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Knowledge dialogues: the role of Kaiowa and Guarani knowledge systems within the Intercultural Teacher Education program of the Federal University of Grande Dourados, Brazil

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Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the role of knowledge systems in the relations between models and practices of production and re-production of the social life of *Kaiowa and Guarani* collectives in the border area of Brazil and Paraguay. The aim is to situate the *Kaiowa and Guarani* knowledge systems within the Teacher Education program of the Indigenous Licentiate program *Teko Arandu*, offered at the Indigenous Intercultural Faculty (FAIND) of the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD). The text explores the Indigenous appropriation of academic knowledge and technologies that may have a result on cosmological revisions and strategies for claiming rights. These appropriations are agents of new forms of articulations between knowledge systems.

Keywords: the Kaiowa and Guarani, Intercultural education, Indigenous knowledge, knowledge systems, Brazil

Introduction

This article is about knowledge dialogue within the Intercultural Teacher Education program of the Indigenous Intercultural Faculty (FAIND) at the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD) in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul (border area with Paraguay). The Kaiowa and Guarani are classified as categories within a bigger group who speak the Guarani language, and are known as Guarani Peoples. The bigger collective of Guarani Peoples also includes Indigenous Peoples in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina (Colman 2007, 2015).

The group, officially classified as *Guarani-Kaiowa* in Brazil (*Paĩ Tavyterã* in Paraguay), self-identify as *Kaiowa*, while the group formally known as *Guarani-Ñandéva* call themselves Guarani. Thus, we follow their own collective identification and call them Kaiowa and

Guarani, as in our previous work (e.g. Colman 2015; Pereira 2016). The Guarani and Kaiowa reside in the south of the Brazilian state *Mato Grosso do Sul*, on the border with Paraguay. The area has a strong transnational mobility and is currently affected by a fast process of social and environmental transformation due to the increasing amount of soy plantations, cattle farms and other development projects (Grünberg 2014; Colman 2015).

Brazil was a Portuguese colony for more than three centuries, a colony that expanded from the coastal regions where the first Portuguese explorers arrived in 1500. However, the occupation by settlers of the area, where the Guarani and Kaiowa live in *Mato Grosso do Sul,* only began in the 1880s, after the war between Paraguay and the triple alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. In the 20th century, dozens of communities were confined to small reservations so that land could be cleared for agricultural use. Agricultural land owners coming from other Brazilian areas gradually occupied the south of Mato Grosso do Sul, and in the 1970s almost reached the total occupation of these lands. However, since the 1980s, some of those communities have started to reclaim and retake their traditional territories. There are frequently confrontations between Indigenous communities and landowners [1].
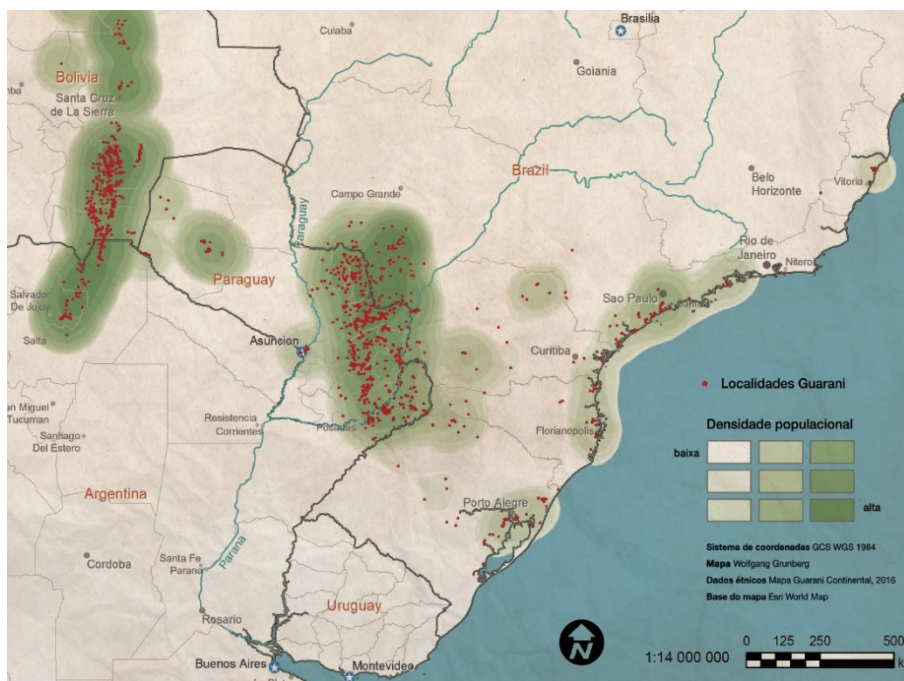
Figure 1. Guarani Peoples in South America. From low (beige) to high (dark green) population density. The red dots show Guarani localities.

