

Leitura literária afro-brasileira na educação infantil e suas contribuições numa prática sociocultural

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RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a existência e utilização de uma prática sociocultural, partindo do trabalho com a literatura afro-brasileira em sala de aula. Dessa forma, a questão norteadora da pesquisa busca saber: como os docentes têm utilizado práticas socioculturais no desenvolvimento dos educandos com a literatura na Educação Infantil? A investigação teve como base a abordagem qualitativa, que ocorreu através de pesquisa de campo realizada no primeiro semestre de 2022, em um Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil (CMEI), em Codó, Maranhão, tendo como técnica a observação e o questionário como Source de pesquisa, com docentes do turno matutino da referida instituição. Os resultados da pesquisa, a partir dos questionários e a observação feita em campo, evidenciaram que os professores conhecem a importância e a relevância de uma prática sociocultural com a literatura, entretanto, suas práticas não agregam a literatura afro-brasileira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação na infância. Leitura. Literatura Afro-brasileira.

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Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the existence and use of a sociocultural practice, based on work with Afro-Brazilian literature in the classroom. Thus, the guiding question of the research seeks to know: how have teachers used sociocultural practices in the development of students with literature in Early Childhood Education? The investigation was based on the qualitative approach, which occurred through field research carried out in the first semester of 2022, at a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (CMEI), in Codó, Maranhão, using observation as a technique and the questionnaire as a research source, with teachers from the morning shift of said institution. The results of the research, based on the questionnaires and the observation made in the field, showed that teachers know the importance and relevance of a sociocultural practice with literature; however, their practices do not include Afro-Brazilian literature.

KEYWORDS: Early childhood education. Reading. Afro-brazilian literature.

La lectura literaria afrobrasileña en la educación infantil y sus contribuciones en una práctica sociocultural

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RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la existencia y uso de una práctica sociocultural, a partir del trabajo con la literatura afrobrasileña en el aula. Así, la pregunta rectora de la investigación busca saber: ¿cómo han utilizado los docentes las prácticas socioculturales en el desarrollo de los estudiantes con la literatura en Educación Infantil? La investigación se basó en un enfoque cualitativo, que se desarrolló a través de una investigación de campo realizada en el primer semestre de 2022, en un Centro Municipal de Educación Infantil (CMEI), en Codó, Maranhão, utilizando la observación como técnica y el cuestionario como método. fuente de información de la investigación, con docentes del turno matutino de dicha institución. Los resultados de la investigación, basados en los cuestionarios y la observación realizada en campo, mostraron que los docentes conocen la importancia y relevancia de una práctica sociocultural con la literatura, sin embargo, sus prácticas no aportan a la literatura afrobrasileña.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación de la primera infânciâ. Lectura. Literatura afrobrasileña.

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Introduction

Reading is not a solitary act, for when someone allows themselves to be engaged by it, they may go beyond all their previous perspectives. The reader is always part of an environment that is, a social group and as a consequence of reading, this reader will carry aspects of that environment into their own world. Likewise, reading will offer the reader a deeper understanding of their reality and broaden their horizons.

It is well known that the practice of reading fosters the full development of individuals, while also fulfilling an important social role as one of the primary means of communication. Therefore, it is essential that reading be incorporated into the school context from early childhood education onward, particularly through literature.

Children's literature is considered the foundation for forming critical, reflective, and engaged readers (Jacques, 2021). The earlier it is introduced to children, the greater the positive impact literature can have. Among these effects are enhanced creativity, improved memory and imagination, the development of writing skills, and an expanded vocabulary, all of which contribute to more effective communication, since a connection is formed between the words we speak and those we read.

Given that literature plays a vital role in shaping citizens contributing to both their personal development and the construction of their identities, which in turn can foster cultural diversity, encompassing political and academic dimensions we believe that literature provides a pathway to rethinking teaching practices. When a child encounters literature, they gain access to new worlds, enabling them to acquire knowledge of experiences beyond their own daily life.

In this context, it is necessary to consider reading experiences within the Brazilian context, particularly in light of the reality in schools where racism, along with its closely related manifestations of prejudice and racial discrimination, still persist. Recognizing that few individuals acknowledge their prejudiced or discriminatory behaviors, and that many struggle to understand the topic, we argue that ending this denial is one of the essential steps toward effectively combating racism. After all, as long as Brazil continues to deny its racism, the oppression of Black people will persist. When racism is normalized and absorbed into society as something "natural," such attitudes lead to the belief that no problem exists and thus, no intervention is deemed necessary.

Prejudice, as an attitude, is not innate; on the contrary, it is socially learned through the individual's interactions within society. Racism, in turn, is the belief that some races are superior to

CONCEIÇÃO; MORAIS; COSTA; SILVA others. Discrimination refers to actions based on prejudice or racism, which result in individuals being unfairly excluded solely because they belong to a different race (Moreira e França, 2020). Thus, it is essential that the study of Black culture and its representativeness be addressed from early childhood education onward, through literature, with schools playing a key role in shaping students' moral and ethical values and fostering the development of critical and socially conscious individuals.

