

**ETHNIC-RACIAL EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:  
REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF TEACHERS**

***A EDUCAÇÃO ÉTNICO-RACIAL NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: REFLEXÕES SOBRE A  
PRÁTICA DE PROFESSORES***

***LA EDUCACIÓN ÉTNICA Y RACIAL EN LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL:  
REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA PRÁCTICA DE LOS PROFESORES***

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper proposes to discuss significant aspects for the formation of pedagogy professionals, who will work in Early Childhood Education, regarding the issue of Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations. From the perspective of a qualitative study with a descriptive approach and documental analysis, we discuss the possibility of an important beginning for the construction of the school as a space for valuing, welcoming and celebrating difference. We infer that it is the role of early childhood education teachers much more than paying attention to the discussion of ethnic-racial relations. These professionals can enable the discovery of ethnic-racial belonging in a positive way and can help all children to relate well to difference. However, we cannot assume that the school alone will resolve racial inequalities. We aim that in teacher training, difference can be assumed as something valuable and positive and that it be incorporated as an important motto of pedagogical practices.

**KEYWORDS:** Early childhood education. Pedagogical practices. Ethnic-racial relations.

**RESUMO:** *Este artigo se propõe a discutir aspectos significativos para a formação de profissionais da pedagogia, que atuarão na Educação Infantil, no que concerne à questão da Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais. Na perspectiva de um estudo qualitativo de abordagem descritiva e análise documental, discutiremos sobre a possibilidade de um importante começo para a construção da escola como espaço de valorização, acolhimento e celebração da diferença. Inferimos que isso é papel de professores da Educação Infantil, bem mais do que atentar para a discussão das relações étnico-raciais. Estes profissionais podem possibilitar a descoberta do pertencimento étnico-racial de uma maneira positiva e podem auxiliar a todas as crianças a se relacionarem bem com a diferença. Contudo, não podemos presumir que a escola sozinha resolverá as desigualdades raciais. Almejamos que na formação de professores a diferença possa ser assumida como algo valoroso e positivo, e que seja incorporada como um importante mote das práticas pedagógicas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Educação infantil. Práticas pedagógicas. Relações étnico-raciais.*

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**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo se propone discutir aspectos significativos para la formación de profesionales de la pedagogía, que actuarán en la Educación Infantil, en lo que se refiere a la cuestión de la Educación de las Relaciones Étnico-Raciales. Desde la perspectiva de un estudio cualitativo con enfoque descriptivo y análisis documental, discutimos la posibilidad de un inicio importante para la construcción de la escuela como espacio de valorización, acogida y celebración de la diferencia. Inferimos que es el papel de los docentes de educación infantil mucho más que prestar atención a la discusión de las relaciones étnico-raciales. Estos profesionales pueden posibilitar el descubrimiento de la pertenencia étnico-racial de manera positiva y pueden ayudar a todos los niños a relacionarse bien con la diferencia. Sin embargo, no podemos asumir que la escuela por sí sola resolverá las desigualdades raciales. Pretendemos que en la formación docente se asuma la diferencia como algo valioso y positivo y se incorpore como un lema importante de las prácticas pedagógicas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación infantil. Prácticas pedagógicas. Relaciones étnicas y raciales.*

## Introduction

This text is based on the premise that the pedagogical practices, committed to the education of ethnic-racial relations that has in its centrality the understanding of difference, have offered elements for the black children, since Kindergarten, build their racial identity positively and contribute to the composition of an antiracist society, democratic, plural and human.

In this way, as Pelbart (1993) points out, it is not enough to recognize the right to identity differences, with this neoliberal tolerance so in vogue, and present in educational policies now in force, but it would be up to education professionals, from Kindergarten on, to strengthen the differentiations, to sharpen them, to incite them, to drive them. In this context, it is significant that the initial and continuing education of professionals working in Basic Education recognizes the differences and their transformation into inequalities, understanding the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic processes that generated them. And, furthermore, it is essential that in the educators' training processes, the proposition of strategic actions be positioned and focused against any and all forms of prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination.

Early Childhood Education, according to Article 29 of the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education - LDBEN no. 9.394/1996 (BRAZIL, 1996), constitutes the first stage of basic education, aiming at the full development of children up to five years old, in their physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community (BRAZIL, 2013). In this sense, its role is to lay the foundations of human personality, intelligence, emotional life, and socialization. This configuration of Early

Childhood Education is situated a priori in the context resulting from the advances in scientific knowledge about child development, in line with the verification of the child as a subject of law, therefore, with the right to education and the appreciation of their identity since the early years of life.

