

TEACHING PERFORMANCE AND ETHNIC-RACIAL EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The present work analyzes the perceptions of black teachers about themselves and about ethnic-racial relations in their personal and professional lives. The research started from a qualitative approach to research in Education, following principles of the phenomenology of perception in light of Merleau-Ponty (1999), as well as the perspective of content analysis of interviews along the lines of Bardin (2011). The teaching narratives are manifestations of both trajectories conditioned by

ethnic-racial prejudices and discrimination and of resistance, confrontation and overcoming, above all, due to the completion of studies, academic training and work in Education. These three aspects demonstrate the importance of the role of these teachers in deconstructing the anachronistic, immoral and illegal imaginary that marks racist practices that are still widespread in society and at school.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Difference and education, Ethnic-racial relations, Racism, Black teachers

ATUAÇÃO DOCENTE E VIVÊNCIAS ÉTNICO-RACIAIS DE MULHERES NEGRAS

RESUMO

Neste trabalho são analisadas percepções de docentes negras sobre si e acerca das relações étnico-raciais em sua vida pessoal e profissional. Partiu-se da abordagem qualitativa de pesquisa em Educação, seguindo princípios da fenomenologia da percepção à luz de Merleau-Ponty (1999), bem como da perspectiva de análise de conteúdo de entrevistas nos moldes de Bardin (2011). As narrativas docentes são manifestações tanto de trajetórias

condicionadas por preconceitos e discriminação étnico-raciais quanto de resistências, enfrentamentos e superação, sobretudo, em função da conclusão de estudos, formações acadêmicas e atuação na Educação. Esses três aspectos demonstram a importância do papel dessas teacheras na desconstrução do imaginário anacrônico, imoral e ilegal que marca práticas racistas ainda difusas na sociedade e na escola.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Diversidade, Diferença e educação, Relações étnico-raciais, Racismo, Teacheras negras.

1 PRESENTATION

In an unequal society, individuals have their differences used as food for prejudice and discrimination. Distorted uses of the concept of difference strongly affect different subjects, especially Afro-Brazilian women. The present paper specifically analyzed black teachers' perceptions of themselves and ethnic-racial relations in their personal and professional lives. The study particularly deals with the discovery or construction of ourselves as black women. It was also discussed, in general, the experience of ethnicity in personal, school and professional terms as well as their role as teachers in light of ethnic-racial relations, focusing on Law 10,639/2003, which determines the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in primary and secondary schools.

We follow the perspective of the qualitative approach to research in Education according to premises defined by Ludke and André (2015) and based on the description and interpretation of teachers' perceptions. We seek a subjective conceptual approach to the phenomenon through the vision exposed by the teachers. When using this type of approach, we looked for the way they perceived and interpreted themselves, their experiences and their professional environment with a focus on ethnic-racial relations. Therefore, the research did not involve manipulating variables or testing experiments. More specifically, we follow the principles of the phenomenology of perception along the lines explained by Merleau-Ponty (1999). From his perspective, what emerges and can be perceived is a phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon analyzed are the teachers' narratives about their perceptions and practices within the scope of ethnic-racial relations. The inspiration in phenomenology comes from the need to understand the place of these relationships in the teachers' experiences. Researching in the light of phenomenology does not mean first defining categories of analysis and explanatory principles or theories. It is necessary to understand the phenomenon, which begins with interrogation about it which, in turn, leads to interpretative thinking (interview) with a view to achieving understanding of the phenomenon, which means identification and understanding of its fundamental meanings.

The work with interviews was materialized in the analysis of five of these carried out in 2020 with teachers who consider themselves black and who work in basic education and who, here, are referred to as: Adriana, Dália, Edite, Manuela and Pilar. They all underwent a semi-structured interview based on four key questions: 1) Do you consider yourself black? Why? What does being black mean to you? 2) How are ethnic-racial relations handled in the school(s) where you work? 3) How do you deal with ethnic-racial relations in your work at school? 4) What were ethnic-racial relations like for you throughout your school, academic and professional life? The questions used for interviews evolved into inquiries about interpersonal and institutional relationships, as well as questions about professional perspectives and practices of teachers and managers, among others.

The inclusion criterion used was that of working in basic education schools, which could be either from the public or private education network in Natal-RN. This decision was made when we identified the small number of self-declared black teachers in schools.