Given this context, our interest in the topic emerged from academic experiences related to literature, which we encountered through discussions and reflections in the Pedagogy undergraduate program at a public university located in Codó, Maranhão. It is also worth highlighting the participation of the first author of this article as a volunteer in the extension project Literacy and Reading in Special Education⁵ integrated into the same program. The project operates in partnership with the Pestalozzi Association of Codó, which, in 2021, worked with literary books addressing racial issues and the valorization of Black identity. It was within this context that we were encouraged to explore the topic in the setting of mainstream education.

Based on the above, this study aims to address the following guiding questions: How have teachers employed sociocultural practices in the development of their students? In what ways can a teacher's sociocultural practice contribute to student development? These questions form the foundation of the general objective of this article, which is to analyze the existence and application of sociocultural practices, focusing specifically on the use of Afro-Brazilian literature. To further develop the topic, we have established the following specific objectives: to reflect on the contributions of literary reading; to identify reading practices based on Afro-Brazilian literature; and to understand teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of working with Afro-Brazilian literature in schools.

Methodological Pathways of the Research

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, which required an in-depth examination of the research object, taking into account the context in which it is situated. As Piana (2009, p. 168) emphasizes, "qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representation, but rather with a specific social group, since qualitative research focuses on aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, aiming instead at understanding and explaining the dynamics of social relations".

Thus, in the first stage of this investigation, a bibliographic review was conducted using the

⁵O projeto tem como objetivo realizar, na Associação Pestalozzi de Codó, atividades de extensão com o propósito de alfabetizar letrando a partir da literatura. Esta ação extensionista vem sendo desenvolvida na referida instituição desde o ano de 2011 e atinge um público de aproximadamente 150 alunos, dentre crianças e adolescentes com deficiência auditiva, visual e mental, nos turnos matutino e vespertino.

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) and Google Scholar databases. The search focused on official documents that guide schools and education in Brazil, such as the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC (2018); the Federal Constitution of 1988; the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (1996); Laws 10.639/03 and 11.645/08, which address the need to expand curricula to ensure that schools value and emphasize racial culture and diversity; the National Education Plan – PNE (2014); and the Municipal Education Plan of Codó – PME (2015).

The second stage of the research consisted of fieldwork. As Brandão (2007, p. 12) affirms, "fieldwork is a lived experience that is, more than a purely scientific act, such as might occur in a laboratory setting." Field research, therefore, represents a different way of seeing and thinking about a given situation or reality, based on the researcher's direct experience and engagement with the environment under study.

It is also important to highlight the relevance of field research within the academic sphere, as it enhances the validation of data obtained through bibliographic research. Its purpose is to ensure direct observation of the studied reality. In addressing field research, Piana (2009) cites Gonsalves (2001, p. 67), who defines it as "a type of research that seeks to obtain information directly from the population under study, requiring a more direct encounter from the researcher," which entails the investigator going to the site where the phenomenon occurs.

The fieldwork in this study was conducted with the Pre-2B class, composed of children aged 4 to 5 years, at a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil – CMEI). It is important to note that the classroom observation took place during the Supervised Internship of the Pedagogy program at a public university located in the city of Codó. The Supervised Internship in Early Childhood Education includes a total of 125 hours, divided into the stages of observation, teaching practice, and finally, the development of an intervention project, entitled Breaking Racial Stereotypes. These stages served primarily to familiarize the researcher with the school environment, observe the lead teacher's reading practices, and assess their contribution to the children, including the presence of racial diversity within the classroom.

In addition to the observations conducted in the Pre-2B class, a questionnaire was administered to the morning-shift teachers at the CMEI. It is worth noting that this method was chosen precisely for its advantages, as highlighted by Oliveira et al. (2016, p. 08): "it saves time, yields quicker and more accurate responses, and, due to anonymity, allows for greater freedom in responses, with less risk of distortion and greater consistency in evaluation." Thus, the questionnaire facilitates the generation of research data for the researcher and promotes more favorable

participation from respondents.

The questionnaire aimed to investigate the teachers' perceptions regarding reading practices based on Afro-Brazilian literature. It included 13 both open- and closed-ended questions designed to gather information about the presence of pedagogical practices involving Afro-Brazilian literature among the morning-shift teachers.

The participating teachers provided informed consent for the use of their responses through a Free and Informed Consent Form (Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido). To ensure anonymity, the respondents are referred to by the names of the seasons: Spring, Summer, and Winter. In doing so, we uphold the confidentiality guaranteed by the questionnaire. The school under study serves children from nursery through Pre-2 in early childhood education. Observations were carried out four times per week, from 7:15 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. As previously mentioned, the classroom research took place in the Pre-2B morning class, which consisted of 20 children aged between 4 and 5 years.

The School and the Social Role of Literature

The school holds the responsibility of developing reading skills in its students. Consequently, it must prioritize reading instruction, enabling children to acquire this essential competence so they can engage with the various types of texts present both within and beyond their social context (Silva, 2007).

It is undeniable that children's learning begins long before they start attending school. As a result, any learning situation encountered by the child within the school environment always has a preceding history, which confirms that the learning that takes place during the preschool years is noticeably different from that of formal schooling (Cole, 1991).