In this context, this text was conceived based on the concept of race, understood as a social, political and cultural construction, the result of unequal social power relations (GOMES, 2005) which, in Latin America, through the colonization process, was used to establish a racialized hierarchy (QUIJANO, 2005). Difference has been associated, above all, with power and authority relations that generate inequalities (SILVA, 2014). Therefore, based on Moruzzi and Abramowicz (2015, p. 213), "we believe that proposals for the education of ethnic-racial relations should be materialized, so that differences are the heart of the children's educational proposal, without hierarchies or center".

Therefore, it becomes significant to think how to contemplate in the initial training process of teachers the issue of ethnic-racial relations, considering the specificities of infants (zero to 1 year and 6 months), very young children (1 year and 7 months to 3 years and 11 months) and young children (4 years to 5 years and 11 months) (BRAZIL, 2017). In this context, this article aims to elucidate some significant aspects for the initial training of educators who will work in Early Childhood Education, regarding the issue of Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations.

Thus, it is essential to recognize the role of Law n° 10.639/2003 (BRAZIL, 2003), now Law n° 11.645/2008 (BRAZIL, 2008), which made it compulsory to teach the History of Africa and African people in the school curriculum of elementary and high schools. These laws, besides historically rescuing the contribution of blacks in the construction and formation of Brazilian society, allow the black child to be visible, respected and have his difference celebrated.

In this context, we discuss ethnic-racial relations from the National Curriculum Guidelines for Initial Training of Teachers for Basic Education (BRAZIL, 2019), which establishes the Common National Base for Initial Training of Teachers of Basic Education - BNC-Training (BRAZIL, 2019), aiming at the understanding that we cannot weaken the discussion of the theme ensured by Laws no. 10. 639/03 (BRAZIL, 2003) and n° 11.645/2008 (BRAZIL, 2008), considering that we live in a country where racist practices are constant and the school has an important role in the deconstruction of this unfortunate scenario.

## Reflecting on the training of pedagogy professionals for the education of ethnic-racial relations in early childhood education

We begin the discussion by pointing out that there is an emptying of the theme on the issue of ethnic-racial relations in the BNC-Formation (BRAZIL, 2019). In it, the theme is presented within the context of diversity, following a national and international trend of the last thirty years in the field of public policies. In this scenario, in its Article 7, which deals with the curricular organization of courses intended for the initial training of teachers for Basic Education, it is presented as one of the guiding principles of the curriculum the "adoption of an intercultural perspective of valuing history and culture and national arts, as well as, the contributions of the ethnic groups that constitute the Brazilian nationality" (BRAZIL, 2019, p. 5).

It is important to highlight that the use of the term ethnicity is linked to the idea that a social group can have its identity defined by sharing language, culture, traditions, historical monuments and territories (BOBBIO, 1992). Thus, from this approach, in the field of ethnic-racial relations, little is questioned about the power relations involved in the racial discussion. However, when we use the term race, we are situating ourselves from its conception as:

[...] a social construction forged in tense relations between whites and blacks, often simulated as harmonious, having nothing to do with the biological concept of race coined in the eighteenth century and now largely superseded. It is worth clarifying that the term race is frequently used in Brazilian social relations to inform how certain physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair type, among others, influence, interfere with, and even determine the destiny and social place of individuals within Brazilian society (BRASIL, 2004, p. 13).

In this way, we understand that the proponents of this guiding document, by positioning in the BNC-Formation (BRAZIL, 2019) the racial issue in the field of cultural diversity, probably made the option for the term ethnicity and not race, further strengthening the discussion in the field of diversity and not difference. Thus, cultural diversity becomes an important tool for dialogue among peoples, or even an intercultural dialogue. In the field of Education, these perspectives are widely discussed by several researchers who bring the issue of diversity linked to the concept of culture. But, what is the problem of placing the discussion on ethno-racial relations on this level?

According to Rodrigues and Abramowicz (2013, p. 17), by placing the discussion of ethnic-racial relations in this context, we run the risk of delimiting the discussion "[...] to the simple praise of differences, pluralities and diversities, becoming a conceptual trap and a

political strategy of emptying and/or appeasement of differences and inequalities. They complement the authors by pointing out that not distinguishing between diversity and difference can frustrate both the issue of inequality and difference (RODRIGUES; ABRAMOWICZ, 2013).

