not exist, possibly change this reality through their day to day practice, making us get closer to each other. I think that the GES will bring us closer, we who are militants in land reform, in the MSTTR of the people, where the people will also give us an horizon to strengthen us, I really believe this” (D17).

For this reason, the systematisation in the region concludes that “the school is still pregnant with possibilities ... The great challenge now is to make the school reach the grassroots through the GES, to provide other people with the

opportunity to become part of a process of liberation through training, share with them the eternal art of learning, teaching, learning” (Silva et al. 2010: 92).

“The historical construction of what we are experiencing today, when we know the roots of the facts, approaches us intimately to them, it seems to give more meaning to the struggle” (D18).

“I began thinking about the elements of collective and individual identity, where I perceived that the MSTTR today could not go on without this training process. I began to see more clearly what we really want in this movement” (D19).

Thus, we briefly presented two ways of experiencing the systematisation of the training processes of the Enfoc/Contag, attempting to demonstrate how, pedagogically and politically, they are open to re-creation and how they are potentiated, as the systematisation possibly offers “pedagogical resources” to the subjects to work on them and even deal with their own subjectivation.

#### **4. Reflections on the systematisation – experience and care**

In research on systematisation processes that develops from practices of popular education, we have found very great changes in the ways subjects relate to their practices when the latter are converted into an object of systematisation. Firstly because this conversion into an object of systematisation results from the problematisation of those practices, from the act of constituting them into a “problem for thinking”. With this, these subjects are compelled to look critically at the events of practices and, as participants in them, signify them. They also need to pay attention to the movements of signification exerted by their peers, those with whom they share daily practices. They are called to take on an attitude of estrangement regarding the practices.

Secondly, because by pronouncing the practice and identifying other ways of also doing so the subjects encounter a diversity which may destabilise their relationships and produce conflicts in practice. As we have already spelled out in this text, these imbalances and conflicts may be converted into a creative power that animates the reflective process that is conducted by systematisation and, thus, may promote changes in the relationships between

the subjects and their practices, even attributing greater intensity to these relationships.

Often this intensity of relationships appears associated with the concept of experience, a concept that has historically had many meanings. I will deal with two of them, those which most frequently appear in the research on systematisation.

The first of them is that which conceives experience as a form of reflection on practice. This meaning is found especially in the studies on systematisation by Marco Raúl Mejía (2010: 162-165) and in texts by Marie-Cristhine Josso (2004: 48) about teacher training, when she works with life stories.

Mejía says that experience, beginning with systematisation, occurs when the “actors of practice” spell out and intertwine their knowledge about it with the “constituted knowledge”, carrying out a movement of “working out, thinking and meaning” (an own form of theorisation), which reveals their will of, on the basis of daily practice, transforming prevailing social relationships and themselves (subjects and social collectives). The experience is constituted by “... an action of creation in the order of enunciation, which the actors of practice perform when they work it out based on their particular language and logic ...” and in dealing with the conflicts that are made through this enunciation (2010: 166).

According to Josso, experiences are specific life experiences that take on a unique status “from the time we perform a certain kind of reflective work about what happened and what was observed, perceived and felt” (2004: 48). The experience combines life experience and reflection. It enables unique life experiences to become an object for thought for the subjects who experience them and, thus, touches their feelings, their sensitivities, their abilities to act, to project on the future what was experienced reflected as ideation.

The second meaning, that of limit experience, is found in texts by Michel Foucault, an author who also “sensitises” us with his concept of “care of the self”. We are inspired by works done by Michel Foucault, (1998: 13; 2004: 228-229) after his readings of the works of Nietzsche, Bataille and Blanchot, by the idea of a limit experience that forcibly brings the subjects out of themselves, that incites them to “not be the same”, which Foucault saw happen to himself when he wrote his books. This is an entrancing movement

that exposes them to a void and, at the same time, to the “unlimited character” of freedom<sup>14</sup> and, thus, provokes them to create. We are also inspired by his studies on ethics, where he associates the notion of experience to what he takes as a “historical form of subjectivation” in which are present “a game of truth, power relations, forms of relating with oneself and with others”, as shown by Castro (2009: 162). From this perspective, the thinker criticises his previous conceptions, but maintains the idea of intensity, which leads people who study his work, such as Jorge Larrosa (2002: 144), to also conceive experience as that which entrances, enraptures the subject and subjectivises them.

We should also point out that this feeling of rupture does not take a person away from interaction with others, on the contrary, it contaminates this interaction, raising it to the dimension of “collective practice”, as indicated by people who study Foucault’s work (Castelo Branco 2000: 313).