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[1] See for instance Cimi's annual reports on violence against Indigenous Peoples in Brazil: https://cimi.org.br/observatorio-da-violencia/edicoes-anteriores/ .

Figure 2. Guarani Peoples in Brazil. Bigger circles represent higher population numbers. Different colors represent the diverse Peoples (orange: Kaiowá/Tavyterã; yellow: Mbya; blue: Avá-Guarani; purple: Nhandeva; pink: Tupi-Guarani; green: communities with more than one People.)

The Intercultural Teacher Education program, called "*Teko Arandu*", is a result of decades of demands from the Guarani and Kaiowa teachers' movement for a specific university program. The *Teko Arandu* program started in 2006 at the Federal University of Dourados (UFGD). The only other specific teacher training program for the Kaiowa and Guarani in Brazil is the "*curso normal médio*"[2] *Ara Vera*, developed in the 1990s by the Education Secretariat of Mato Grosso do Sul. In some way, it is possible to say that the *Teko Arandu* developed from the *Ara Vera* program, because it is a licentiate degree and enables graduates to teach in more advanced levels. The programs have similar pedagogic proposals.

FAIND has around 300 Indigenous students from the Kaiowa and Guarani Peoples in the current academic year. Since 2018, ten Indigenous students began the master's program offered by Post-grad in Education and Territoriality at UFGD. Around 20 other Indigenous students follow other master's and PhD programs at the same university. In a recent post-doc research, Noemia Moura (2019) reveals that 225 Indigenous students graduated since the start of the program. In 2018, 90.6% of them were working at Indigenous schools in the area, known as

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[2] In Brazil, "curso normal médio" is a kind of program that trains teachers to work at the initial series of education, the case of *Ara Vera*. While a licentiate university program, like *Teko Arandu*, trains teachers to work at more advanced levels.

Território Etnoeducacional Cone Sul. Of those former students, 38.2% are public servants and 61.8% have a contract.[3] Moura (2019) shows that of the 225 graduates, 98 were female and 127 male. The program is divided into four main areas: 71 of the graduates were part of the language program, 60 a part of human/social sciences, 48 graduated in mathematics, and 46 graduated in natural sciences.

Those numbers reveal the dimension of the scope of UFGD's teacher training. Students and graduates tend to keep in contact with the UFGD even after completing the program because the same university carries out the project *Saberes Indígenas na Escola* (which develops specific programs for Indigenous schools) and other collective initiatives, like the annual students' meetings. In the same way, they participate in the Indigenous Teacher Movement, which does not gather exclusively education professionals who graduated at *Teko Arandu*, there are other public and private institutions where Indigenous students follow regular or distance courses – which are not specific intercultural programs.

The Indigenous people known as *Kaiowa* in Brazil are called *Pãi* in Paraguay. The ethnographic accounts made by Melià, Grünberg and Grünberg (2008[1976]) about the *Pãi* reveal two knowledge systems: the *Pãi/ Kaiowa* system called *ava reko* – and the non-Indigenous system, called *karai reko*. In their formulations, these two systems are presented as opposites and exclusives. This kind of formulation is expressed by many of the Indigenous individuals in Brazil too, especially by the shamans who did not attend formal school education. Shamans are Indigenous individuals who have the specialized knowledge to perform rituals, chants, and to interpret mythical narratives. For some of the Indigenous elders or shamans, the *ava reko* is connected with the old and authentic way of being – *teko yma guare*, which was fully practiced before colonization.

On the other hand, the Kaiowa and Guarani who went through a literacy process, including the ones who attended specific Indigenous educational programs, express a different perception. Maybe because for years they were in contact with the theme of interculturality, which was always presented by the lecturers as something positive. The students are, in a certain way, encouraged to present themselves as hybrid individuals. The idea of opposition and exclusion

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[3] The difference between a public servant and a teacher with a contract is the stability of the job. Public servants have a stable position, while contracts could more easily be terminated due to political or economic situations.

between knowledge systems is problematic for the application of the interculturality theory paradigm, which comes from cultural studies and considers that knowledges circulate, interact, produce synthesis, even being ambiguous or hybrid.