For the aforementioned authors, when we place diversity linked to the cultural context, we deny inequality, because what we call social, which is the place of culture, is not mixed with economic issues. "Placing diversity on the social level is a way to invent a whole social economy that makes it possible to cut the distinction between rich and poor and/or place it on new bases, so as not to collide with inequality" (RODRIGUES; ABRAMOWICZ, 2013, p. 18). From this perspective, we would treat diversity disassociated from inequality. On the other hand, diversity also frustrates the discussion about difference, since "the diverse contains in itself the idea of identities that relate, compose and tolerate each other as if it were possible to establish egalitarian dialogues without power/knowledge hierarchies" (RODRIGUES; ABRAMOWICZ, 2013, p. 18).

In this context, tolerance comes into play. In the educational field, tolerance invites us to avoid polemics, the questioning of the current order, compromising our criticality and our engagement with change. This perspective, even assumed in the BNC-Training (BRASIL, 2019), proves ineffective, because "no child who has the mark of difference asks for tolerance, there is nothing to tolerate. One must make difference a positivity, an affirmation" (ABRAMOWICZ, 2011, p. 37).

For Silva (2014), identity and difference are dependent on representation and it is through representation that they connect to systems of power. This represents that under the aegis of diversity the valorization of identities is permeated by the issue of tolerance, which is not enough for the educational field. When we call attention to the discussion of ethno-racial relationships rooted in the field of diversity, we are stressing that it is not only necessary to deal with the relationships among different cultures as a matter of agreements, consensus, conciliation. It is necessary to recognize the power issues involved in these relations. For Silva (2014, p. 100-101), "diversity is static, it is a state, it is sterile" and the discussion of ethnic-racial relations based on identity and difference, before recognizing and celebrating them, questions them.

In this context, it is necessary and urgent to assume difference as a constituent element of the educational process. However, it is not about thinking of otherness as love for one's neighbor, nor from universal ideals, nor under the premise of tolerance with cultural diversity, but thinking beyond the logic "us X others", recognizing ourselves as a product of difference,

that is, recognizing the otherness, seeing the other as someone who lives in me. "Bring together without pretension to unify, articulate the differences without erasing the conflicts, give space to the other without pretension to assimilate him and dissolve his otherness" (TÉLLEZ, 2011, p. 74). The right to difference is the right to uniqueness, it is the recognition of the other that is not determined beforehand, that escapes any identification and control.

According to Arroyo (2012), the other, in our society, has been produced as the non-existent. When we consider the others as marginal, excluded, unequal, we create possibilities of existence for the we and the other. Therefore, because they do not exist, there is no need to include them, regulate them, emancipate them, because they are irrelevant and incomprehensible. The impossibility of their co-presence has been configured as an effective way to organize the Brazilian system in the political, social, cultural, and educational fields. Thus, the present moment requires us to politically rethink our hierarchical imaginary of the "others" under which we establish a scale of social, political, economic, and also pedagogical differentiation. This structure has accompanied and strengthened our social relations since the colonial period, and has remained in the republican period, in the democratic context, and in the molds of exploitative capitalism.

Therefore, to be in tune with this time, it is necessary that the professionals who work in education recognize the differences and their transformation into inequalities, understanding the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic processes that generated them, in addition to being able to propose actions that take a stand against any and all forms of discrimination. If the other as the source of all evil instigates xenophobia, the other as the subject of a cultural brand indicates segregation, by establishing fixed and immutable identities that ignore the process of interaction among the different. Tolerance drives us to indifference, proving to be extremely weak.

The BNC-Formation (BRAZIL, 2019), still among the general competencies for the initial training of teachers, highlights that the teacher needs to understand, as well as use historically constructed knowledge, in order to be able to teach it, engaging in student learning, as well as in their own learning, thus contributing to the construction of a free, fair, democratic, and inclusive society.

Garcia (1995) states that it is necessary to reconstruct the identity of the black child when he or she enters school, warning that for this to happen effectively it needs to start since kindergarten. He stresses that this will only be possible if the identity of the teacher or future teacher is also reconstructed. In this sense, she defends the inclusion of the topic of Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations in the initial and continuing education of teachers. Such



contributions could help these professionals to have elements to think about the rights to learning and development in Early Childhood Education (to live together, play, participate, explore, express oneself, get to know oneself), considering the specificities of the black child, facts that permeate the care and education, the interactions and games, the organization of the space, the routine, the selection of teaching materials, of children's literature books, bringing the difference to the center of the educational act.

According to the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture (BRAZIL, 2004), to be successful in the discussion of the theme teachers cannot improvise, being up to them the role of "undoing secular racist and discriminatory mentality, overcoming the European ethnocentrism, restructuring ethno-racial and social relations, de-alienating pedagogical processes" (BRAZIL, 2004, p. 15).