Every human being has lived experiences prior to gaining access to reading. However, once this encounter occurs, reading becomes an effective tool in the construction of one's identity, as it broadens one's perspective (Brito, 2010). In this regard:

Literature is filled with knowledge about human beings and the world [...]. In the reading and writing of a literary text, we discover a sense of ourselves and are encouraged to desire and express the world in our own terms and through the lens of the community to which we belong. Literature tells us who we are and motivates us to express and reimagine the world ourselves. This is possible because literature is an experience to be lived. It is more than knowledge to be reworked; it is the incorporation of the other into the self without renouncing one's own identity.

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Through literature, we can become others, live as others live, break through the boundaries of our own experience, and still remain ourselves. The literary experience not only allows us to learn about life through the experience of the other, but also enables us to live that experience (Cosson, 2010, p. 17).

Literature provides contact with the new, significantly contributing to students' development, as noted by Cosson (2010), who states that through literature we are able to break through the boundaries of our own experience. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that both the school and the family play a vital role in shaping children's identities, so that they may grow up valuing their own particularities while also respecting those of others. In the absence of adequate education that embraces different cultures, there is a risk of reinforcing prejudiced worldviews, reproducing discriminatory behaviors, and perpetuating collective practices of social exclusion.

Thus, education and knowledge serve as the school's most powerful tools in the fight against racism. As Anjos (2017) argues, one does not have to be Black to understand the history of Black people just as we are not European, yet from an early age we are taught European history.

In this sense, we recognize the individual as a social being, for children are born into and immediately integrated into society. In the case of Brazil, this is a society that is structurally racist and exerts a strong influence on children. As a result, children are not exempt from committing or experiencing discriminatory acts even unknowingly by reproducing racist or prejudiced words and behaviors. As Freire (1987, p. 79) asserts, “(...) human beings educate themselves in communion, mediated by the world.”

According to Cândido (1995), literature corresponds to a universal need, one common to all human beings, and which must be fulfilled lest one's personality become stunted. This brings us to the understanding of literature as an integral part of human identity. Likewise, Cosson (2010) explains that our body is the sum of different bodies (the imaginary body, the physical body, the language body, etc.), and without exercising these bodies, they become atrophied—just as our physical body does when we fail to move it. Therefore, to deny the use and benefits of literature is to mutilate our own personality.

Considering that the habit of reading originates in childhood, why not provide children with access to new interpretations and diverse perspectives on a variety of themes? Why not offer them high-quality literature that embraces their uniqueness? Recognizing the child's singularity does not mean we are beholden to it; on the contrary, it should serve as a guiding principle for our classroom practices.

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When it comes to reading comprehension, it is essential to reflect on how a reader can assign meaning, significance, and critical thought to something they have not understood. On this point, Freire (2017) argues that comprehension arises from the association between text and context. Therefore, the reader's world must be considered when selecting texts. In light of the Brazilian context, Jaccoud et al. (2002), as cited by Scremin and Hara (2013, p. 34), report that "Brazil has the largest Black population outside Africa and the second largest in the world, second only to Nigeria." This reality results in a significant influence of Black culture, also referred to as Afro culture (Silva, 2014).

The Importance of Afro-Brazilian Literature

The first appearances of Black individuals in Brazilian literature date back to the early 20th century. However, these representations did not focus on their rich cultural contributions, but rather on a path marked by pain and suffering. The abolition of slavery, unfortunately, did not eliminate prejudice. As Gouvêa (2005, p. 79) states, "in the works produced up to the 1920s, Black characters were either absent or referred to the recent slaveholding past." At the time, society viewed Black people as inferior. Moreover, there were numerous studies and theories that sought to justify the supremacy of whites over other races. As a result of these ideologies, which systematically devalued Black individuals, their history and culture were silenced, and omitted particularly because the Brazilian literary market primarily catered to the ideals of the dominant social classes (Farias, 2018).

It is important to note that, according to Gouvêa (2005), the readers shaped by literary books were characterized by an identification with white culture and aesthetics, while simultaneously disqualifying Black culture and aesthetics. Whether the reader was Black or not, the texts ultimately contributed to a process of "whitening," as they repeatedly portrayed the white race as superior. In other words, these books led Black readers to dislike their own image, since the human standard was represented as being white.

Although the majority of Brazil's population is Black, the country still records high levels of social, educational, and economic inequality linked to skin color (Moreira & França, 2020). Brazil is a structurally racist country. It is a society whose culture is deeply embedded with discriminatory practices that are expressed in all spheres of life. According to Godoi (2020), these practices persist because they were forged over more than three centuries of slavery.

This context raises significant concern regarding the selection of literary books in early childhood education. Children's literature is shaped by a range of ideological forces: the authors of

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice literary texts, critics, those responsible for selecting titles (since children rarely choose books on their own and when they do, their choices are already influenced by dominant cultural norms), and the children themselves (Souza e Martins, 2015).

This need for a diversified selection of literary books to be used in early childhood education taking into account their educational contributions also highlights the importance of considering this within the context of the city of Codó. In Codó, 83% of the population of 118,038 people self-identify as Black: 15,498 as Black (pretos) and 84,435 as Brown (pardos), totaling 99,933 Black individuals (Almeida, 2018). Likewise, in the state of Maranhão, where, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Black people also constitute the majority about 74% of the population (G1, 2012)⁶, racism is still present. According to G1 (2021)⁷, between January and August 2021, Maranhão recorded 21 cases of racism and 303 cases of racial slurs (injúria racial). This demonstrates that even in societies where the majority of the population is Black, such as Maranhão, it cannot be assumed that Black individuals are not oppressed or that racial prejudice has ceased to exist.

