

# Indigenous making History: The Indigenous ETP at UFSM – Federal University of Santa Maria

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## Abstract

The Tutorial Education Program – TEP from Federal University of Santa Maria – UFSM was created in 2010 in the service of Knowledge Connections Public Notice from the federal government, and, among others, establishes the modality of an interdisciplinary TEP with native academics.

Given the importance of the insertion of indigenous people in the academic space, this Program has allowed the collective construction of academic activities created, established and developed by the indigenous people of the institution. There are 60 academics currently, which 12 are part of the TEP group. They are from Kaingang, Guarani-Kaiowá and Terena ethnicities, creating, thus, an ethnic and spatial mosaic of the country, since the first ones are from Rio Grande do Sul state and the others are from Mato Grosso do Sul state. This report presents the activities and the results obtained from this project and its empowerments in the 2015-2016 biannual time. The activities are proposed and discussed collectively and the decisions are taken for consensus, within the TEP limits. Besides the realization of the academic awareness programs about indigenous issues, activities in the villages (the making of the traditional indigenous scholar games) and a seminar of indigenous students in the south region of Brazil.

Key-words: TEP, Indigenous, UFSM, social inclusion

## Introduction

The Tutorial Education Program is a Program from the Brazilian Federal Government to stimulate university research, teaching and extension activities in under graduation courses. This program is subordinated to the activities of The Education Ministry and the Higher Education Secretariat (HES). According to HES, the goals of the Program are the formation of academics in graduation, the interdisciplinary actions, planning and executing collective actions under the coordination of a tutor in diversified and qualified programs of academic activities.

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The Indigenous TEP was created from a differentiated perspective, through a specific public notice to attend parcels of the population who had not been attended in the traditional programs, such as low income population, indigenous and *quilombos*<sup>2</sup> remnants, named *quilombolas*. In a general way, and following the successful experience of many notices that aimed the connection between academic knowledge and other abilities that originated outside the academy (the so-called "Connections of Knowledge"), a special announcement was made in 2010, called TEP - Connections of Knowledge, in which the target public was low income populations, indigenous academics and *Quilombolas*

It is possible to affirm from a wider perspective that TEP indigenous Nãnde Reko in its actions and reflections relates itself to a broad educational issue of which the subject of Indian university inclusion is one of its facets. In this sense, a reflection on the Indigenous TEP also refers to the history of representations about the Indian in Rio Grande do Sul as a corollary of the discussion about higher education for indigenous groups and their insertion in UFSM. (Brum and Soares, 2013, p. 151)

The author of this article, through this notice, proposed the creation of a TEP–Indigenous group, in 2010 called Nãnde Reko, which in Guarani Language means “Our Way of Being” alluding to a differentiated view of Being indigenous related to the non-indigenous. Several academic works point to the specificities of the "way of being" of indigenous people related to the maintenance of tradition, and this is the result of a traditional living in geographical areas in which social, cultural, vegetable cultivation, manipulation are followed according to ethnologically defined values and criteria. Consequently, our indigenous "way of being" does not refer to an opposition to the white way of life, but rather to various conditions for society to reproduce itself both socially and materially. When the name of the group was baptized, the idea was to propose to non-indigenous people to take awareness of one other culture that not only excels in values in the field of linguistics, but also moral, ethical, environmental, and other values that deserve respect and consideration, given that the 'speed' of indigenous peoples is different from the so-called 'white' academics.

By the time the notice was published, the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) counted with a little more than ten Indians attending classes there, and many were not

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<sup>2</sup> The term *quilombo* refers to settlements, refuges or places of residence and establishment of ex-slaves during the period of African slavery in Brazil (1500-1888). After the liberation of the slaves by Princess Isabel (1888), several rights were denied for the exercise of citizenship by these descendants, many still living in places that once were refuges of the slave system, or in villages where they met without state intervention.

from the villages, but rather self-declared indigenous 'de-villaged'<sup>3</sup>, or urban Indians, which prevented a follow-up of their ethnic origin. At the same time, part of the indigenous who were attracted to a higher education were not only because the academic formation, but also because a student assistance policy pretty solid which holds student housing, subsidized university restaurant and stay aid.

Belonging to distinct linguistic and cultural groups, those Indians have social-economic ways of organizing also different among them, being similar only in the marginalized condition and find in the scarce selling of art craft alternative ways of survival. In Santa Maria the situation is not different, being the city policy marked by tolerance, but with no affirmative actions worthy of reference.

The admission of indigenous students into the academic world of higher education at UFSM is a separate chapter, but briefly we can affirm that the vacancies are offered in courses that are requested through indigenous leaders who dialogue with a commission of entrance for the accomplishment of a differentiated selection process in the areas of the intended courses. The students thus compete for vacancies in courses predefined by the commission, and the number of places in each course is also discussed among the indigenous leaderships and the commission in which UFSM is part of other members within the rules of the law. It is still important to note that the quota system does not interfere with the number of places foreseen in academic admission, in the case of new vacancies destined for quota holders.

