

ARTICLE

“A literary banquet”: a mosaic about children's literature, Afro-Brazilian and African culture, curriculum and teacher training***“Um banquete literário”: um mosaico sobre literatura infantil, cultura afro-brasileira e africana, currículo e formação docente***

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ABSTRACT

Of an essayistic nature, this text aims to analyze the discourses produced through testimonials, images and reflections of participants in a project carried out between the years 2020 and 2022, in a municipal school located in the municipality of Serra, state of Espírito Santo, Brazil. The project involved training sessions on literary mediation and education regarding ethnic-racial relations, targeting teachers and children in the early years of elementary school. Employing the metaphor of a mosaic, the text explores the repercussions of the comprehensive training sessions undertaken, which involved an often tense and dichotomous relationship: child vs. adult. Considering this relationship, other pieces of the mosaic are gathered, namely: children's literature, Afro-Brazilian and African culture, curriculum and teacher training. The methodology for analyzing these discourses is based on Grada Kilomba (2019) and advocates for a "subject-centered" interpretation, emphasizing the nature of subjective experiences. As the pieces of the mosaic are gradually assembled, the resultant design sheds light on several significant outcomes. Notably, when prompted to engage with themes previously absent from their experiences, both children and teachers reflect upon the profound impact of their training in the realm of children's education, ethnic-racial relations, Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture, in conjunction with children's literature. These reflections culminate in transformative shifts not only in their individual subjectivities but also in the curriculum, recognized as a discursive practice that yields meaning.

Keywords: Children's Literature. Curriculum. Training. Afro-Brazilian and African Culture.

RESUMO

De natureza ensaística, este texto tem como objetivo analisar discursos produzidos por meio de depoimentos, imagens e reflexões de participantes de um projeto realizado entre os anos de 2020 e 2022, em uma escola municipal de Serra-ES. O projeto envolveu formações sobre mediação literária e educação das relações étnico-raciais com docentes e crianças dos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental. Tomando a metáfora de um mosaico, o texto explora os impactos do conjunto de formações realizadas envolvendo uma relação muitas

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vezes tensa e dicotômica: criança X adulto/a. Ligadas a essa relação, outras peças do mosaico são reunidas, a saber: literatura infantil, cultura afro-brasileira e africana, currículo e formação docente. A metodologia para análise dos discursos parte de Grada Kilomba (2019) e refere-se a uma proposta de interpretação "centrada em sujeitos", enfatizando a natureza das experiências subjetivas. Ao nos propormos juntar as peças, o desenho que se forma acena para alguns importantes resultados, dentre eles: ao serem instigadas/os acerca de temáticas antes não recorrentes em suas trajetórias, crianças e professoras/es refletem sobre o quanto a formação no campo da educação das relações étnico-raciais, história e cultura afro-brasileira e africana em diálogo com a literatura infantil produzem transformações não apenas em suas subjetividades, mas também no currículo, reconhecido como uma prática discursiva produtora de sentidos.

Palavras-chave: Literatura Infantil. Currículo. Formação. Cultura Afro-Brasileira e Africana.

The feast table is set

This article is a mosaic of ideas and actions resulting from an applied research project entitled "LitERÊture: training in children's and youth literature with a theme of African and Afro-Brazilian culture¹" carried out between 2020 and 2022 in a municipal elementary school in the municipality of Serra, state of Espírito Santo (ES), Brazil, whose proposal was to develop, with teachers and children, training on literary mediation and education in ethnic-racial relations. It was an extension project affiliated with the Federal University of Espírito Santo and the Serra-ES Municipal Department of Education (SEDU/Serra).

The aim of this text is to present and discuss, through the form of an essay, some of the results of the project, recorded through images, testimonies, and theoretical-methodological reflections. This proposal is inspired by Jorge Larossa (2003, p. 105), who questions the lack of value given to other forms of academic writing, such as the essay type, which is excluded "[...] at least from the forms of knowledge and thinking that dominate the academic environment". For him, this exclusion is due to the imposition of certain modes of writing which do not allow for greater "thematic and formal freedom" of analysis (Larossa, 2003, p. 106). Our aim is to explore the potential that an essayistic text offers, precisely because it allows content and form to meet in less rigid and pre-established ways.