Freitas (2016) highlights the challenge of identity formation for Black individuals, particularly the construction of a positive self-image, which begins in childhood within a racist society that teaches them self-denial. Indeed, the overrepresentation of the image of white students and whiteness in general in our society is undeniable, leading us to understand that ideals of beauty, intelligence, and morality have predominantly been associated with whiteness.

In this regard, it is observed that several articles in the 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil address the issue of equality, such as Article 3, which establishes the fundamental objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil, consisting of four items: I – to build a free, just, and solidary society; II – to guarantee national development; III – to eradicate poverty and marginalization and to reduce social and regional inequalities; and IV – to promote the well-being of all, without prejudice based on origin, race, sex, color, age, or any other form of discrimination. Nevertheless, Black and Brown individuals still strive for the realization of these provisions, which concern the fundamental rights of Brazilian citizens.

Although these constitutional principles do not explicitly mention the role of education, they

⁶G1. **Black people represent 74% of the population of Maranhão, says IBGE.** (November 20, 2012). G1. Available at: <G1 - Negros representam 74% da população do Maranhão, diz IBGE -notícias em Maranhão (globo.com)> Accessed on June 25, 2022.

⁷VIEIRA, Lucas. Maranhão has already recorded 21 cases of racism and 303 of racial slurs in 2021; learn how to report them. G1, November 20, 2021. Available at: <Maranhão já registrou 21 casos de racismo e 303 de injúria racial em 2021; saiba como denunciar | Maranhão | G1 (globo.com)> Accessed on June 25, 2022.

CONCEIÇÃO; MORAIS; COSTA; SILVA are inherently linked to it, as schools are responsible for promoting respect for cultural diversity and for fostering an understanding of individual differences. Clearly, the school is the institution that offers children a broader horizon. Therefore, the importance and necessity of an education grounded in social commitment becomes evident (Vasconcelos, 2007).

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB, 1996) incorporates the fundamental objectives of the Republic into its Article 3 and introduces additional principles. However, in terms of anti-racist education, it is Article 26, paragraph 4 of the LDB that specifies that the teaching of Brazilian history must consider the contributions of different cultures and ethnicities to the formation of the Brazilian people explicitly citing African heritage. This provision was first introduced in Law No. 10.639/2003 and later amended by Law No. 11.645/2008, which today serves as the principal legal instrument for combating racism in education.

Law No. 11.645/2008 mandates the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture in the basic education curriculum. It legally reinforces the need to teach Afro-Brazilian culture, including its literature and history, within classroom discussions (Brazil, 2003, 2008). This represents a significant milestone in the development of a curriculum that values diversity and promotes equality.

Furthermore, the inclusion of this content seeks to redress the erasure of Black people from Brazilian history and aims to deconstruct all forms of prejudice against Black people and Afro-descendants. The implementation of this law is of great value in restoring visibility to African heritage within the Brazilian school curriculum. Given the profound and ongoing influence of African culture in Brazil, it is unacceptable that African heritage continues to be excluded from the content taught in many schools (Oliveira, 2021).

Although the LDB addresses anti-racist education, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) is not fully aligned with this directive. The BNCC merely reinforces existing content related to Africa and Afro-Brazilians topics that have already been part of the basic education curriculum (Silva, 2021). For instance, in the BNCC's general competencies for basic education, Competency 9 refers to the importance of developing and nurturing empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution, and collaboration among students, while embracing and valuing the diversity of children (BNCC, 2018).

It can be said that the BNCC has failed to recognize Afro-Brazilian and African literature as a source of great value. Furthermore, it has overlooked the wealth of knowledge that could offer children access to other historical periods and details about the history of Black people, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation of their identity. It is also important to emphasize that Afro-Brazilian

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice and African literature has enabled Black children and those of other ethnic backgrounds to become critical and reflective citizens, promoting understanding and acceptance of the diverse cultures that make up our nation (Silva, 2016).

Afro-Brazilian Literary Reading in the School Context

Working with Afro-Brazilian literature in the classroom is not relevant only to Black children, since our culture is undeniably the result of customs and values drawn from all ethnic groups. Despite the unequal conditions in which some of these groups have developed, all have contributed to the richness of our national identity (Mariosa e Reis, 2011).

With regard to this contribution, we recognize the relevance of Afro-Brazilian literature in early childhood education, given that it provides guidance on the historical times and spaces that have shaped us as a people. Thus, it is not an overstatement to affirm that Afro-Brazilian literature not only exists, but is also multiple and diverse (Duarte, 2008).

In this sense, it is the school's responsibility to maintain a diverse book collection that ensures the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian literature, since, as previously mentioned, it is not intended solely for Black students, but for all students. According to Anjos (2017), it is particularly relevant for white students, who, having received an education shaped by prejudice, have had their psychological structures affected. From this perspective, Mariosa and Reis (2011) argue that, while the school fosters the development of a positive identity for Black students, it also enables non-Black students to come into contact with the specificities of African culture, thereby abandoning distorted, prejudiced, and stereotypical views of Afro-descendant references.