For the analysis of the interviews, we were also guided by the perspective of content analysis along the lines of Bardin (2011), following its three phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of results with attention to inference and interpretation. Based on the pre-analysis, it was possible to categorize the information in the narratives with attention to the research objectives. According to Bardin (2011, p. 117), “categorization is an operation of classifying constituent elements of a set, by differentiation and, then, by regrouping according to genre (analogy), with previously defined criteria”. Thus, we looked for what was common in the statements.

We commonly see in the teachers' narratives the identification as black as the result of a process; the disregard for ethnic-racial relations in their schools in general; the intention of permanent work on their own practices on ethnic-racial relations; and a life trajectory marked by prejudice and discrimination. Thus, we arrive at three categories: complex and painful constitution of being black, external violence and permanent self-affirmation and ethnic-racial relations as daily historical and cultural valorization.

The (participating) teachers were between thirty-two and forty-two years old. Two were pedagogues and the others had degrees in Literature (one), History (one) and Physics (one). Their teaching experience varied between eight and seventeen years. One has a graduate specialization (thirty-nine years of age and seventeen years of teaching in the area of Pedagogy) and one has a master's degree and is studying for a doctorate in History (thirty-two years of age and six of teaching in the area of History).

1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 The complex constitution of being black

Emotionally exhausting situations are associated with “considering oneself black” in the teachers' narratives, either due to circumstances dating back to childhood or adulthood. There are even those who started to consider themselves black only as adults. When asked if they considered themselves black and what it would be like to be black, there were those who declared, for example, that: “Yes, I am black, despite it being a recent discovery. [...]. I spent my entire life, childhood, adolescence, not knowing I was black” (Teacher Adriana).

The teacher associates the lack of definition with the fact that her sisters are considered white because their phenotype belongs to their paternal family, regardless of their mother being black. Despite her childhood nickname being “Nega”, highlighting her different physical characteristics from those of her sisters, she considered it a simple nickname and not something

that could be associated with an ethnic-racial definition. It was only at the age of thirty-eight (at the time of the interview, in 2020, she was thirty-nine), after being introduced to the work “Quem Tem Medo do Feminismo Negro?”, by Djamila Ribeiro, that she began to understand and define herself as black.

Contact with the work allowed her to realize the existence of an entire agenda relating to racial issues, which result in a series of social, cultural, political and economic inequalities previously unknown to her. According to her words:

It was [...] like a way of getting to know myself and understanding who I was (I speak in terms of race, as a black woman) and what issues were linked to my subjectivity and my ancestry. I began to search, I began to discover, from my readings, that my intellectual construction was that I was able to understand situations of racism that I had gone through in my childhood, in my adolescence and in my adult life that at the time, I did not understand that was racism. (Teacher Adriana).

Another example of a recent discovery is that of teacher Manuela, aged thirty-two. It was only after she was twenty-five that she began to recognize herself as black. According to her, recognition is a process and, in her case, it started when she stopped straightening her hair, assuming it to be naturally curly. When asked about the reasons for considering herself black, she relates them to her characteristics that, according to her, made her consider herself as a non-white (individual). According to her:

I consider myself black because I already have in my experience of suffering racism, knowing that the racism I suffered came from individual practices, but it is also structural racism, which comes from institutions, not just from people. And I also consider myself black because my identity is built based on strong influences from African culture. (Teacher Manuela).

What teacher Manuela states is directly related to what Souza (1990, p. 77) has stated since the 1980s, when he stated that “being black is not a condition given a priori. It is a becoming. To be black is to become black and in a process marked by constant violence, by a double injunction: to embody the body and ego ideals of the white subject and to refuse the presence of the black body”.

The example of teacher Dália, aged thirty-eight, is representative of what caught the attention of teacher Manuela and what Coelho and Silva (2015, p. 697) both point out, according to which “unfortunately, skin color remains between the markers relevant social factors in the reproduction of prejudiced and discriminatory mechanisms in the relationship among students at the school environment”. Because she had lighter skin and straight hair, as a child, she was called “Little Indian”. As a teenager, she was named “Pocahontas”. As a result, he grew up forming an

identity association with indigenous culture, despite having black family members and having, in his older sister, a representation of a person with darker skin, curly hair and whose school career was marked by a lot of prejudice and discrimination. According to Gomes (2019, p. 25), “any identity process is conflictive to the extent that it serves to affirm me as a ‘self’ in the face of an ‘other’. The way this ‘I’ is constructed is closely related to the way it is seen and named by the ‘other’”. In such regard, as in his childhood and part of his adolescence he was perceived as indigenous, and consequently acknowledged such representation.