Given that discourse comprises images, testimonies, and reflections, we have methodologically taken Grada Kilomba's (2019) proposal for a "subject-centered" interpretation of discourse. Based on the studies of Paul Mecheril, Kilomba (2019, p. 81) argues that subject-centeredness makes it possible to analyze "[...] the experiences, self-perceptions and identity negotiations described by the subject and from the subject's perspective". This methodology is in line with our proposal to discuss all components of this mosaic, incorporating our impressions and interpretations. We understand the notion of a mosaic as a very appropriate metaphor when we think about the theme of this text. By its nature, each separate piece of a mosaic does not constitute meaning on its own, but when

¹ This is one of the 15 national projects selected and funded by the "Call for Proposals for Racial Equity in Basic Education: applied research and scientific articles", carried out by the Center for the Study of Labor Relations and Inequalities (CEERT), whose objective was to identify and support research that points to solutions for the challenges of racial equity in basic education (Equidade Racial..., 2020).

integrated with the others, it contributes to the creation of a piece of work. Such understanding of text production as a mosaic reflects the appropriation and formative experience that converges in African cultural aspects of wholeness and interdependence, as Eduardo Oliveira (2003, p. 116) argues: "Everything is important insofar as everything is interconnected with the whole. The whole is important, not the particular aspect of it. [...] the part is important precisely and to the extent that it is an integral part of the whole".

Therefore, this paper is an aesthetic-educational work since it integrates reflections on/with children, children's literature, teacher training, Afro-Brazilian and African culture, a common thread which runs through the curriculum and its social force. To this end, we will initially explore some epistemological and conceptual issues. Let us start with the "child" matter. Davis Moreira Alvim and Izabel Rizzi Mação (2018, p. 79) recall that the word child "[...] comes from the Latin *creare*, that is, from the same root as the words 'creation' and 'creativity'. It is a composition of the Brazilian Portuguese verb 'criar' (in English, 'to create') with the Brazilian Portuguese suffix '-ança', recalling the action that results from creating".

Another definition that will be important throughout this essay is "children's literature". In a radical sense, it could be defined as the art of the word produced by children. However, this level of radicalism will not be considered here, as this provocation would be difficult to carry out, given that the children's literature considered in this article comes from adults. In general, children's literature will be defined according to Ligia Cademartori (2010):

Children's literature is characterized by the way it addresses the reader. Their age, in its different age groups, is taken into account. The elements that constitute a work of this genre must be in line with the reading competence that the intended reader has already achieved. Thus, the author chooses a form of communication that anticipates the age group of the potential reader, taking into account their interests and respecting their potential. The structure and style of the verbal and visual language forms of communication are tailored to the child's experiences. The themes are selected in such a way as to meet the expectations of the little ones, while at the same time the focus of the narrative should allow them to be overcome. [...] Produced by adults for children, it expresses the ideas of their elders about what children should be and think. Frequently, children's books depict our dreams of childhood, or, conversely, the intention of training predominates, taking shape the rational and ideological conception of what adults think should be part of the concepts to be acquired in childhood. (Cademartori, 2010, p. 11-12).

And since a new term ("adult") has appeared, that would be the cue to define it. But instead, we propose to define a word derived from it and which is closer to our intention: "adultery". For Alexsandro Rodrigues *et al.* (2018, p. 10), adultery means "[...] the realm of adults who have betrayed their own childlike qualities in search of the promises of power, completeness and comfort in the unlivable being always 'the same', bodies become astonished statues, looking like eternal and immutable forms".

In an attempt to reconnect with our own childlike qualities (a term we will not define for the moment) so that we can also get to the subject of teacher training, we insist on bringing together the triad that was outlined in the first paragraphs of this essay: children, children's literature and adultery. In the capacity of adults, for we no longer have (at least not as clearly as before) the

knowledge of the child we once were, we sometimes need to remember or reinvent what it is like to be a child. Reflecting on the junction of the verb 'criar' with the suffix '-ança', Alvin and Mação (2018, p. 79) argue: "However, what the etymology dictionaries do not explain is how, exactly, the child creates. [...] the child creates by willing to". While adult energies belong to reactive forces related to conservation, adaptation and utility (Alvim; Mação, 2018), children belong to active forces: "[...] unconscious, superior, spontaneous, aggressive, conquering, transformative and creative" (Alvim; Mação, 2018, p. 79), making it difficult for adulthood (or "adultery") to operate them.

This is why we have reached a critical point in our reflection: how can we move forward with this text if we are starting from adulthood to think about children and, even more so, about the literature aimed at children? This is where we turn to foundations that are no longer Western, since we believe that they would keep us under a dichotomous logic (either being a child or being an adult). We looked to Sobonfu Somé (2009) and her people, the Dagara, for a way out. And it is through the spirits that she shows us the way:

There are many different spirits in Africa. Each of them has a specific role, or a specific characteristic, that can help us. The spirit of the earth, for example, is responsible for our identity, our comfort, our food, and so on. There is also the spirit of nature, the spirit of the river, the spirit of the mountain, the spirit of animals, water and ancestors. Spirit is everywhere (Somé, 2009, p. 27).