According to the authors,

throughout the entire process of constructing the identities of both Black and non-Black children through literature, it is essential to emphasize the role of schools and teachers. Through the content addressed in the classroom and in school libraries, administrators and educators must become aware of the need for literary work that embraces diversity awakening critical thinking and discernment in young readers through specific texts. Costa and Marisa (2003) analyze schools and their curricula as spaces of production, circulation, and consolidation of meaning privileged spaces for the enactment of identity politics. Those who hold political power ultimately impose the representations and symbols of their own culture onto the world. Therefore, it is fundamental to implement a curriculum that encompasses all traditions, cultures, and symbolic references that make up Brazilian culture, with special emphasis on establishing a dialogue with African heritage (Mariosa e Reis, 2011, p. 49).

Thus, it is essential to reframe and restructure school curricula in order to promote racial

CONCEIÇÃO; MORAIS; COSTA; SILVA equality, since fostering diversity through Afro-Brazilian literature in the classroom contributes to the formation of critical individuals who are aware of cultural differences. To achieve this,

education professionals must recognize that Basic Education plays a fundamental role in the holistic development of individuals and serves as a space for socialization and identity formation. From this perspective, it is crucial to construct a curriculum aimed at the decolonization of knowledge, the visibility of differences, and the creation of spaces that promote racial equality. Rethinking the practices carried out in Early Childhood Education institutions becomes an urgent measure, as this stage of education plays a vital role in the emotional, social, cultural, physical, and intellectual development of children from birth to age five, and constitutes a key space for the socialization and construction of both individual and collective identities (Bernardes, 2018, p. 66).

Godoi (2020), when discussing the school curriculum, highlights it as a political instrument of social control that holds power over the way knowledge is produced. As a result, traces of a racist and prejudiced society can be observed in school practices. This leads us to the understanding that, through a restructured and reformulated curriculum, it is possible to break with entrenched social norms and with the invisible practices that reinforce negative images of Black individuals, given that the school plays an essential role in children's lives: it teaches, and in many ways, children reproduce what they learn there.

Currently, a new body of children's literature has emerged one that considers Black identity, including its cultural and historical perspectives. These are books that go beyond narratives of pain and suffering; they are no longer centered solely on slavery. It was in the mid-20th century that this new representation of Black individuals began to appear in Brazilian children's literature one that values and preserves traditions and customs, placing emphasis on the lived reality(Farias, 2018).

What Do the Research Results Reveal?

Box 1 presents the profiles of the teachers who participated in the study. As previously mentioned, fictitious names were assigned to both participants to ensure the anonymity of their questionnaire responses. Accordingly, in this research, they will be referred to by the names of the seasons, as shown in the table below:

Box 1 – Profile of the Research Participants

Participant	Education	Class Assignment	Teaching Experience
Spring	Bachelor's Degree in Geography and Pedagogy	Pre-K I	25 years
Summer	Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy	Nursery	23 years

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Winter	Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy	Nursery	23 years
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Source: Produced by the authors, based on field research, 2022.

As shown in the table above, the three teachers who contributed to this research hold degrees in Pedagogy, have over twenty years of teaching experience, and work with classes composed of approximately 15 to 20 children.

Initially, the teachers were asked to describe their classroom routines involving the reading of literary books and to share their personal views on the importance of working with literature in the classroom. The results were noteworthy, as all three teachers recognized the relevance and contribution of literature to children's lives. According to the teachers: *"Its relevance lies in its contribution to the child's holistic development, particularly in fostering oral skills, expressiveness, attention, retelling, and the child's own fluency based on their hypotheses"* (Spring, 2022); *"In addition to being enjoyable, it contributes to intellectual and cultural enrichment, developing the child's critical thinking"* (Summer, 2022); *"It is offundamental importance for our children, as it will accompany them throughout their school and life journey, supporting the development of written language and adding to their knowledge"* (Winter, 2022).

However, although all three teachers acknowledged that literary reading contributes to the holistic development of children also highlighting its role in cultural enrichment when asked which books they had worked with in 2022, only Winter mentioned titles from Afro-Brazilian literature, such as *What Color Is My Color?* by Martha Rodrigues. According to the teacher, *"it is one of the pathways to bring diversity into the classroom and create conditions for natural conversations, so that children can understand concepts of race"* (Winter, 2022).

Although she does not use Afro-Brazilian literature in her practice, when asked whether she believes in its importance and relevance in the classroom as a resource for children's identity formation, Spring (2022) stated, *"I absolutely believe in it, because it is through lived experiences that we address and contextualize learning situations, and the child begins to understand respect and appropriate attitudes for living with others."* It becomes evident that the books mentioned by the teachers Summer and Spring are, for the most part, those distributed by the government, including *Giraffito's Tie* and *Bekinha the Bee*, both by author Xico Bizerra; *The Three Sticks* by Ana Neila Toquarto; and the classic *Snow White*. These materials, in turn, provide little visibility to Black representation, as Tardivo rightly points out (2020, p. 322):

[...] we highlight the limited visibility that Black literaturewespecially contemporary

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Black literaturewhas within schools. A review of textbooks reveals that Black literature is largely excluded from the school environment, which leads teacherswho often rely on these materials as their primary resource for instruction and do not seek alternatives beyond what is provided by the governmentto continue reproducing this exclusion in their practices.