In this article we focus on describing and analyzing how the reception, circulation and transformation of the Kaiowa and Guarani knowledges (necessarily in plural) function in the intercultural teacher training program *Teko Arandu*. The pedagogic proposal of the program highlights the importance of the dialogue between the Indigenous knowledges and the knowledges, which are recognized as "scientific" because of being produced inside the academic sphere. This effort, that we call interculturality, is a central theme in the education of teachers. In this article, we present the principles and methodologies applied in the program. We also discuss to which degree the course is effective in promoting a knowledge dialogue - its most essential principle. Thus, the article offers a series of arguments about knowledge dialogue in the scope of the program *Teko Arandu*.

Methodology and material

This paper offers reflections that are based on our own experiences with the *Teko Arandu* program. Approaching this theme and discussion is a challenge for the authors, since we all work or have worked with and at the FAIND – one of us as an associate professor, thus public servant, the second author as a regular lecturer, and the third author as an eventual collaborator. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that our own positions also strongly affect our discussions and reflections. Two of the authors, Levi Pereira and Camila Emboava Lopes, are non-Indigenous[4] researchers, while Rosa Colman is Indigenous and a native Guarani speaker.

Pereira has worked together with Indigenous peoples for decades, especially with the Kaiowa and Guarani. Our reflections heavily rely on his theoretical discussions about Kaiowa and Guarani forms of organization and knowledge systems. We aim to develop discussions that dialogue with international research on Indigenous methodologies and education. For example, we touch upon themes of decolonization (Smith 1999) and interculturality, which can be related to Chilisa's (2012) accounts about integrative approaches. However, we strongly situate our

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[4] In Brazilian literature, we use the term *não-indígena* as a general word to describe Brazilians that are not part of an Indigenous People. They can be descendants of people from other continents, or simply do not have knowledge about their origins.

reflections on the Kaiowa and Guarani context. Our work is inspired and informed by the work of the Kaiowa researchers Tonico Benites (2004, 2009) and Eliel Benites (2014), as well as other researchers who have been working with these peoples for a long time, such as Nimuendaju (1987[1914]), Cardogan (1959, 1962), Brand (1993, 1997), Chamorro (1993), Vietta (2007) and Pimentel (2012).

Besides our own observations and reflections, this paper considers the written perceptions of Indigenous students and graduates, as well as visits to Kaiowa and Guarani communities to talk with students, teachers, religious leaders and political leaders. During fieldwork, we registered how Indigenous students and community members understand the pursued knowledge dialogue within the program, the problems that they identify, and the suggestions they have for its continuity. To reflect on the gradual insertion of the theme of interculturality in the program *Teko Arandu*, we also talked extensively with other colleagues, especially teachers Veronice Rossato and Adir Casaro Nascimento, who have worked with the program and have followed the development of this kind of specific Indigenous education for many years, since the 1980s.

Talking about the relationship between different knowledge systems at the space of school education seems to be weird and even uncomfortable between some of the Kaiowa and Guarani who did not attend school. This is because school was historically conceived as an exclusively non-Indigenous space, hence it is identified as *karai reko*. Many of the shamans believe that the school is the space where the *karai* stores their knowledge and secrets, because "for the *karai* everything is on paper, the paper is everything to them, it is their secret". In this view, the school is a space contrary to Indigenous knowledges. In addition, many shamans also understand that the introduction of schools in Guarani and Kaiowa communities has the aim to abolish their practices and knowledges, to neutralize the *ava reko*. For the shamans, the school attacks mainly the language, the praying, and the rituals. In their understanding, it is an attack on what Schaden identifies as the locus of the Guarani culture (Schaden [1962]1974).

Theoretical framework – Interculturality and the relations between knowledge systems

We consider Indigenous knowledge systems to be complex cumulative systems that are transmitted and transformed through generations, oftentimes for centuries, by a specific society. The systems include knowledges, beliefs, practices, and the way to understand and relate to the world, the environment, and other collectives of humans and non-humans. We situate this paper within the ethnographic studies of the Guarani Peoples. Although there is a vast number of publications about the Kaiowa and Guarani, there are still significant gaps in the understanding of their knowledge systems – expressed as *ava reko* – and the relationships that this system establishes with non-Indigenous knowledge systems – expressed as *karai reko*. The proposition of these two systems does not exclude diversity within the systems themselves.