To the indigenous scholars, it should also be noted that there is a monumental diversity in the country, since we currently have more than 200 native languages registered, in a population that is 0.1% of Brazilian population. It is worth highlighting that the different ethnic groups have very different perceptions of what life is like in the village, since it can be treated in Indian reservation areas administered by the National Indian Foundation - FUNAI, or isolated lands in environmental protection areas, or even areas not demarcated by the federal government. Thus, the contact that each group has with the involving society varies a lot, since groups that keep the original language, or keep it partially or even have adopted the Portuguese language as a parameter.

Still, it is important to highlight that, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistic (IBGE)<sup>4</sup> indigenous population is of 896,9 thousand Indians (in a population of approximately 206 million people), distributed into 305 ethnicities, from

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<sup>3</sup> Indians living outside the villages, usually in conditions of social vulnerability and they are not recognized as indigenous by most of the population.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brasil.gov.br/governo/2015/04/populacao-indigena-no-brasil-e-de-896-9-mil>, último acesso em 18 de maio de 2107.

which the biggest one is Tikúna, with 6,8% of indigenous population (data from 2015). According to the census, in 2010 36,32% of indigenous lived in urban areas and 63,8% in rural area. In those ethnicities, 49,55% holds up to 500 people; 39,5% between 500 and 5 thousand people, 9% holds between 5 thousand and 20% people and only 4 indigenous groups hold more than 20 thousand people.

Thus, the empowerment that those indigenous receive when they get into the University refers to several aspects, legal, social and economical. For instance, from the legal point of view, indigenous university students have undergone similar processes of training and qualification that any other person, allowing this person to act in his/her field of knowledge in equality situation with non-Indians; socially speaking, the undermining by which the Indians in Brazil suffer, always associated with backwardness, laziness and unproductiveness, fall by the wayside to compete with the "whites" in the vacancies for jobs, public competitions and postgraduate selective processes.

Finally, in the social scope and although the number of indigenous scholars is extremely low in population percentages, the university is opening spaces so that those citizens may enjoy to its fullest their legal rights, having representatives in all scopes that may act in the indigenous cause.

The Indigenous TEP activities so far

Among the several activities that aim the indigenous culture and knowledge valorization, some of them are reported as follow:

#### Indigenous School Games

This Project aims to organize activities inside Terra Indígena da Guarita (Guarita Indegenous Land – Indigenous reserve) in the counties of Tenente Portela, Miraguai and Redentora, Rio Grande do Sul state in Brazil, Pedra Lisa Section, that intends children and young men and women, from all indigenous school to practice and improve traditional sports games, as well as to present other indigenous culture elements.

The modalities developed were indoor male and female soccer with a traditional indigenous ball, tug of war, 100m running, bow and arrow, log throwing, body wrestling, game with the shuttle, game of the log, race with log, in addition to cultural manifestations as: dance, body paintings and lectures.

### Meeting of Indigenous University Students

It happened between August 26<sup>th</sup>. and 27<sup>th</sup>. in 2016, as part of a bigger event named “Indigenous August”<sup>5</sup> with the proposal of create a space for the indigenous students from Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul state, in which they could discuss and share ideas about indigenous issues from the own indigenous perspective; promote different ethnicities integration and draw up a letter exposing the ideas discussed there to the whole community. The activity took place in August 26<sup>th</sup>. and 27<sup>th</sup> within the Indigenous August idealized by the group. Three plenary sessions were held with the central themes: Health, Territory and Indigenous Law, in which indigenous and non-indigenous speakers discussed the issues in each area.

### Kaingang Cooking Project

This project rescued the traditional cooking and cuisine of Kaingang group in the villages of the scholars from this ethnic group. The proposal was to be able to register in physical and magnetic medium some elements of the Kaingang indigenous cuisine, as ingredients, know-how and technologies used to prepare the traditional dishes. It aimed the preservation of indigenous memory and culture, materialized in cuisine, considering this one of the last elements to be abandoned by people, as well as their mother tongue. It searched to register elements of the indigenous cooking and cuisine, verifying the cultural elements presents that could be inferred as traditional, as well as registering the components, seasonings, ingredients and craft to prepare the dishes and to document the elements present in indigenous cooking that are traditional, differing from the ones of the surrounding non-indigenous community.

### Kaingang Culture Before and Now

It is a project that has been developed in lectures and presentations in schools, places where the surrounding society has little access to indigenous history where the indigenous are the protagonists, in a way where they can be in the middle of all the building process of the activities for the public. It was worked the indigenous activities and bringing historical, social and cultural aspects of the Kaingang people to the knowledge of the white society that ignores the issues rose.