Thus, it becomes clear that teaching practice is still largely based on a limited and non-diverse experience when it comes to the selection of literary books, given that many teachers do not have access to alternative literary materials and are, to some extent, restricted to the collection available at the schoo.

It is important to highlight, based on the questionnaires, that a similarity can be observed in each teacher's practice: they reported using Afro-Brazilian literature in the classroom only when the topic arises spontaneously among students, or when a project is developed on the theme, particularly around Black Consciousness Day, in the month of November.

This confirms what Brito (2019) points out when noting that schools tend to address racism in a compartmentalized manner, concentrating related activities exclusively during the week or even just the day of Black Consciousness, November 20. As a result, throughout the rest of the year, Black individuals experience social invisibility, perpetuated by dominant white culture and its social markers. In contrast to other countries where reading is considered a tool for socialization used to introduce younger generations to the behavioral values of their social group Brazil engages in “reading activities that do not foster socio-cultural identity, but rather differentiation, distinction, and consequently, isolation” (Perrotti, 1990, p. 74).

In anti-racist work, the teacher plays a fundamental role as a facilitator and mediator of knowledge. Therefore, it is essential that teachers engage in critical reflection on their pedagogical practice, carefully considering the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian literary works within their methodologies. This not only supports the development of a positive identity among Black children, but also allows non-Black children to engage with the diversity that exists in the society around them.

With regard to literary practices, the research sources we used confirmed the observations made during the first semester of 2022 in the preschool class of 20 children aged 4 to 5: literary reading was not, in fact, a priority in the daily routine, as the textbooks had not yet been delivered to the CMEI. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that even if the textbooks had been delivered, they would not necessarily ensure engagement with literature, as their objectives differ.

We also observed that the teacher's classroom practice consistently prioritized printed activities and explanations of their content, which had been previously established by her and the

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice school administration as part of the weekly routine (e.g., tree, family, water, numbers, etc.). It was therefore evident that, although the school possessed a small literary collection, it was not being used, and the children had no access to it, since the books were stored along with general school supplies and other materials unrelated to literary us.

Box 2 – Class Routine – 03/28/2022

Topic of the Day	Planned Activities	Assessment
Circus	Circle time: prayer, attendance count, weather, songs, name badge introduction. Discussion on the relevance of circus arts and completion of the activity sheet.	Monitoring and recordkeeping

Source: CMEI, 2022.

In summary, the daily classroom routine followed this sequence: a moment of prayer; traditional children's songs; questions directed to the children about the weather, their location, their feelings, and the number of children present. Following that, the topic of the day was introduced to the children with a brief explanation and demonstration, either through drawings on the board or a printed activity. At this stage, the children showed interest in the activity by asking various questions, which encouraged active interaction between the teacher and the students.

After these activities, the children had their snack, followed by a trip to the restroom, and then proceeded to the second part of the routine, which was completing the worksheet, respecting each child's individual pace. As they finished, they were given building blocks to play with until their parents arrived. On some days, hands-on activities related to the lesson content were included, with the goal of developing motor coordination.

It is worth noting that during the internship observations, no literary reading moments were witnessed except during the teaching practicum phase⁸, when literary books from the school collection were selected and read daily with the children. These moments sparked strong participation, generating excitement and curiosity about what would be read in the next session. Storytelling was a constant presence, both through literary books read aloud by the interns and through the children themselves, who would share stories about their own experiences from the previous day with the class.

⁸ The Supervised Internship in Early Childhood Education, integrated into the Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy program at the public university to which the authors are affiliated the Center for Sciences of Codó comprises 125 hours and includes the stages of observation, teaching practice, and an intervention project. This project was carried out in pairs in the Pre-2B class at CMEI Santo Antônio, in Codó, Maranhão, in the year 2022.

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We believe that the teacher is a key mediator of reading. For this reason, it is essential that reading be integrated into their classroom practice. According to Mariosa and Reis (2011), the construction of a child's identity is both personal and social, and it inevitably involves the reference points presented to them by society and the school. Cartoon characters and children's story figures are part of these reference points and contribute to the development and construction of that identity. These figures are introduced to children either through oral storytelling or through books resources to which many children only have access within the school setting.

With the aim of ensuring children's access to literature, the 2015 Municipal Education Plan (PME) of Codó established, in Goal 16, the need to guarantee the continuing education of basic education professionals in their respective fields. Strategy 16.3 specifically calls for the creation of conditions that support the use of literary, textbook, and supplemental reading materials in ways that foster knowledge construction and promote a culture of inquiry among basic education teachers.

Although the right to access books is guaranteed by law, the research revealed that one of the challenges to be overcome is the lack of dedicated spaces for books within schools. The CMEI investigated, for example, has a playroom (*brinquedoteca*) that contains some books in addition to toys and teaching materials (such as EVA foam, crepe paper, laminated paper, etc.). However, there was no space exclusively designated for books, and the children did not have access to the playroom, as it was used as a general storage area for school materials. Nevertheless, Law No. 12.244, dated May 24, 2010, establishes in Article 1 that all educational institutions public and private, regardless of the educational system must have libraries, making it mandatory for all schools to maintain a book collection in a library. Aware of this law, the principal of the CMEI reported that, during the second semester of 2022, she would organize a specific space dedicated to books.