Systematisation, by making the subject interact with limit situations of their own practices and of “themselves”, in the sphere of the latter, exposing a void that points to freedom to create,

- drives them to ask themselves about their way of acting towards others;
- safeguards them from simple “adherence” to the world and conformity at this condition;
- renders possible a relationship between the subjects and practice and a seeing themselves in practice, where there is space to refuse. They may even refuse to “be what one is”. This is a movement of “de-subjectivation” furthered by the impact of experience which entrances and at the same time induces an exercise of new subjectivation.

Thus, experience

- impacts and subtracts; challenges and opens;

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<sup>14</sup> A rupture with ties that limit creation, the possibility of making choices that allow individuals to transcend their present conditions (what they are already ceasing to be) towards actualisation (what they are already becoming) despite the losses that occur as a result of choices made (see Deleuze/Guattari, 1997; 113-114)

- exposes a void and, at the same time, the unlimited character of freedom;
- predisposes the subject to creation, especially to creating relationships with their peers, with themselves, with their practice.

This movement requires work about oneself, a care, “occupying oneself” and “getting to know oneself” after the fashion of the Greeks in classic Antiquity. But it is not a work which takes the subject away from interaction.

As Judith Revel (2005: 34), who studied the production of Michel Foucault, reminds us,

In Classic Antiquity, the care of the self is not in opposition to the care of others: on the contrary, it implies complex relationships with others because it is important for free men to include in their “good conduct” a fair manner of ruling their wife, their children or their household. The *éthos* of the care of the self is, thus, an art of governing others, and therefore it is essential to take care of oneself in order to govern the city well.

Care of oneself, from this perspective, will make it feasible for the subject to enter the field of ethics at the same time as they enter that of politics: “relationship with oneself”, “with others”, “with the city”, unceasing work towards “being oneself”, “being together”, “being relationship”.

Silvio Gallo’s considerations (2006: 188) on education also are illuminating:

Here is the reciprocity of an ethical action based on care of oneself and on care of the other, in which the game of constructing freedom can only be played as a collective game, of mutual interactions and relationships, in which the actions of some imply actions of others. A game in which some make themselves free by learning from the freedom of others, in which some make themselves free insofar as they teach others freedom.

Here we have a game in which realising oneself moves the “me” in the direction of an “us” and instigates the “responsible” expansion of one’s own sociability.

## **5. The care of the self as a right: by way of conclusion**

Michel Foucault (1994: 4) already said that a way of life based on reciprocity and conceived in experimentation “may give rise to intense relationships that

do not resemble any of those that are institutionalised”; “it may give rise to a culture and an ethics”.

We certify that a way of life thus forged is an endless game. As such it can “happen” in many different spaces of human existence, including the formal spaces of institutions such as school, family, community center, trade union, social movement, reinventing daily life, promoting the expression and interaction of different subjects and driving changes.

It is a space for dialogue; it is the practice of freedom that takes on the form of an *éthos*; it is space for care.

Participating in these human experiences, experiences/experimentation, makes the subject able to

- work on knowledge without the pressure of disciplinary processes, prescriptions and out of context rules;
- experience dialogue mediating relationships between subjects (communication and interaction) and knowledge (interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity);
- experience educational opportunities without moving away from the practices that they protagonise and the collectives to which they belong;
- make choices: defining themes, curricula, methodologies, forms of evaluation in their educational processes.

Finally, it allows the subject to deal with themselves, to work themselves out, to change themselves, to find ways of being that will not lead to denying themselves and excluding the other, to work on themselves to act properly in the private space and on the public scene, to take care of themselves.

The way in which these “ways of being” and “living well” have been practiced, and this case that I present here bears witness to it, refers to something that was achieved by organised human collectives. Since then they began to take care of their achievements that can no longer be suppressed from their lives.

These, in turn, acquire visibility as they appear re-created in other experiences. They acquire the status of a “right”. “Right” to care; care of the self or care of oneself, the care that makes the relationship of the subject with them-

selves more intense, and to the possibility of freely establishing strategies for relationship with others and with the social and natural environment of their time.

Finally, and taking stock of the claims established when we began this text, we believe that we have not erred away from them: in brief we presented information on the object of reflection, tried to spell out the concept of systematisation with which we have been working and also presented “theoretical reasons” that lead us to claim that this kind of investigation, attached to the social practices and performed collectively, *with the intention of producing knowledge and learning from and for the practices and which flows into a subjectivation process*, can lead us to reflections that even go beyond the limits of systematised practices. It enables reflections on the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and pedagogical contexts in which systematisation can involve the subjects and which it can launch onto them, potentiating a process of subjectivation that makes room for the critique of what has been experienced, freedom to redirect one’s ways of being in the world (“being-oneself”, “being-together”, “being-relationship”) and submitting one’s political practices to a reflective surveillance that manages to keep them moving.

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