The Kaiowa and Guarani recognize the plurality of their own organizational forms. In this way, when one of the researchers asked them about the existence of various *teko* (way to be) this question was considered a bit strange, because livelihoods only make sense in the plural. The Kaiowa and Guarani are clear in stating that "everything has *teko*", including non-humans, because all species of animals, plants, rocks and wind have their own ways of being. In this sense, one of our challenges is to avoid understanding knowledge systems as homogeneous. For this reason, our theoretical framework in this study considers the diversity and distinctions between *parantelas*, the theme of Pereira's doctoral dissertation (2004).

Here, we briefly describe the process of children's socialization and knowledge access between the Kaiowa and Guarani, which produces their own pedagogy. Their pedagogical methodologies produce differentiations, which are nevertheless connected to common references. The different behavior styles are considered exclusive and known as *ore reko* (Pereira 2004). The smaller organizational modes are known as "domestic fires", a collective of fires that consist of one *parentela* and a *tekoha*. The *parentela* is the core of relations between different "domestic fires" that tend to live close to each other. However, the *parentela* can only be noticed when we look at the feelings of identification and solidarity between the groups. Those feelings are connected to a main couple who articulates the groups, known as *hi'u* and *ha'i* or *tamõi* and *jari*. To conclude, it is impossible to talk about the socialization of children without highlighting their internal polymorphism.

Pereira extensively developed the argument of a multiplicity of styles in previous papers (2004, 2016). We consider it important to touch upon these arguments as a strategy to avoid the image of Kaiowa and Guarani societies as internally homogeneous – an image that was predominant in academic literature for decades. However, the current state of arts that guides anthropologic practices demands research that looks for new images of Indigenous collectives. The various and varied formulations and styles of practices organized around the *parentelas* and *parentela* networks, do not exclude the existence of common references – known as *jekoha*, where the different styles of practices are articulated around. The shamans and other *parentela* articulators recognize the distinctions between them, but know that they are all *ava*, followers of the *teko tee*, the authentic way of being of a Kaiowa or Guarani individual.

Even with the distinction between styles of diverse *parentelas*, the similarities are recognized because they are part of the same social formation, as proposed by Elias (2001). The similarities emerge mainly when the Kaiowa and Guarani differentiate themselves from other peoples, including other Indigenous peoples. They also recognize the permeability of the *ava reko*, because they say, "today we already use a lot of things from the behavior of the *karai*". In this way, the *ava reko* and the *karai reko* communicate and connect, in spite of being opposed to one another. The ideas of opposition versus connection/appropriation between systems oscillate. In some contexts, the emphasis on the opposition between the systems seem to be connected with strategies of affirming Indigenous rights, which are constantly violated in relationships with State institutions.

The differentiation between styles only makes sense when the styles are put in relation to each other. The relations can also entail connection and permeability – themes that lead the discussion to the idea of transformation. In other words, relationships do not only produce connections, they also produce transformation. In a way, this proposition is reminiscent of the classic comprehension of culture as a communication system, since, according to Lévi-Strauss (1983), exchanges always add new values to what is transferred or circulated. In this way, the transformation should be considered as a necessary part of relationships. This addresses the classic theme of exchanges as the basis of relations, as proposed by Lévi-Strauss, which has also favored recent developments of the South-American ethnology with the focus on transformation as Gallois (2005a) and Viveiros de Castro (2015) point out.

These discussions allow us to think about an alternative approach to interculturality, which is still under discussion in the scope of the *Teko Arandu* program, but at the same time essential to the articulation of this program. About this theme, there are important theoretical contributions, for instance Gallois (2005a, 2005b) and Latour (2012), who offer contributions about relation networks, Viveiros de Castro (2002, 2015), Carneiro da Cunha (2009) and Wagner (2010) make important contributions about the culture production of human collectives. Coming from a cultural studies perspective, the idea of interculturality recognizes the importance and the possibility of hybridity in the production of knowledge.

We also believe that contexts affect the processes of production and circulation of knowledges. Hence, it is important to point out that the current Guarani and Kaiowa social figurations consist mainly of numerous populations in small areas, demarcated as Indigenous reservations. There is also a significant number of different figurations, like camps, next to the roads, farms, or urban peripheries. Often the Kaiowa and Guarani living in any of those contexts struggle with the actions of the State and majority societies, since integrationist and colonialist perspectives are predominant. The variations of livelihoods impose the need of expanding the comprehension of their organizational modes. The Kaiowa and Guarani respond with creativity and develop new ways to produce their Indigenous collectives – in very difficult human and environmental conditions. A clear asymmetry and relations of political domination routinely affect the relation between knowledge systems that we call coloniality (Maldonado 2007; Quijano 2000).