Given the difficulty of accessing printed books at school, it is necessary to highlight the use of technology, as despite the absence of Afro-Brazilian literature in the school's collection numerous "Afro-libraries" can be easily found online, offering a vast array of Afro-Brazilian literary works. In this regard, the use of technology in education enables greater access to resources and information on the subject for teachers, which could encourage more diverse storytelling practices. It is worth noting that most urban schools in the city of Codó already have access to Wi-Fi. Moreover, in 2022, schools had resumed in-person activities following a prolonged period of social isolation caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

It is important to emphasize that the pandemic accelerated the use of digital technologies. However, the complete or partial closure of schools and the lack of adequate access (to the internet,

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice computers, mobile devices) prevented thousands of children from effectively participating in educational activities. This led to setbacks in the development of reading skills, as reported by data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua) conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) between 2012 and 2021, and presented in a technical note issued by the organization *Todos pela Educação* (2022).

The data showed a significant increase in the percentage of children who are unable to read and write, with an increase of over 66% between 2019 and 2021. These numbers become even more concerning when disaggregated by race: among white children who are not fully literate, the percentage is 34%, whereas among Black children, the figure rises to nearly 48%. These statistics highlight the greater educational disadvantage faced by Black children in terms of reading and writing development (*Todos pela Educação*, 2022).

Considering the return to in-person classes in early 2022 and the internet access now available to teachers in schools, it is believed that educators can now access a wide range of literary works online. The internet is a rich source that offers teachers a broader range of choices. Additionally, many stories can be found in storytelling videos on YouTube, in PDF format via Google, and even as inspiration for creating resources to dramatize those narratives. Teachers can also choose works that highlight Afro-Brazilian culture not only those that focus on the history of slavery thus helping to counteract some of the negative effects the pandemic has had on children's literacy.

As previously mentioned, the online collection of Afro-Brazilian literature is extensive. Works such as *Kouumba and the Diambê Drum* by Madu Costa, illustrated by Rubem Filho and published in 2009 by Mazza Edições, or other books aimed at encouraging a more attentive view of music and musical instruments of African origin, can be easily found in storytelling videos on YouTube.

In its pages, written in poetic language, *Kouumba and the Diambê Drum* highlights the African storyteller who safeguards ancestral traditions passed down from generation to generation. The story aims to stimulate children's imagination and address Black identity, reinforcing self-esteem and emphasizing diversity, as expressed in the book's powerful phrase: “*It is time to celebrate our differences, it is time to break the chains of racial prejudice*” (Costa, 2006, pp. 18–19). The book's illustrations also play a key role in reinforcing the theme of diversity, depicting a Black boy and a white boy, both with the Diambê drum.

Likewise, in *Lélê's Hair* (*Cabelo de Lélê*, 2007) by Valéria Belém, the main character Lélê initially dislikes her hair, raising several questions such as “Where do all these curls come from?”

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Understanding that every question demands an answer, she decides to search for a book. The book she finds presents different hair types across the African continent coiled, voluminous, adorned, and more which leads Lélê to accept and appreciate her hair, recognizing its beauty and understanding it as a mark that tells her story. The illustrations in *Lélê's Hair* also reinforce a positive image of Black identity.

Another excellent and more recent example is *Amoras* (2018) by Emicida, published by Companhia das Letrinhas. In this book, Emicida shares a conversation he had with his eldest daughter under a mulberry tree as they picked berries. He explained to her that the darker the berries, the sweeter they are. To which his daughter responded, "Daddy, that's great because I'm dark too." *Amoras* is a book that speaks to the importance of valuing who we are and recognizing ourselves in the world. It celebrates Black beauty through natural imagery and self-recognition, offering children a powerful narrative of representativeness and Black identity, with direct references to Afro-Brazilian culture.

The classroom observations and the experience gained during the teaching practicum especially in the intervention project developed based on those observations revealed the presence of prejudiced expressions and attitudes reproduced by children. Examples included phrases such as: "hard hair," "skin-colored pencil," and "straight hair is prettier, right miss?" among other adjectives that reinforce racial stereotypes. Without intentional and critical intervention, these attitudes may have serious implications for the construction of positive Black identities.

The project "*Breaking Racial Stereotypes*" emerged from the central question: why repeat prejudice if we can break it? It was carried out with the children from Pre-1A and Pre-2A classes, as a rainy day prevented many students from the originally observed class from attending school. As a result, the two groups were combined, totaling only 13 students. The project consisted of three distinct yet interconnected stages. It began with a storytelling session featuring *The Boy of All Colors (Menino de Todas as Cores)* by Luísa Ducla Soares. In a playful and engaging manner, props were used to illustrate the situations described in the story with the entire group, which also created an opening for the interns to engage in dialogue with the children on the topic of race.

In the second stage, still during circle time, the concept of prejudice and its consequences was introduced using the "Pre Box" (*Caixa do Pré*), which contained phrases previously spoken by the children and recorded during the internship observations. One by one, phrases were drawn from the box, sparking a number of questions from the children, such as: "*Miss, so there's no such thing as bad hair?*"; "*Miss, what color is skin-colored pencil?*"; "*Are there really that many kinds of hair?*"

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice. This intervention clearly revealed that change was beginning to take place, as the children were now seeing and hearing differently, and developing new curiosities. It indicated the emergence of a broader and more critical understanding of the topic.