The author's main concern is the risk of distancing ourselves from spirits. That is why she warns us: "We need to try not to educate our children away from the spirit, so that they do not have to make so much effort to reconnect when they grow up. Once they know they have a spirit, everything else is understood. This realization makes life easier for them" (Somé, 2009, p. 34). Drawing inspiration from this piece of advice, we look to the principle of *erê* to justify where we are starting from epistemologically and methodologically in this text. And this time we will not dare to define *erê* as anything else than "the spirit of joy", a characteristic of every child and that we believe lives within every adult as well. Or we could associate *erê* with childlike qualities. It is unfeasible to go any further with any other definition because, as the song goes: "To understand *erê*, you have to be a kid" (Da Gama; Garrido; Vilhena, 1996).

The choice of this non-Western approach is also deliberate, as it is part of an epistemological standpoint we have taken in this text: to explore the foundations of Afro-Brazilian and African culture, another piece of our mosaic. Considering the curricular changes brought about by the amendment to the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law, in particular Act no. 10639/2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture compulsory in education², it is paramount to remember that the reasons that led to this change are a set of struggles undertaken by the Black Social Movement in favor of recognition by the Brazilian state of reparations aimed at providing

² While the Brazilian Act no. 10639/2003 does not mention early childhood education and higher education, in this text we will tend to generalize it to both basic education and higher education. This decision is grounded in the understanding that, after almost 21 years of the enactment of this Act, all levels and modalities of education are co-responsible for its implementation. This is especially pertinent considering its direct relevance to Brazilian society and its historical debt to the Black population. Furthermore, in agreement with the perspectives of Mauro Cezar Coelho and Wilma de Nazaré Baía Coelho (2021, p. 5), this Act serves as a "[...] a legal apparatus that redirects the curriculum and the approach to the History of Brazil within the scope of Brazilian Education".

symbolic and historical compensation for:

[...] the descendants of Black Africans, of the psychological, material, social, political, and educational damage suffered under the slave regime, and also due to the explicit or tacit policies of the "whitening" the population, of maintaining exclusive privileges for groups with the power to govern and influence the formulation of policies, in the post-abolition period. It also aims to ensure that these measures take the form of initiatives to combat racism and all kinds of discrimination (Brasil, 2004, p. 3).

These words, recorded in the "National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture³" (Brasil, 2004), reiterate what Nilma Lino Gomes (2017, p. 68) recognizes as a dispute: "The knowledge expressed in these documents is still not properly considered as such in the field of knowledge and educational theory. It is a dispute [that finds space] mainly in the field of curriculum". Since it is, therefore, a field of dispute in the curriculum, promoting academic productions in this sense is also to dispute curricular narratives, after all, as Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (2017, p. 15) reminds us: "The curriculum is always the result of a selection". And since it is a selection, it is produced based on a dispute and correlation of forces. For this reason, we understand that social struggles are integral to any proposal to analyze pedagogical practices and curricula. As Cleriston Izidro dos Anjos, Solange Estanislau dos Santos and Fernando Ilídio Ferreira (2017, p. 158) point out:

The struggles for education consist of social actions, movements and mobilizations, as forms of collective action that seek to conquer or regain a social space, in the recognition that social structures condition human action, but do not completely determine it. It is in this sense that society builds its future, both through structural mechanisms and through its own social struggles.

Also being a part of this struggle is teacher training, another piece of our mosaic. For us to be able to reach this point, we had to realize that adults can - when they want to or know they want to - activate the *erê* principle in their way of thinking about the world. Hence the name of this article: It is a sentence uttered by Mrs. Maria de Anchieta⁴, the teacher at the municipal school, when she came across the literary collection acquired for her school through the applied research project. Upon saying "It's a feast! It's a literary feast!"⁵, Mrs. de Anchieta, a white teacher, triggered the euphoria of a child before a delicious treat. In this case, the treat was the literary book, which can also be considered a treat for a child who sees it.

² Henceforth, the "EERR Curriculum Guidelines".

⁴ Non-fictional name. None of the names will be fictionalized, as they are public and have already been recorded in the book "LitERÊture: training in children's and youth literature with a theme of African and Afro-Brazilian culture", organized by Débora Araujo and Jakslaine Penha (2022).

⁵ This phrase and the others mentioned here are recorded in the short documentary "LitERÊture: a literary feast", directed by Débora Araujo, Ariane Meireles, Joelma Trancoso and Lucilene Soares (2022).