In the development of their recent social figurations, the Kaiowa and Guarani consider that it is necessary to master both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems, as well as to understand the relationship between them. This can be noted in assertions like "we need to master the system of the white people so we are not dominated by it" or "to use it in our favor". The Kaiowa and Guarani community members that are literate try to be mediators between the knowledge systems and also underline that this mediation could bring a certain level of control over the transformation processes they go through. Hence, this discussion is recognized as fundamental to the production of agency. And accordingly, the relationship between knowledge systems becomes central to the *Teko Arandu* program. This relationship exists in the problematic field of dialogue between the two knowledge systems.

Our case - Indigenous knowledges and school education. A possible dialogue?

The *Teko Arandu* program emerged in 2006 from an intense and long debate between the Indigenous movement and researchers. The purpose was to conceive an intercultural education program that would bring together, relate and conjugate the Kaiowa and Guarani knowledges with the knowledges of the non-Indigenous society, often identified as scientific, Western or supposedly universal. This formulation hides many mistakes or misunderstandings extensively discussed among those involved in the program. Sahlins (2004) calls attention to the fact that when we consider something as global, this reflects the intention of presenting something local as if it has global validity. In this sense, all local perspectives are global and the opposite is also true, because the ones that globalize the world do that from their own points of view. This theme is greatly discussed in this program while we try to relate and connect knowledges making no distinction about their universal validity and making all the perspectives relative. However, these discussions have developed little towards an effective knowledge dialogue.

Until the 1990s, public universities and institutions did not participate in the education of Indigenous teachers in *Mato Grosso do Sul*. The courses were carried out by NGOs, like the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) and the Operação Anchieta (OPAN), with the help of the anthropologist and Jesuit Bartomeu Melià (1990, 2019). When the program *Ara Vera* was created it had three main axes: language - *ñe'e*, culture – *teko* and land/ territory – *tekoha*. We believe the three axes point to a movement oriented towards Guarani and Kaiowa societies, in an effort to connect with its pedagogies, methodologies, knowledges and practices, which can be transformed into school content. When the program *Teko Arandu* started, it inherited the axes that pointed to an Indigenous pedagogy.

During recent years, the theme of interculturality was given space in the education sphere, while cultural studies became more popular between non-Indigenous teachers at the university and at the Secretariat of Education in *Mato Grosso do Sul*. Discussions and debates around the theme of interculturality are about the contact between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. Thus, it is possible to make a distinction: the original projects of the *Ara Vera* and *Teko Arandu* were oriented towards the Indigenous knowledge system *ava reko*, for the strengthening of the Indigenous collectives. Currently the projects are being framed by the idea

of interculturality. Indigenous teachers are considered intercultural and are thought of as cultural mediators.

The four years program involves lectures and activities at the university two weeks out of the month and activities that the students carry out in their own communities. The lectures (*etapas*) can be identified as a space of exposition of both *ava reko* and *karai reko*. The discussed themes are: history of colonization, political State organization, civil society organization and general knowledge about the areas of nature sciences, mathematics, and language. According to the choice of each student, one of the areas is studied starting from the second year. The participation also promotes a proximity with shamans, who have the role of traditional masters in the program.

For some students, especially those from communities with a strong presence of evangelical churches, the proximity with shamans is greater at the program than in their communities. The interaction between traditional masters and evangelical students can bring some tension. Some of the students who are used to attending evangelical churches are not encouraged or not allowed by evangelical leaders to take part in the Indigenous traditional practices, such as dances, prayers, and blessings. Many of the evangelical religious leaders state that those are diabolic practices. However, during the *etapas* and throughout the program, it is common to see that the evangelical students – even still identifying themselves as evangelical – agree to participate in the traditional dances and curative blessings that happen in the hall or corridors of the university.

The shamans who are involved as traditional masters participate directly in the lectures and activities. Frequently the traditional masters are invited by teachers or students to comment on a subject inside the classroom. The explanations of the traditional masters always articulate "globalization" from the Kaiowa and Guarani perspectives. The themes that are discussed then begin occupying a place in their cosmology, even if the theme is part of natural or biological sciences. However, this does not always ensure interculturality or knowledge dialogue. The main problem seems to be the lack of knowledge from the non-Indigenous lecturers about the traditional masters' formulations, because of language difficulties or lack of knowledge about Kaiowa and Guarani cosmologies.

