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## Bruno Ferreira is the first Kaingang to hold a PhD from UFRGS

**Ferreira proposes the adoption of an Intercultural School model – with its own calendar, curriculum, content and administration – taking into consideration indigenous culture and knowledge.**

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The dissertation defense happened at 9am on December 4<sup>th</sup>. A unique historic moment both for UFRGS and for Ferreira, the first indigenous student to achieve a doctorate degree from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

Born on indigenous land in Barra do Guarita, in the South of Brazil, since he was 8 years old, Ferreira has studied in schools devised for non-indigenous students. In 1993, he entered university, taking the History program, and in 2012, he started pursuing a master's degree in Education at UFRGS. In 2016, he started working on his doctorate, also in Education—a great step both for the university and for the indigenous peoples. His main motive was to fulfill a project of the Kaingang people.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, in an online session, Ferreira defended his dissertation, **ŨN SI AG TŨ PĒ KI VĒNH KAJRĀNRĀN FĀ – The role of the school in Kaingang communities**, which was supervised by professor Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi, in the research line "Education, Culture and Humanities".



Studying History and Education was a choice made by the Kaingang community. Photo: Bruno Ferreira / Personal Archive

Studying History and Education was a choice made by the Kaingang community. It led Ferreira to learn the historical moment in which Brazilians live since the Constitution of 1988. "According to this document, we have the right to have our culture respected as different, what leads us to seek for a better understanding of what this difference is so that we can eventually devise public policies for the indigenous peoples," says Ferreira.

This is the key point of his dissertation in the areas of History and Education: creating a school model specifically for indigenous students, which takes cultural difference into consideration—something guaranteed in the Brazilian Constitution. The dissertation explores the idea of what an Indigenous School might look like for the Kaingang people. "Until now, the schools we've had weren't created with indigenous people in mind. They're schools that disregard our knowledge, our values, our customs, our way of living and of building knowledge. They're schools that, for a long time, have denied all those things on the basis of an outdated idea of civilization and integration of indigenous people in the non-indigenous society," Ferreira emphasizes.

Faced with this view, Ferreira proposes the adoption of another way of learning practiced by indigenous peoples: that which happens inside the indigenous community, different from the space and time existing in a regular classroom, with a specific calendar to respect the time for fishing, hunting, harvesting, celebrating, and fighting for their rights. "For us, there are other spaces for learning, and the school needs to understand this, respecting our identity, our values and the customs of the Kaingang people," says Ferreira.

According to Ferreira, the Intercultural School—a school model made for indigenous peoples—will be based on this understanding of indigenous culture, on its knowledge and the appreciation of its value. This will be possible when indigenous knowledge becomes recognized, valued, and (re)produced in a space strengthened in and anchored by indigenous tradition, including indigenous knowledge scope and forms of learning. "The Intercultural School model seeks to relate indigenous knowledge to non-indigenous knowledge, but above all, to recognize the indigenous knowledge that the school denies."

The Intercultural School model Ferreira would like to implement includes an indigenous custom calendar, curricular grid, content selection, and school administration to suit the needs of the Kaingang people, unlike the current school model, centered on homogeneous State policies instead of on community consultation. "A custom calendar would also respect important events in indigenous history. This school could build its curriculum taking into consideration indigenous culture. Another important aspect is the Kaingang language, which must be respected and included in the classroom. The Portuguese language has been used to exclude our knowledge, while it's through indigenous languages, Kaingang in this case, that we keep our customs, our culture, our rituals, our knowledge and our worldview alive, so it should be included at school. Our history is in our language," states Ferreira.

### Indigenous people at the university

Indigenous presence at the university is important, not only as a way to learn the rights of the indigenous peoples and demand them to be respected, but also for other reasons, according to Ferreira. First, indigenous presence in undergraduate courses is important in a political sense so the students can better understand the non-indigenous world and participate in making public policies for indigenous peoples; second, indigenous presence in graduate courses, besides serving as a moment to increase the indigenous students' knowledge, allows them to show academia and society that indigenous people also possess knowledge.

"By going to university, I, Bruno Ferreira, am introducing the Kaingang people to society, and at the same time, I'm saying 'my people have also built knowledge'. In my dissertation, I state that this is beneficial to the university, as the indigenous world is unknown to non-indigenous people; we need to understand the non-indigenous world to survive, but non-indigenous people don't understand our world, which is how prejudice and discrimination come into being."

The presence of indigenous people at the university is important to give these peoples voice, to spread their knowledge, and to aid in the fight for public policies that take the needs of the indigenous peoples into consideration.

*Translated into English by Caroline Winge, under the supervision and translation revision of Elizamari R. Becker (PhD – IL/UFRGS).*