From this, we understand that when teachers engage in sociocultural practices, they begin to consider the social, cultural, and scientific role of the school (Canda, Souza & Brito, 2010). This aligns with Winter's response when asked why she addresses racial themes in the classroom: *“Because it is one of the ways to introduce diversity and create opportunities for natural conversations, so that children can understand concepts of race.”* This reveals a strong connection between reading, knowledge, and culture. After all, “reading is not mere decoding, but above all, interpretation, and according to modern thought, the creation of a new text” (Caldin, 2003).

In this perspective, the third and final stage of the intervention project involved telling the children that inside the “Pre Box” was someone very important and very beautiful. Each child was asked to describe the person, but they had to look into the box without revealing what they saw to their classmates. One by one, they opened the box and smiled upon seeing the reflection inside was a mirror. Upon seeing themselves, the children began to describe the person: *“She has black eyes, Miss”*; *“She really is beautiful”*; *“She has long hair”*; *“Miss, this person looks like me.”* In this way, it became evident that each act of reading gives rise to a new text and, as stated earlier, reading, knowledge, and culture are interconnected.

This activity demonstrates that when teachers work with Afro-Brazilian children's literature in the classroom especially in groups where the majority of students are of African descent it contributes meaningfully to children's identity formation. Furthermore, literature fosters self-awareness and respect for diversity, creating meaning and guiding children toward a deeper and more engaged interaction with the world around them. Through Afro-Brazilian literary reading, children are also able to recognize the social realities that surround them.

Notably, it is important to follow the path of a sociocultural teaching practice permeated by literature, so that reading may be genuinely experienced and not reduced to a mere obligation aimed at pragmatic and immediate goals. Childhood has shown itself to be open to discovering and valuing the infinite possibilities that reading can offer (Perrotti, 1990).

Final Considerations

What this investigation reveals is that Afro-Brazilian and African literary reading is a source of immense value, and its effective inclusion in the Basic Education curriculum is of utmost

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importance. Basic Education plays a fundamental role in children's development, considering that identity formation begins in childhood and is shaped by the references presented throughout one's life references that may be either positive or negative.

Afro-Brazilian literature does not appear in the school context as a form of recovery, since it is not something that was lost over time. Rather, it emerges as a necessary act of historical and cultural reparation for Black people, whose image has been historically trivialized and rendered invisible by the dominant classes in Brazilian society. For centuries, they were treated as inferior and inadequate, and stereotyped and prejudiced views prevailed, with little to no recognition of the immense contributions of Africans and Afro-descendants to the country's history and culture.

As discussed throughout this article, identity especially its formation is both personal and social, and is not fixed or immutable. Therefore, schools must recognize their responsibility in shaping children's individual and collective identities, ensuring they do not grow up reproducing discriminatory or prejudiced discourse, or internalizing a supremacist ideology of whitening where whiteness is upheld as superior and everything associated with Black culture and aesthetics is rejected. Such a context leads Black children to develop negative self-images and aspire to conform to white standards imposed by dominant cultural references.

We thus argue that a teacher's sociocultural practice in the classroom contributes to ensuring that Black children grow up with knowledge of the richness of their own culture. This helps deconstruct harmful stereotypes and enables non-Black children to broaden their understanding of cultural diversity, thereby reducing the reproduction of racist behaviors. Both groups benefit from learning about the place, value, and contributions of all peoples who make up Brazil's diverse heritage and who have played a role in shaping its history.

In this regard, a redefinition and restructuring of school curricula is essential especially concerning the selection of literary books used in Basic Education, and more specifically in Early Childhood Education. The aim should be to adopt literature that represents Black individuals positively, portrays enriching images of their culture and beauty, promotes visibility of difference, fosters racial equality, and supports the decolonization of knowledge.

It is the duty of public authorities to invest in teacher training, so as to strengthen the understanding of African culture as a vital part of the teaching-learning process and of the fight against racism. Throughout the identity formation process of children, the essential role of schools and educators in building a more just and democratic society cannot be overstated.

In short, based on the observations conducted at the CMEI involved in this research and the

Afro-brazilian literary reading in childhood education and its contributions in a sociocultural practice questionnaires answered by morning-shift teachers, it is evident that all participants understand the importance of working with Afro-Brazilian literature and recognize its significance for children's identity formation. However, as the data presented also indicate, Afro-Brazilian literature is still seldom incorporated into their daily teaching practices. Even so, the teachers have expressed a desire to change their approach, and the school administration, as previously mentioned, has been working to restructure the *brinquedoteca* in order to create a dedicated space for books.

Investigating this theme proved to be highly relevant, especially considering that Brazilian history has long been marked by sociocultural segregation of groups deemed inferior. Bringing Afro-Brazilian literature into the debate as a real possibility for combating racism and social and racial inequality and simultaneously strengthening Black identity makes it clear that the current school curriculum, which mirrors a historically exclusionary society, is no longer adequate and must be urgently reformed to include the historical and cultural heritage of Afro-descendant peoples. It is, in fact, essential that students have access starting in Early Childhood Education to the African and Afro-descendant historical and cultural richness from which countless generations were deprived throughout Brazil's history, and which remains vital to our contemporary society.

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