It was only in her adult life, after the experience of wearing dreadlocks in her hair, did teacher Dália begin to feel what, according to her, “being black” meant: “When I got dreadlocks, and wore it for four years with, I felt what prejudice against black people was” (Teacher Dália). “Being black”, therefore, in its conception, goes beyond the pigmentation aspect of the skin. In addition to the experience of racism experienced in adult life, the teacher declares the association with cultural characteristics as being the basis of the constitution of being black. Thus, it is clear that recognizing oneself as black is not something that can only be found in phenotypic characters (characteristics?). Non-identification may be related to the lack of experiences of belonging, admiration and recognition of the black body. The recent discovery, therefore, does not constitute some kind of surprise in itself. It is a late process of virtuous recognition of the black body due to such lack of self-awareness.

Teacher Edite, thirty-two years old, in addition to “being black” as a recent discovery, considered it as something coming from outside. In order to better explain her statement, he (she?) cites the phrase attributed to the architect and researcher of racial and gender issues, Joice Berth about being black: “I didn't discover myself black, I was accused of being black”. In this sense, he highlights what he calls the “social burden”, racism, which he declares to face on a daily basis. Thus, she states: “I consider myself a black woman because of my skin color, my hair, my facial features and the social burden I carry” (Teacher Edite).

The interviewees recognize that “being black” is an often painful construction. In addition to recognition occurring, to a large extent, as a result of the phenotype, there are also situations of prejudice and discrimination. This identification of black people in Brazil goes beyond physical characteristics, according to Munanga (2019, p. 19), due to the fact that “in history they have been victims of the worst attempts at dehumanization and that their cultures have not only been object of policies of systematic destruction. More than that, the existence of these cultures was simply denied”.

What the interviewed teachers declare, points to life trajectories marked by uncertainty and situations of prejudice and racial discrimination (as well as by) not being understood in their childhood or adolescence. This lack of understanding may be (precisely) associated with the lack of knowledge about the history of attempts at cultural destruction and dehumanization which Munanga (2019) deals with. As shown in the teachers’ statements, physical characteristics and

the association with experiences of racism mark “being black”. This is how it is completed with questions of identity and political positioning, as Teacher Adriana highlights.

Specifically, about women, Gomes (2003) highlights that, in the Brazilian historical and cultural process, black women construct their corporeality amidst a tense movement of rejection/acceptance and denial/affirmation of the body. In this sense, the hair is highlighted. Due to its prominence on the body, it constitutes a symbol that differs from culture to culture. Thus, the “hair” aspect leads black children and adolescents to be forced to live with the idea of inferiority regarding their ethnic-racial belonging. Corporeality goes beyond biological aspects. It has a social character due to the fact that the body is an expression of values, cultures, languages and identity. Gonçalves (2005) states that social relations are built in the body and that is why it expresses both the history of the individual and the accumulated history of a society that imprinted its codes on it. Therefore, the body feels and forms a perceptual synthesis.

In such sense, upon expressing negative opinions about black women's bodies and hair, society encourages a negative identity construction. In order to halt this type of construction, it is necessary to problematize racial issues by taking into account the production of knowledge in different areas. The appropriation of knowledge becomes a path to the process of changing representations about black beings, which must be marked by positivity.

As a child and teenager, teacher Dália did not suffer daily from being associated with a “little Indian woman”. But, over the years and, according to her, as a result of a natural transformation in her hair that changed from straight to curly and, above all, when she adopted dreadlocks, she began to suffer racism on a daily basis, at which point she began to become aware of her identity as a black woman.

The temporal difference in relation to the recent identification as black is that of teacher Pilar, aged forty-two. When questioned, she promptly stated that “I consider myself black since I was born, despite being born into what appears to be a white family” (Teacher Pilar). “Passing as white” refers to the lighter shade of your parents’ skin. Despite considering herself the result of an interracial relationship, especially between black and indigenous people, she defines herself as black because she identifies with black culture music, struggles, religiosity, for example). She states that asserting herself in her identity, made her “an even stronger person, more of a warrior, achieved many things, I had to overcome myself, I had to overcome several prejudices and that only made me stronger”, in the same way as defined by Munanga (2019).