FIGURES 1 and 2 - Books acquired for the school collection



SOURCE: Authors' personal collection

It was indeed a feast. Never before in the history of our lives (of all the people taking part in the project) had we come across more than 200 books of "children's literature themed on African and Afro-Brazilian culture"³. So it is possible that our taste buds may have been triggered by the explosion of colors and flavors that those works, so vivid and full of "us", represented to our eyes. "We", in this case, is in a double sense: pronominal, referring to our Black identity (the authors of this text); and "we" as a noun, of intricate plots ready to be unraveled through reading.

It is uncommon for Brazilian school libraries to have collections of such caliber. Consequently, everything that came from this group of books, ranging from training modules to the actions developed in the classroom, affected all the forms of childhood involved: the children who were students at the school, the adults in the capacity of teachers, researchers, teaching and coordination staff, mothers, fathers and family members in general. Given that the constraints imposed by the dimensions of this text prevent us from going into greater detail about the smells and tastes provided by the collection to all the people involved, our attention will be directed towards the children, teachers and professors taking part in the research.

Thinking about any definition of teacher training (the fourth piece of the mosaic) in this context necessarily involves the dimension of diversity. In this sense, Nilma Lino Gomes and Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (2011) reflect on how the history of teacher training in Brazil has long been dedicated to thinking about the processes between initial and ongoing pedagogical instruction, techniques, and methodologies. However, defining teacher training has increasingly implied to consider the socio-cultural contexts involved in the professional performance of teachers:

There is a commitment among some scholars who study teacher training to overcome the static, content-based view, limited to the mastery of teaching methods and techniques, which is still present in the formulation of courses and other activities of the same nature. There is also a movement to recognize that all stages of teacher training have importance

³ A concept introduced by Eliane Debus (2017) to refer to literary works that value African and Afro-Brazilian culture, the focus of which is not necessarily the ethnic-racial sentiment of belonging of the author, but rather what the work is about. This concept aligns with the books comprising the collection under discussion, as they aim to elevate Black identity and cultural heritage, irrespective of whether they are authored solely by individuals of Black descent.

and meaning, demystifying the overvaluation of initial training. These attitudes elucidate that teachers, upon embarking on their initial training journey, already possess a repertoire of values, knowledge and skills pertaining to the professional and social universe in which they will work, albeit often influenced on prejudices and stereotypes (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 13).

Therefore, for us, teacher training is defined based on "[...] the identity of teachers as pedagogical and political agents, with rights and duties not only to implement educational policies, but also to participate in their design and evaluation" (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 14). In this way, we add one more concept or one more last and very important piece to the composition of our mosaic that will be assembled in the following sections: curriculum. Considering that the training of teachers necessarily involves their personal backgrounds and interactions with the broader world, the curriculum that underpins their formation also assumes the role of assigning significance, as Alice Casimiro Lopes and Elizabeth Macedo (2011, p. 41) point out:

[...] the curriculum is itself a discursive practice. This implies that it is an exercise of power, but also a practice of signification, of assigning meanings. It constructs reality, exerts governance over our actions, constrains our behavior, projects our identity, all by producing meanings. It is, therefore, a discourse produced at the intersection of different social and cultural discourses which, at the same time, reiterates meanings set by these discourses and recreates them. [...] Any manifestation of the curriculum, any curricular episode, is the same thing: the production of meanings (Lopes; Macedo, 2011, p. 41-42).

Aligned with the authors' perspective, what we have been able to experience in the context of the project here in question was how much the curriculum is reflected in the production of meanings. Therefore, equipped with the necessary pieces, we shall proceed to construct in the following sections the mosaic that is also intended to be another production of meanings. In the first part, we will present aspects of the training course held with the school's teaching staff, through testimonies and theoretical discussions on children's literature, literary mediation, as well as Afro-Brazilian and African cultural themes. Subsequently, we shall delve into the examination of the issues raised by children and teachers about Black identity and children's literature.

"I thought I was in the right place at the right time"

In order to contextualize the phrase that serves as the heading of this section, we will initially provide a brief overview of the training processes undertaken within the applied research project, the subject of this article. Divided into three stages spanning 18 months, from November 2020 and April 2022, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a drawback to the entire project, especially due to the technological difficulties involved in virtual meetings and the lack of human contact – an aspect that was part of the very nature of the project, originally conceived to encompass workshops on percussion instruments, corporeal expression, and Afro dance, which regrettably could not take place. Nonetheless, it was possible to set up a series of propositional and subsequent interventional endeavors in the realm of teacher training and pedagogical practices.