It was also sought as a fundamental point of this project to open up possibilities of this new knowledge to the white society, using Law N<sup>o</sup> 11.645, of March 10<sup>th</sup>. , 2008.

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<sup>5</sup> The official celebration date of the “Indian Day” is April 19th. August is the month of the original people in the world.

Law 11.645 of March 10, 2008 deals with the obligation of teaching History and indigenous culture in schools. In our view, this legislation directly affects the views we have of the Indians, since the various forms by which these representations occur in didactic materials and in the processes of continuous teacher training are responsible for the construction of perceptions and the formation of an imaginary about what is to be an Indian and its dynamic importance throughout the Brazilian historical process. The school manuals, as well as the other opinion formers, obviously corroborate the acceptance or execration of the indigenous groups in the Brazilian scenario. (Brum and Soares, 2013, p.153-154)

Other projects shall be developed in the year of 2017, as a documentary video about indigenous maternity and university, that will register the testimonies on the difficulties that indigenous mothers have to carry out the graduation in conditions similar to other academics, since maternity is a constant Among the Kaingang youths who are the majority in the UFSM.

When it is about indigenous culture, several ethnicities face maternity as one of the pillars to maintain culture, what affects young females from 16 to 18 years-old. They become mothers without being considered precocious. The entrance in the academic world comes after, what brings these young mothers and students to face double journeys. The goal of the video is to bring visibility to the problem, once there is no daycare to the academics.

Still in the list of projects to be developed in 2017 there is a project which is "Indian Program" an expression that in Brazil means to do an activity in which there are more work to do than pleasure, when it was supposed to be just for fun. The project aims to carry out educational activities with the theme of indigenous culture, especially the material culture bequeathed to Brazilian society. The proposal is to take the schools and and universities to a moment of presentation of indigenous cultural elements through practical activities (i.e bow and arrow, pottery, among others) to show the difficulty of activities considered 'banal', but that involve technology, previous knowledge and complex thinking.

"We seek to initiate a dialogue between indigenous populations who live in low-income, at-risk urban homesteads and camps in the city of Santa Maria, seeking to build citizenship of these social segments with the creation of new perspectives for the valorization of local knowledge and Knowledge. We wish to articulate a set of activities where the indigenous, descendants and / or self-declared ones act in their own community, bringing with them the load of knowledge and experiences acquired in their academic trajectory, fomented by the PET-Connections of Knowledge Program. " Soares, 2013, pp. 177-178)

Some final considerations

A collaborative process of insertion of the indigenous community into the academic milieu is slow, gradual, and must break with various barriers of prejudice, such as racial prejudice, cultural prejudice, and the exclusionary and competitive system that the academy itself stimulates. In this sense, presenting to the university the indigenous cultural universe is a rather arduous task, which requires patience and persistence, since it is known that inclusion will not occur in a peaceful or external way. The ultimate goal of the Indigenous TEP is to establish a connection between academic and indigenous knowledge, in such a way that, in the sense of academics, the knowledge of sanitation, disease transmission, good eating practices, dialogue between the use of medicinal plants, epidemiological surveys, Generation of vegetable gardens and orchards, as well as acting in bilingual schools, for example.

In the sense of the relationship between Indians and white people, the project aims to develop actions for valuing citizenship and redemption of self-esteem, presentation of traditional means of territorial management, sustainable management of the environment, as well as other forms of perception of the world, through their traditional religion or metaphysics and indigenous cosmology.

As far as the relation between the Indians is concerned, the cultural diversity we have today (2017), with indigenous peoples of three ethnic groups, the Guarani-Kaiowá, Terena and Kaingang, is a continuous discussion and a process of recognition of diversity and common issues all. It is not a question of fighting against a common enemy, but learning the "white system" to learn how to navigate the different realities, between academic bureaucracy, meetings that decide nothing, disciplinary procedures and eternal promises unfinished. Indigenous TEP also encourages academics to develop projects in their indigenous areas in order to provide an effective return of the academic in their community of origin. At the same time, instigated to carry out field research in their community, the Indians are obliged to know better their own reality and to question the solutions that are being given by themselves and the whites.

Finally, the indigenous group TEP is a space of struggle, in which the indigenous condition must be elevated to social protagonism, without assistance, without protectionism, but with direct action on the indigenous reality in the academic environment. More than thirty indigenous students passed through the TEP, among engineers, teachers, doctors and nurses, among various formations. As a political space, TEP reaffirms itself in the service of ethnic minorities, as a space for research, the production of knowledge by the natives themselves, and as a space for university extension, the concrete proof that it is possible, that everyone and everyone live in search of harmony.

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