Although, as expected, there were no problems within the family because she was born with darker skin than his parents and sisters, she suffered from prejudice and discrimination in the public sphere. According to her, “I (have) always a problem, not with myself, but always with others... the issue of bullying at school, in other spaces too, people always talked about it, as if it were a bad thing” (Teacher Pilar).

Problems at school do not only occur in relationships among students. They can also exist in the teacher-student relationship or amongst the institution's own professionals. Regarding the teacher-student relationship, Gonçalves (2007), when investigating teachers' perception of the performance of black students, found differences in the treatment given to students, which ranged from non-recognition or distrust of students' potential, to submission to punishments. In other words, different treatment was observed due to underestimation of the students' abilities, disregarding, for example, the fact that some of them lived in problematic families or even school conditions that, therefore, made their success difficult. The differentiated service was based on prejudice due to ethnic-racial issues.

Cavalleiro (2003) highlights this aspect in relation to early childhood education. The researcher reports there is a whole non-verbal language (behaviors, forms of address, tones of voice, gestures and looks) at school that communicate prejudice and discrimination and conditions black students to failure, submission and fear. The work of Castro and Abramovay (2006), which covered ten Brazilian capitals, provides sufficient data to prove the existence of racism and discrimination in everyday school life.

Black students are commonly humiliated in the nicknames they receive from their classmates and often in the treatment and omission observed by teachers. Martins & Geraldo (2013), for example, demonstrate in their research that reports from black students about their trajectories at school, marked by nicknames, insults, swearing and other hostile practices, are proof of the omission of the professionals who run schools, which ultimately see such violent practices as a natural process. Such approach causes the above mentioned practices to be disseminated without any need to discuss the intense suffering that affects the black population.

It is by lack of reaction from school professionals, that many children and adolescents, as a kind of unconscious defense, start to deny their black identity, since they are forced daily to see it as something bad. In this sense, Teacher Manuela states that:

For a long time I didn't see myself as black, because I thought it was words like that that carried a very bad pejorative weight. So, as you see, like racism it is so subtle and can be so cruel that we tend to associate, here, everything that is black and black is bad. So, for example, I understood myself as a brunette, a (light-skinned) brunette, a (dark-skinned) brunette, and not as a black woman.

And this process of denial of the teacher's identity lasted twenty-five years. Meanwhile, Manuela experienced racism, because as she herself states: "If you don't recognize yourself as a black man or woman, society will point it out to you and this happens at one time or another and it usually points it out in the cruellest way", and this is the racist way. In this sense, she recalls that she suffered racism at school: "I was called a monkey, people made fun of my hair, I was excluded from some group work, among other things".

When target of discrimination and prejudice at school, black students can build a negative image of themselves, even if they do not yet consider themselves or are not aware of what it means to be black in Brazil. This process of denial, which may be unconscious, has been mistakenly seen from the “outside” as if “black people themselves produced the denial of their identity” (COELHO and SILVA, 2015, p. 693). This goes back to what William Du Bois (apud COELHO and SILVA, 2015) calls double consciousness. This concept enhances the understanding of the damage caused by racism to subjectivity, identity and dignity, especially among black children and adolescents. The internalization of the image of the other constructed by the dominant white discourse tends to provoke psychological conflict in the black population that can suffer throughout their lives. Experiencing this negative experience within the school can be even more devastating, as one experiences naturalized suffering on a daily basis in an environment where one is supposed to learn to live together in a respectful and healthy way, protected from all forms of violence.

2.2 Obstacles between external denial and permanent self-affirmation

Years go by and what is the issue of race in the lives of teachers? How did you experience ethnic-racial relations in your school, academic life, and professional life. It is possible to find among them stories of external disapproval in the midst of their academic and professional, therefore, adult lives. We are left with life stories filled with situations of violence that required attitude of affirmation and resistance.

Teacher Adriana, for example, draws our attention once again to the negative reception regarding the issue of hair. According to her, at the university (UFRN), a teacher approached her and, observing her braids, uttered the sentence and took the following actions:

“How do you wash it?” And he grabbed my hair with some disgust. I said: “wash once a week”. She grimaced. I said, “Why? Have you ever asked people who brush their hair how long they spend with a brush in their hair? Because it’s also a week or more.” She laughed. But it was also just this once. (Teacher Adriana).

The attribute “hair” occupies a prominent place in a racist society. It is a striking element in the definition of identities and, therefore, depending on its characteristics, it tends to be considered as a mark of superiority or inferiority.