The first stage consisted of planning and carrying out a training course with the teaching staff of the afternoon schedule, encompassing grades from the 1st to 5th grades of the school taking part

in the project. Besides that, more positions were open for teachers from other institutions in the municipality of Serra, with the approval of SEDU/Serra. Conducted throughout the first semester of 2021, the course comprised ten synchronous sessions, each spanning three hours, supplemented by asynchronous engagements. The curriculum covered content on EERR Curriculum Guidelines; the evolution of Black characters in children's literature; more recent productions, which tend to value African and Afro-Brazilian culture; and strategies for literary mediation. Concluding the course, a panel was put together by the course participants on proposals for working with works acquired for the school's collection. Members of the research group responsible for coordinating the project led the training meetings, as well as guiding and correcting⁷ the asynchronous activities.

The next stage of the project took place in the second semester/2021, characterized by the implementation of "intervention projects". The actions were carried out by teachers responsible for 1st to 4th grade classes⁸, under the supervision of the project's coordination team, with the aim of exploring, in practice, the potential of literary mediation of works centered on African and Afro-Brazilian culture. At this stage, together with the teaching staff, the children were the main protagonists: when they came into contact with the newly integrated collection that had just been added to their school library, they were encouraged, both by the teachers and head teacher, as well as by the field disciplines, taught by the Arts and Physical Education teachers, to explore new meanings of literary reading. Most of them were encountering for the first time works that also featured Black characters, just like them. It is noteworthy that the municipality of Serra, the largest in terms of population in Espírito Santo, is made up of a Black majority (63%) population⁹. Moreover, the school under consideration, located in the suburbs, is also made up of predominantly Black and brown children and adolescents, constituting 80.5% of the student body, according to 2021¹⁰ data provided by the Statistics and Information Management of the Espírito Santo State Department of Education (Espírito Santo, 2021).

The final stage involved writing a book (Araujo; Penha, 2022) containing the project's theoretical and methodological paths. An audiovisual production (LitERÊtura, 2022) was created to document the actions taken. Furthermore, Ione Reis, an artist and member of the group that coordinated the project, produced a mural adorning the school's playground (Figure 3), a collaborative activity involving the participation of the children (Figure 4):

⁴ Two sub-groups were formed: course lecturers, responsible for teaching content, and tutors, responsible for guiding and correcting the asynchronous activities.

⁵ Although the school's afternoon shift serves classes from 1st to 5th grade, teachers from the first four grades joined the second stage of the project.

⁹ See more in Hileia Araujo de Castro (2018).

¹⁰ According to the source provided, the 2021 census data for the school in question reveals the racial/color distribution among its student enrollment of 941 individuals as follows: 93 as white, 0 as indigenous, 720 as brown, 37 as Black, and 77 did not declare their racial/color identity.

Figure 3 - School court wall



Source: Authors' personal collection

Figure 4 - A 4th grader painting the wall with gouache paint



Source: Authors' personal collection

The opening statement of this section was uttered by Mr. Marcos da Silva, the Arts instructor, who engaged with students spanning from 1st to 4th grade at the institution. His reflection pertained to the impact of the training program and subsequent interaction with the newly acquired literary

collection for the school. Notably, Mr. da Silva underscored the "beauty and plasticity" of the books, emphasizing that "back in the day we didn't have that. I didn't have that". The words of Mr. da Silva, a Black man, actor and advocate of popular culture (as he defines himself), which were expressed while holding in his hands the book called "Ynari, a menina das cinco tranças" (literally translated into English as "Ynari, the girl of five braids") by Ondjaki (2010), reiterate sensory and aesthetic experiences that also trigger political meanings when he recalls that in his childhood ("back in the day") the Black human reference was not present in the visual and literary arts. This experiential encounter with the book object resonates with the analysis provided by Debus (2006, p. 34):

The reader's contact with the objective book in its material form, considered here to be the first ceremony of appropriation of reading, leads us to reflect on the sensory manifestations arising from the palpable relationship between the reader and the book. We could say that the reader approaches the book stimulated by the five senses.

It is possible to infer that for Mr. da Silva, the contact with this type of literary work, even if it was late, offered him "[...] multiple aromas of past and future in relation to the present book" (Debus, 2006, p. 34). This encounter reinforces what Gomes and Silva (2011) analyze about the formation of reflective teachers, who come to recognize how their life experiences contribute to shaping meanings for their professional performance.

Within the evolving landscape of teacher training, there has been growing interest in those that focus on life narratives, professional development, the training of reflective teachers and new mindsets. Historically, these issues were not taken seriously, but research and pedagogical debates on the construction of identities, values, ethics, religion, gender relations, race and work have shown them to be relevant dimensions in the professional performance of teachers (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 14).