The dialogues between the traditional masters and the students is always in Guarani language, with limited translation, and limited effective conversations with the non-Indigenous teacher. We believe that a better conversation would be a necessary condition for effective knowledge dialogue. Sometimes the teacher or a student initiates a basic translation from what the traditional master says, but it is hardly ever followed by intense discussion. More often, after the traditional master's explanation, the teacher or student will thank him or her and sit, and the non-Indigenous teacher continues with the lecture in the Portuguese language, supposedly explaining about scientific, thus supposedly global, knowledge. In this way, what is meant to be a conversation looks more like parallel assertions than a dialogue.

For example, during the discussions within the *Teko Arandu* program, it is possible to notice that the students situate the implications of domination and decolonization between knowledge systems not only as political relations. Normally, the discussion starts by approaching political relations, but, only until the traditional master or even a student who is considered to be a proxy of the shaman verbally intervenes. This intervention, always in the Guarani language, explains that the comprehension of these relationships can only be formulated inside the shamanistic system, that is, from their own cosmology. The distinction between systems is also connected to different cosmologies, cosmopolitics.

Beginning in 2014, the *Teko Arandu* program had its first Kaiowa lecturer, (besides the traditional masters), Eliel Benites, a former student of the program, who concluded a Master in Education (2014) and is now in the last phase of his PhD in Geography. The possibilities of dialogue, carried out in Guarani language, during lectures and activities at the communities were expanded with the arrival of the lecturers Eliel Benites and also Rosa Colman, one of the authors of this article. Regarding the non-Indigenous lecturers, even the ones who do not speak Guarani at a good level, we notice that the time of experience working together with these peoples and their knowledge about ethnography eases the degree of proximity and dialogue. However, the knowledge levels of language and ethnography among the non-Indigenous lecturers varies greatly. We notice that possibilities for dialogues are directly connected to how well the lectures know the language and how close of ties they have with the communities.

Final reflections

The discussions made in this article evince that the relationship between knowledge systems are an essential part of the *Teko Arandu* program. This relationship exists in the problematic field of dialogue between the two knowledge systems. It seems that the shamans who are not involved in school education oppose it because they see it as a form of domination. On the other hand, the shamans who are involved in school education, as traditional masters, seem to think that the relationship between knowledge systems is the source for understanding their current situation and to finding solutions to overcome the situation of coloniality. Recognizing the asymmetry of knowledge and power while trying to understand the two knowledge systems seem to be their way of constructing a decolonial perspective.

The Kaiowa and Guarani have a critical and reflexive attitude towards their own knowledge system. On many occasions, they do use the discourse of defending traditions as the only valid way to be. This seems to be a discursive modality that is frequently used as a political strategy to differentiate *parentelas* or different systems, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Yet, in the social practice, we notice the application of Indigenous knowledge tends to be presented as something flexible, always open to communication and relation. As long as it does not entail submission to the *karai reko*, the non-Indigenous knowledge. We notice that the *Teko Arandu* program favors situations of interaction between different styles, since the students live in different, diverse communities and all gather during the weeks of lectures (*etapas*). In this way, the program creates an environment of knowledge exchange. According to the Kaiowa and Guarani ethics, it is not recommended to engage on public dissent. This is part of the political behavior shared among many *parentelas*.

The existence of the *Teko Arandu* program is a great development. Schools and especially universities, still an elite space in Brazil, were historically assimilationist spaces. In this sense, the program is an important and rare space where the Kaiowa and Guarani can assert their own perspectives. At the same time, the intercultural practices at the *Teko Arandu* program remain a great challenge. Our impression is that the students and traditional masters are not feeling encouraged enough to participate in an open dialogue. There is lack of knowledge from the other's cosmology and not enough will to de-center perspectives. Nevertheless, during the lectures the students appropriate from many knowledges that are taken to their own "fires" and

parentelas. Within this organizational modes, there is a favorable space for dialogue between knowledge systems.

In this article, we touched upon many themes that could be further discussed in upcoming research. We have presented a general overview of knowledge systems' relations within the scope of the *Teko Arandu* program of the UFGD in Dourados, Brazil. It is not possible to be conclusive about the discussions, thus we hope that this paper has raised questions to provoke more studies that aim to further understand efforts towards constructing dialogues between different knowledge systems within Indigenous education.

Acknowledgement

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