In this way, it is important to understand what Quijano (2005) emphasizes when he points out that America was consolidated as the first space/time of modernity, having as pulsating elements of this constitution: the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in race and the articulation of the forms of control of labor, its resources and products around capital and the world market. In this context, by conceiving differences based on the idea of race, some were placed on a higher plane than others. Thus, colonization influenced the production of a new world pattern, also producing a new intersubjectivity. We can affirm that the European transformed the non-European into "the others". And these others find little space in the school curriculum since Kindergarten. In this context, we resume Santos and Nunes (2003, p. 56) when they state that

We have the right to be equal when our difference inferiorizes us; and we have the right to be different when our equality mischaracterizes us. Hence the need for an equality that recognizes differences and a difference that does not produce, feed, or reproduce inequalities.

Silva Júnior (2012) states that although there is an increasing concern with the guidelines for teachers and managers on ethnic-racial diversity in Early Childhood Education, the actions developed are in error, because they are centered on the perspective of adopting a reactive posture, repressive of discrimination and prejudice, when Early Childhood Education can do more than that. The experiences in Early Childhood Education can prepare children to value ethno-racial diversity and to build an egalitarian society. For this to be achieved from Kindergarten on, he points out two angles: the first involves ensuring an environment where

relationships are positive and respectful, which requires rethinking physical spaces, materials, and textbooks and literature, among others.

[...] the second angle, places early childhood education as an instrument of social transformation in the sense that it prepares children to positively value the difference, dissociating difference from inferiority in such a way that in the medium and long term, prejudice and discrimination are eradicated from society. That is, it is not enough that early childhood education is not itself a source of discrimination, but it should also foster a culture of mutual respect and harmonious coexistence among all ethnic-racial, cultural and religious groups, among others (SILVA JÚNIOR, 2012, p. 71).

The BNC-Training (BRAZIL, 2019) also manifests that the competencies required for teacher training need to consider three fundamental dimensions that integrate and complement each other in teaching action. They are: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. Regarding the dimension of professional engagement, within the competence of "committing to student learning and putting into practice the principle that everyone is capable of learning", one of the skills stands out: "Pay attention to the different forms of physical and symbolic violence, as well as ethno-racial discrimination practiced in schools and digital environments, and promote the ethical, safe and responsible use of digital technologies" (BRAZIL, 2019, p. 19).

By recognizing that racism is present in our society, the BNC-Training (BRAZIL, 2019), stresses the importance of teachers being aware of possible episodes of racism in the school environment. However, the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture (BRASIL, 2004) point out that it takes more than that. To re-educate Ethnic-Racial Relations it is necessary that in the process of initial formation we can bring to light the pain and fear that surround the black population, as well as it is crucial to understand that "the success of some has the price of marginalization and inequality imposed on others" (BRAZIL, 2004, p. 14). To re-educate ethnic-racial relations is to understand that non-blacks:

[...] they have the moral and political responsibility to fight racism and discrimination and, together with those who have been kept at the margins, the blacks, build healthy racial and social relations, where everyone can grow and realize themselves as human beings and citizens (BRAZIL, 2004, p. 14).

In this context, it is important to highlight that research with children from 0 to 5 years old has shown that there is little attention to the forms of prejudice and racial discrimination, because the pedagogies of racialization are still present in school, the ideal of whiteness still occupies a privileged place in the interactions between children and children and children and



adults, and color and hair are the main protagonists of racial prejudice. And yet, between the ages of three and four, children already use color gradation as a resource for identification. This research allows us to infer that there are still few schools that provide educational practices that offer elements for black children to positively construct their identity, being proud of their racial belonging. Thus, investing in education may be one of the ways to reverse this panorama.

In this sense, Oliveira (2004) highlights that black children, in general, are excluded from most of the moments of pampering in daycare centers, thus, the disciplinary power becomes evident from the norm, demonstrating that there is a micropenality inside the daycare center. However, in face of these findings, she points out that the exclusion of black children from parenting is not a negative thing, because this relationship is configured as a device for capture and control. Thus, excluded, black children are free "from this inhibiting, fraternal and familial affection that asphyxiates and imprisons" (OLIVEIRA, 2004, p. 93).

Trinidad (2011) hypothesizes that preschool children express prejudice and discrimination through the verbal plane and, as they get older, transform them into attitudes, as well as use other words to express themselves about their racial belonging. For her, from a very young age, black children do not identify with some of their characteristics, indicating a devaluation of their ethnic-racial belonging.