This underscores that not only is the curriculum non-neutral, as previously stated by Michael Apple (1999)¹¹ and echoed throughout the academic literature, but neither are our teaching practices, since they invariably stem from a confluence of interactions "[...] between the dimensions of personal and professional life" (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 19). But how can we mitigate the propensity for these biases, especially towards a tendency for personal values to overlap, many of which are based on prejudiced and discriminatory views of the world? In the specific context under examination, which relates to working with children's literature permeated by elements of ethnic-racial relations education, Afro-Brazilian and African culture, it becomes imperative to understand the socio-political importance of teacher training that investigates these elements. In this sense, the EERR Curriculum Guidelines point to this relevance:

The relevance of studying themes arising from Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture is not restricted to the Black population; on the contrary, it concerns all Brazilians, since they must educate themselves as active citizens within a multicultural and multiethnic society, capable of building a democratic nation (Brasil, 2004, p. 8).

⁶ This is how the author reflects: "[...] the curriculum is never just a neutral set of knowledge that appears in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, the result of someone's selection, of some group's vision of what is legitimate knowledge. It is the product of tensions, conflicts and cultural, political and economic concessions that organize and disorganize a people" (Apple, 1999, p. 59).

Indeed, it is not a game devoid of rules. Ethnic-racial-cultural diversity needs to be seen in its political sense, that is, diversity "[...] is more than a question posed to society, the school and the curriculum to be dealt with without prejudice" (GOMES; SILVA, 2011, p. 21). If one reduces it to a mere question, there is a chance that we will limit ourselves to a celebratory tendency that overlooks the diverse complexities inherent within our identities. Instead, we must delve deeper and perceive diversity as "[...] a component of the processes of socialization, knowledge and education. [...] To recognize it is to assume a new relationship with the processes of constructing knowledge, values and identities. It means taking on a new professional stance" (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 21-22).

This is what happened to Mrs. de Anchieta, a white woman, when she talks about how she has changed as a result of the training course and exposure to new books:

*After the training with you, I began to see how important it is for us to work with children in this context, explaining it to them, making them understand themselves, accepting them for who they are, building their identity from an early age. **So this was very important for me because I hadn't experienced it yet.** The only thing I used to do on Black Awareness Day was that we used to make those little dolls and tell them about the pretty girl with the ribbon bow. (Testimony from Mrs. de Anchieta. Emphasis added).*

Mrs. de Anchieta's reflections underscore the profound relevance of her engagement with the project, as she hadn't "experienced it yet". We agree with the need of knowing what teachers who "[...] educate themselves and build their [teaching] identities beyond formal educational processes" think, since "[...] the training process depends on educational paths, but does not allow itself to be controlled by pedagogy, running the risk of stifling its efficacy" (Gomes; Silva, 2011, p. 22). To a certain extent, what the project provided her was an increased chance to breathe, to overcome the asphyxiation that confined her work to a "single story" which, in this case, literally referred to a single work. This piece¹² was possibly revisited annually during the same period: in the month of November, coinciding with the "celebrations" for National Black Awareness Day. The quotation marks, in this case, denote irony because the recurrence of experiments carried out during this period reinforced mistaken practices rather than promoting Black awareness.

Another noteworthy aspect of Mr. da Silva's and Mrs. de Anchieta's discourses is that they speak from their own subjective experiences, demonstrating that the centrality of the subjects is not reduced to analyzing the phenomenon on its own (Kilomba, 2019). On the contrary, by humanizing their pedagogical practices and engaging in candid self-reflection about their professional journeys, they adopt a stance akin to that advocated by bell hooks¹³ (2017, p. 211) to be as liberating: "[...] imagining myself as a progressive teacher who is willing to take on responsibility for her successes and her failures in the classroom". Specially for Mr. da Silva, reflecting on his life story as a Black man made it possible not only to reflect on the current context of Black representation perceived in books, but also to create a "gestalt" about the reality of racism in his life, "[...] making it possible to

⁷ The book cited by Mrs. Alda Cunha is "Menina bonita do laço de fita" (title literally translated into English as "Pretty girl with a ribbon bow"), by Ana Maria Machado.

⁸ bell hooks, spelled in lowercase letters, is not a typographical mistake, but rather the author's wish to have her name registered this way.

reconstruct the *Black* experience¹⁴ within racism" (Kilomba, 2019, p. 85, emphasis added). A similar comprehension resonates in the voices of the children participating in the project, as demonstrated by Alessa's view in the following section.

When we say: "I'm going to get this skin color", there is no skin color!