Gomes (2019) and Silva Júnior e Almeida (2020) do not let us forget that this attempt at change may mean a way to move away from a place considered inferior. Straightening your hair can be seen as a way of expressing a tense situation in women's lives. This way, deciding to follow through with the so-called hair transition and adopt curly hair, as teacher Edite did, for

example, can be considered a stance that is not only personal, but political and of a collective nature.

As for teacher Manuela, in addition to suffering racism at school (where, among other things, “they made fun of my hair”), including for being the only black student, recalls the prejudice experienced in other instances throughout her life, the “subtle racism” which, in her words “undermines our lives in several instances that we experience”. She remembered, for example, that she had “looked at a pie in a restaurant, by other customers, when I went to some restaurants that are relatively expensive, here in Natal”.

For her part, teacher Pilar recalls that, in the first school where she worked, she was the only black teacher and that she considered herself that way. There was another phenotypic black colleague, whom although she presented characteristics of the black population, by straightening her hair, declared herself as non-black. When placing diversity and black culture on the agenda of discussions, the topic suffered resistance and there were those who claimed it was “reverse racism”. In this way, actions within the scope of diversity were limited to the month of August, folklore month. The statement of “reverse racism” seems to be very comfortable for those who do not wish to discuss the subject, who do not have enough valid arguments to support their denial. Such “idea” against discussions about ethnic-racial relations at school represents a racist stance in motion and, unfortunately, persists in many educational institutions, despite such discussions constituting an official determination, according to Federal Law no.: 10.639 /2003.

Teacher Dália’s experience also demonstrates racism in movement. She remembers that when she started wearing dreadlocks, she noticed rejection from people and opportunities that began to close on the professional front. The following words are hers: “at a certain school, I did not send my curriculum because I already know that, it's a space that doesn't fit me, I don't fit in, and maybe I wouldn't want to be there either”.

Another representative example is that of teacher Edite. What she presents to us reinforces the perception of racism based on stereotypes. In personal terms, she remembers “going to commercial establishments and being followed and people thinking I was suspected of stealing”. On a professional level, she recalls that there was a school where she worked and, after falling ill, she asked to be transferred. Years go by, but inappropriate attitudes remain frequent, for example, in regards to one’s hair.

When choosing to transition from straightened hair to natural hair, Teacher Edite used braids. On different occasions, he remembers, for example, hearing from a coordinator of a private educational institution where he worked, asking what it would be like when her braided hair “reeked of sour” (common expression in Northeastern Brazilian Portuguese equivalent to “stink”). The teacher also states that: “At this school I faced resistance to being able to braid my hair. I needed authorization to braid my hair and I still had a hard time getting that authorization. I started a conversation in which I warned them that if they didn't authorize it, I would be able to accuse them of racism” (Teacher Edite).

This probably fueled shyness, consisted of insecurity resulting from these relationships he experienced every day in his childhood. In his professional life, the remnants were felt. In addition to feeling “like an intruder in the place” due to the lack of representation of black professionals, she started to develop a practice, as she herself says: “from a more individual perspective, my class and I and without really following the ideal of the school as a whole”.

This type of loneliness is also highlighted by teacher Pilar when she reports the existence of many difficulties in relation to her acceptance, which influenced the fact that she felt very alone as a child during school activities. As a result, the teacher highlights the need for above all, in order to better impose herself in situations of prejudice. Teacher Edite, in turn, as a teenager, felt she was intellectually incapable of entering a federal university, which, according to her, negatively affected her academic performance.

A possible path to changing this state of things is intellectual training. This was precisely where teacher Edite felt limited, but which she dared to face in recent years, especially from the moment she began reading works by black researchers and began to feel more empowered. In her own words, “I think that when we know our history better, it gives us more motivation to move forward, and continue resisting and fighting against these barriers that racism imposes on black people” (Teacher Edite). We saw, as Gomes (1995) rightly, stresses that the arrival of black women into teaching represents a culmination of multiple resistances and affirmations. It is necessary to overcome racism in schools and universities to continue studying and then establish oneself in the profession.

While working as basic education teachers, the teachers participating in the research witnessed the development of specific actions on the topic of diversity, such as those carried out in the month of November and still marked by “folklorization”, since they were not accompanied by adequate discussions, without reasoned debate on the racial issue.