Guizzo (2011), through contact with children between 5 and 6 years old, observed that from an early age children incorporate the notions and prejudices that circulate socially and use this knowledge to curse their peers, especially at times when they want to defend themselves and/or retaliate against something that was said to them. She also reveals that children show strangeness with the presence of black characters in children's stories. According to Oliveira (2012), among children aged 3 to 5 years, the use of racist nicknames is common at the time of the children's fights, highlighting that they are used mainly when the boys want to assault the girls, making marked use of aesthetic elements. According to the author, the issue of racial discrimination is strongly observed in relations with the body and hair (OLIVEIRA, 2012).

In this direction, Amaral (2013) highlights that the organization of spaces and environments, as well as the routine in Kindergarten, does not favor the construction of the identity of black children, because there is a visible denial of it. Thus, we infer that this is the role of Early Childhood Education teachers, much more than paying attention to the discussion of ethnic-racial relations. These professionals can enable babies, very young children and toddlers to discover their ethno-racial belonging in a positive way, as well as help all children to relate well with the difference.

In this perspective, for Bischoff (2013), children perceive racial differences from their daily experiences, from the television programs they watch, from the people they live with, but when they come into contact with cultural artifacts that value the presence of the black population, they evidence, reinforce, as well as change their position and influence that of their peers facing their ways of living raciality. In this regard, Machado (2014) also reaffirms the school as a privileged space to address racial issues, pointing out that encouraging discussions that problematize the place of reference of whiteness and the representations that children have about the black population are strategies that make it possible to give visibility to the identities and ways of constituting the racial belonging of young children. In this direction, Silva (2015) highlights that there are practices in Early Childhood Education that recognize coloniality and its forms of expression and bring the difference to the center of their educational practice, contributing to the destabilization of the hegemonic model and to the strengthening of the identity of black children.

By assuming the incorporation of the difference in their teaching practices, professionals working in education recognize that "the difference is not appeased, since it is not to appease, what the difference does is to differ. [...] The difference goes against identities, since its function is to blur them" (ABRAMOWICZ, 2011, p. 92), because, according to Arroyo (2012), it is not enough to recognize the humanity of the other, it is necessary to abolish the conception that their human plenitude will come from a single, universal model of humanization, where the we is understood as the synthesis. The difference exists, it is concrete, and we need to dialogue and learn with it.

### **Final considerations**

Initially, we clarify that our emphasis was on the training of professionals who work in Early Childhood Education, considering that from the earliest age children have the right, in kindergartens and preschools, to affirm their identity as a black child, and that little attention has been given to the discussion of the topic at this stage of Basic Education. Such a possibility may be an important beginning for the construction of the school as a space for valuing, welcoming, and celebrating difference and identity.

However, we cannot assume that the school alone will solve racial inequalities. The school, as an educational institution, assumes an anti-racist education, and joins other social instances in the struggle for the construction of a Democratic State. It is also relevant to reflect that almost two decades after the ratification of Law 10.639/2003 (BRAZIL, 2003), now Law

11.645/2008 (BRAZIL, 2008), we still have timid experiences related to the issue in schools, especially in Early Childhood Education.

According to Gomes (2006, p. 33), "we cannot believe in a cause and effect relationship between the legal precept and the social and educational reality", because, although the law represents a great advance, it is in its political struggle, in the context of power relations, in the school routine and in the organization and experience of educational practices that it will be realized. Thus, for its implementation to take place, it is essential that initial and continuing education is planned and experienced considering the respect for differences.

We must also understand that the re-education of ethnic-racial relations enables a broad discussion about Africa, the African Diaspora, and the black population in Brazil. However, this discussion has assumed, in some contexts, stereotypical views. According to Arroyo (2010), in some schools, the ethnic-racial issue has been reduced to a festive and selective opening, which notifies the disrespect to the history of the black population. Thus, it has been common, during school festivities and teacher training, among others, for some collectives to be invited to present choreographies of capoeira, rap, funk, maculelê, maracatu, samba, in short, countless expressions of black culture. But these occasional actions are "[...] forms of 'incorporation' that reproduce and do not modify the system's traditional regulatory function over legitimate conceptions of knowledge, values, culture, and identity" (ARROYO, 2010, p. 127, emphasis added).

According to the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture (BRAZIL, 2004), schools and their teachers need to commit themselves to the "responsibility of ending the false and reduced way of treating the contribution of enslaved Africans and their descendants to the construction of the Brazilian nation" (BRAZIL, 2004, p. 9).

Finally, it is significant to emphasize that to problematize the differences is to unveil the darkness that has predominated in the educational field, which disregards the different knowledge and wisdoms, establishing hierarchies. In this sense, we wish that in the initial and continuing education of teachers differences can be assumed as something valuable and positive, and that they are incorporated as an important motto for pedagogical practices. Thus, all children with and in their differences will feel contemplated in their identity.

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