When asked about her thoughts on the project conducted at her school, Alessa, a third-grade Black girl, emphasized the profound insights she gained regarding the significance of skin color:

When we say "I'm going to get this skin color", then there is no skin color. You have to explain to the person: brown is the same color as this girl's right here [showing the cover of the book "Makeba vai à escola" (literally translated into English as "Makeba goes to school"), by Ana Fátima (2019)] (Statement by Alessa, 3rd grade student).

Her position reflects the understanding embraced by the teachers engaged in the project: as Maria Aparecida Silva Bento (2002, p. 25) posits, previously, the notion of "skin color" served to portray "white" as "the universal model of humanity". However, Alessa's viewpoint symbolizes a departure from this established project of whiteness when she warns: "You have to explain it to the person". This emerging movement, while seemingly in its early stages, reveals to be considerably powerful when one considers the effects in concrete and symbolic discrimination acting on the "[...] nature of developmental processes, interfering in the formation of their identity" (Bento, 2012, p. 101). The author highlights how even young children already perceive racial differences and, based on external stimuli, are capable of categorizing them, as "[...] they are notably observant to what is socially valued or devalued, quickly perceiving the phenotype that is most pleasing and the one that is not well accepted" (Bento, 2012, p. 101). In Kilomba (2019, p. 145-149), this is interpreted as "[...] a massive denial mechanism, in which Blackness is only admitted into consciousness in its negative form". Similarly, as illustrated in the author's research where an interviewee expressed discomfort with this realization, Alessa echoes this sentiment when she reacts with indignation to the attempt to negate her identity through the generic label of "skin-colored pencils".

This is why we agree with Gomes (2019), who emphasizes the need to highlight the curriculum in addressing the relationship between childhood and race:

Understanding Black children as subjects of knowledge and rights and placing the relationship between childhood and race as one of the central axes of an emancipatory curriculum implies recognizing racial diversity in its affirmative dimension, as part of human existence (Gomes, 2019, p. 1022-1023).

Alessa finds solidarity among her peers, including Kauã, a second-grader with white skin and blue eyes. Reflecting on the book "Cada um com seu jeito, cada jeito é de um" (literally translated

⁹ Grada Kilomba uses italics in various terms in her text, arguing that in the Portuguese language the meaning of various terminologies "[...] reveal a profound lack of reflection and theorization of colonial and patriarchal history" (Kilomba, 2019, p. 14). And "negro/a" (literally translated into English as "Black") is one of them because it is a word that is "[...] invariably anchored in colonial terminology and, therefore, closely linked to a history of violence and dehumanization" (Kilomba, 2019, p. 17).

into English as "One has their own way, and each way belongs to one") by Lucimar Rosa Dias (2012), he says: "But I liked it a lot too. The face, the eye and the mouth. It was very special, they did it in great detail".

In both of these statements, as well as in those made by the participating teachers, it becomes evident that the concept of beauty, fostered through the mediation of readings featuring Black characters, evokes varied interpretations even among white children. This aligns with Gomes's (2019) discourse on identity formation as an ongoing and adaptable process that " [...] can be reshaped, for both white and Black children, guiding them towards other stages of human interaction, which will enable more dignity and respect in race relations in the future" (Gomes, 2019, p. 1030).

This is also in line with Eliane Cavalleiro's (2006, p. 92) proposition regarding the formation of identities among Black and white children. Racism engenders feelings of inferiority among the former and feelings of superiority among the latter.

Interventions aimed at mediating reading with literature that contextualizes alternative models of humanity serve to challenge the notion of the white body as the universal standard. Moreover, they foster the development of more diverse representations of both oneself and the world, thereby enriching the subjectivities of all children.

In this regard, reflections on ethnic-racial self-affirmation emerged as a significant pillar of the initiatives undertaken. Mrs. Vanessa Santos, the school's pedagogical coordinator, a white woman, offered insights into the project's impact on both the curriculum and the children's sense of identity:

They understand their roots, they understand their nationality, they understand what it's like to be a princess or a prince, not just in the white fairy tales [...]. They are starting to see themselves as beings, especially in the stories (Mrs. Santos, Educator).