Teacher Adriana presents us with an unfortunate example of how experiences from African backgrounds are received by teachers in some schools. She recalls that, on a certain occasion, because she did not adequately understand African-based religion, she invited a daughter of holy father to have a conversation with his students about Candomblé and the orixás. When she arrived at school, a teacher who professes a (protestant branch of) Christian faith welcomed her by saying: “Are you bringing “catimbozeira” to school now, Teacher Adriana?” (Teacher Adriana).

Furthermore, there are institutions in which the topic of ethnic-racial relations is not worked on, or even considered. The topic, in the institution where teacher Manuela works, according to her, “is effectively not addressed”. What we have is a set of specific activities on November 20th, Black Consciousness Day and, even so, on the initiative of the school's Student Union, without any support from the coordination or management staff. Teachers refuse to treat racial issues as legitimate and some even “call it snow flaking, playing victim, among other things” (Teacher Manuela).

The exception, in relation to the institutional stance towards diversity, seems to be due to the experience of Teacher Dália. The private school in which it operates develops projects in teaching units. Thus, it involves cultural issues in its projects with greater consistency, which encompasses different civilizational matrices. Faced with possible cases of prejudice or racial discrimination, professionals' actions tend to be immediate, and prone to respecting diversity and equal rights, according to her. As a black teacher who agrees with the school's educational principles, Teacher Dália, despite being in Physics, an area considered to be more distant from discussions on issues of ethnicity different from History or Literature, for example, has made her contribution in the discussion and proposition of activities that promote education for ethnic-racial relations, as we will see below.

2.3 Diversity as an everyday historical and cultural appreciation

Despite not specifically dealing with the topic of ethnic-racial relations in her work plan, Teacher Dália does not pass on the opportunity of discussing the subject whenever she has the opportunity (scenes of prejudice, events in the media, black women in science etc.). In other words, the transversal character, problematizing social issues when dealing with the topic, is part of her teaching practice. This is clear in the teacher's report about her lesson on sound waves as we can see:

And then we started talking about percussion instruments, and then the students started calling them macumba, the batuque, the atabaque, and I started talking about the history of the instruments, of Afro-Brazilian culture. How did they get here, how did black people develop their instruments to be able to play, how did capoeira become part of the culture, how did black people need to disguise themselves by dancing, that history of capoeira, and this was all within the approach to physics, about musical instruments, about the propagation of sound, sound waves. (Teacher Dália).

The teacher points out that the experience required her to talk about African religiosity so that there was greater understanding on the part of the students. Thus, she states: "I realized that many left there with another conception of what religiosity was [...] this is very liberating." (Teacher Dália).

The student protagonism seen in Teacher Dália's class, especially in relation to the two students in the capoeira circle, is an educational principle guiding a respectful practice regarding education for ethnic-racial relations. Teacher Dália's example encourages us and makes us reiterate that the treatment of the topic must occur regardless of specific school subjects or the introduction of new and specific curricular content.

As teachers we are producers of knowledge. Therefore, more than playing the role of source of knowledge, we are ethically, politically and pedagogically responsible for providing experiences of analysis, reflection and criticism in order to take subjects to the next level of sociability with repercussions on discourses and practices within the scope of ethnic-racial relations.

This perspective, concurs with Silva Júnior and Almeida (2020, p. 4) when they state: “in effect, education and school can both contribute to the perpetuation of racism and to the maintenance of demeaning discourses about black people in our society, how much they can be agents of social transformation and anti-racist struggles”. When we consider racism as a structural dynamic, affecting practices and representations, as well as when we understand teaching practice as an intentional action on the type of subject and society we want to form, we advocate that teaching professionals create work opportunities that bring themes to the subject, that the racial issue be taken as an object of permanent discussion. In other words, the matter cannot be addressed only when “there is an opportunity”.

It is necessary to consider the topic, regardless of the explicit existence of racist practices at school, since dealing with ethnic-racial relations has the purpose of promoting balanced, respectful and beneficial social relations for everyone. Considering the subject in the school context does not mean studying others, it means studying everyone and their relational processes with historical, social, political and cultural understanding. There should therefore be no reason to remain silent on this topic. If there is something unacceptable in the context of ethnic-racial relations at school, it is silence. It causes misinformation and this reinforces everyone's indifference and lack of commitment towards one of the most difficult social issues to deal with and break its limits due to its structural relationship with society. It is necessary to pay attention to the silences present in the curriculum and question who it serves and who is being excluded from it. As it is a field of disputes and veiled power relations, the silence on the racial issue reveals itself to be biased.