The notion of Black princes and princesses was widely debated in the project, stemming from two main sources: prior to the project, firstly, the limited exposure of the school's teaching staff to training on children's literature, which predominantly centered on European classics; and secondly, the children's encounter with one of the authors of the book "Princesas Negras", (literally translated into English as "Black Princesses") authored by Ariane Celestino Meireles and Edileuza Penha de Souza (2019). In a statement, Ariane remarked:

I felt that talking about the book "Black Princesses" to the children [...], talking about being Black and liking being Black - which is what the book has to offer - was very moving, it was incredible because there were so many children. The moment I found most beautiful was when I asked the girls or boys who thought they were princesses or princes to come on stage. And the stage was packed! When I saw that, I was like, Wow! It works! They think of themselves as very important people! Because being a princess isn't really about that sticky, boring thing you get in the commercial world, about being that little princess, who's pretty, loved and protected. No! It's about people being the protagonists of their own lives. These children realized this and stepped up to their own game. That was incredible!" (Testimonial by Ariane Meireles, author).

What really stands out from Ariane Meirele's dialogue with the project is the understanding that Black princes and princesses navigate trajectories imbued with experiences diverging from the imposed literary paradigms of passivity for the princesses and enforced patriarchy for the princes.

After all:

Figure 5 - Inside page of the book "Black Princesses"



Source: Meireles and Souza (2019, p. 18-19).

NOTE: Transcription of the text from the picture above: "This is what Black princesses look like. It's not their clothes, crowns or princes on horseback that identify them, but their melanin-rich skin, their curly hair, their wisdom, their ancestral heritage."

The words recorded in the book "Black Princesses", coupled with Ariane Meirele's testimony, echo what Kilomba (2019) terms "becoming a subject" within the discursive realm: when internally, the person who was once classified as "the other" liberates themselves from colonial constraints and comes to exist in the dimension of the "I". Thus, "we are I, we are the subject, we are the one who describes, we are the one who narrates, we are the author and the authority of our own reality. [...] we become subject" (Kilomba, 2019, p. 238). This transformation not only alters the individual's subjectivity but also reshapes their practices. In the context under examination, which revolves around the experiences of individuals involved in education, whether they are children or adults, the process of becoming a subject triggers educational transformations.

An ending that tastes like a fresh start

As the construction of the mosaic proposed in this essay draws to a close, one realizes that it remains an unfinished endeavor, akin to a work in progress. While the assembled pieces include textures, colors, and lines, numerous others are yet to be integrated. The components utilized thus far – children, children's literature, adultery [adulthood], Afro-Brazilian and African culture, curriculum, and teacher training – can and should be supplemented by additional elements to engender fresh challenges in comprehending an educational system that aspires to be democratic and inclusive in its pedagogical approaches. We dare to propose three such additional pieces: combating whiteness, denouncing ableism, and problematizing speciesism. Without addressing these entrenched issues, in a near future, one will not even be able to think of a collectively produced mosaic. Without acknowledging the significance of oral traditions, passed down through generations, the presence of physical book collections loses its potency. Without challenging the commercialized appropriation

of Afro-Brazilian and African culture within the framework of whiteness, its appreciation becomes superficial. It will mean little to offer children non-white role models, but to reduce ourselves to single existences, with the human being above all other beings. In this context, the curriculum, teacher training, and our approach to childhood education are vital.

This is perhaps why the words of Ailton Krenak (2020) resonate so deeply in these concluding reflections:

We need to be critical of this molded idea of homogeneous humanity in which consumption has long since taken the place of what used to be citizenship. José Mujica said that we have turned people into consumers, not citizens. And our children, from an early age, are taught to be customers. There are no people more adulated than consumers. They are adulated to the point of being "drooling" imbeciles. So why be a citizen? Why have citizenship, otherness, being in the world in a critical and conscious way, if you can be a consumer? Such mindset disregards the richness of living in a world brimming with significance, on a platform with different worldviews (Krenak, 2020, p. 12-13).

And we dare to go further and include, alongside cosmovision, cosmoperception, a provocative matter posed by Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (2021, p. 28-29):

The reason why the body has such a presence in the West is that the world is perceived primarily through sight. The differentiation of human bodies in terms of gender, skin color and skull size is testimony to the powers attributed to "seeing". Looking is an invitation to differentiate. Different approaches to understanding reality, then, suggest epistemological differences between societies. [...] The term "cosmovision", which is used in the West to summarize the cultural logic of a society, captures the Western privilege of the visual [...]. The term "cosmoperception" is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups [...] which may privilege senses other than [only] the visual ones or even a combination of senses (Oyěwùmí, 2021, p. 28-29).

More than "rehearsing" a mosaic, more than reflecting on the voices of children and educators, even more than thinking about the missing pieces for the work, there are cosmoperceptions that shape our ultimate longing: any curricular, didactic-pedagogical, and/or aesthetic-literary initiative only makes sense if it is in an honest dialogue with a new global project. Therefore, transcending Western perspectives is imperative to shape our dreams and construct education, particularly for children.

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