When discussing her practices in the context of ethnic-racial relations, Teacher Adriana highlights that she seeks to feed her experiences with many studies. It highlights the carrying out of research on “black literature, African literature and Afro-centered literature” to strengthen its practice of storytelling, proven to be an effective teaching technique for audiences of different ages and identities. In addition to materializing the practice of orality, it promotes the exercise of memory, something typical of African and indigenous culture. In addition to this practice, teacher Adriana seeks to promote moments of discussion with children through the dynamics of conversation circles, practice aligned with the document “Guidelines and Actions for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations” (BRASIL, 2006).

Teacher Pilar, in turn, highlights the cultural aspect in her work (black music, cultural and artistic manifestations, artists). Its aim is to show that talking about black people does not mean just talking about slavery and, therefore, something bad and that it only leads to the association

of black people's lives with the history of suffering and humiliation. In fact, when working on certain topics with students it is necessary to go beyond what has usually been done. It is necessary to go beyond the simple description of slavery. Working on black people requires historical and political awareness of diversity, work to strengthen identities and rights and promote educational actions to combat racism and discrimination (BRASIL, 2004).

By following this perspective, Teacher Pilar's work in the context of ethnic-racial relations is not limited to one month of the year, week or days. The concern for continuity of actions is also part of Teacher Edite's universe. The teacher reports that she seeks to involve students with African and Afro-Brazilian culture through work with books and teaching sequences planned for this purpose throughout the year, as she clearly points out "it is not within one month of the year that we deconstruct the entire racist ideal and that being black means being inferior overnight" (Teacher Edite).

But it is possible to find black teachers who move away, at least for a moment, from the profile of seeking to work on issues of ethnicity on a daily basis. Teacher Manuela explains that in her classes, specifically, in the 2nd grade of high school (juniors), when dealing with the subject of slavery, and in the 3rd grade of high school (seniors), when addressing the theories and policies of whitening current at the turn of the 19th century for the XX, a debate on issues of identity is promoted with students. In addition to these specific moments, the teacher exemplifies the work in partnership with the Portuguese language teacher based on an activity with music from the musical group Racionais MC's. In the end, she reinforces this perspective by declaring: "So, we have treated it like this, but even so, without any initiative that comes from school management, but rather very specific things" (Teacher Manuela).

To what extent should teaching practice (themes and methods) be guided or come from a direct initiative of school management? Is working with specific activities focused on racism a more appropriate path? Both academic production and legislation regarding the topic argue that it is not.

The knowledge and practices proposed by Law no.: 10.639/2003 need to materialize as an educational premise, therefore, something permanent. Doing so requires (a) continuity (of) relationships. Actions delimited within the scope of specific content or limited to days relating to commemorative dates contribute to the stereotyping of historical events and subjects, even if this is not the intention of the education professional. High school teachers, for example, need to permanently analyze and review their practices in a sensitive way. This way, it is possible to go beyond considering the topic of ethnic-racial relations as a topic of study or content to be worked on at a given moment in the training of students. Promoting education for ethnic-racial relations requires actions that value the history and culture of students on a constant basis, with a view to preventing students from experiencing the identification of being black in such a painful way, just as their teachers were forced to experience during of their personal, educational and professional trajectories.

2 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The teachers' narratives are manifestations of trajectories conditioned by prejudice and ethnic-racial discrimination. It is as if an entire 20th century had not been able to put an end to the influence of racist theories from the 19th century, to destroy thinking rooted in colonialism.

Today, as teachers, even if some of them still do not adopt education for ethnic-racial relations as something constant in their pedagogical practices, their training and teaching activities in basic education demonstrate their importance in deconstructing the anachronistic, immoral and illegal imaginary that marks racism. Even experiencing it, the teachers (research participants) went beyond the limits arising from it, achieving social advancement via a professional career in the field of Education.

Discussing the trajectory personal, school and professional of black teachers allowed us to give visibility to life stories marked by annoyance, suffering, disrespect, but also stories of strength, overcoming, resistance and successful confrontations. This rich experience of self-affirmation and overcoming is vital to fuel discussions and actions that promote and value education for ethnic-racial relations and which, therefore, can promote a reorganization, a redesign of new professional attitudes for all those who attend elementary school, making their daily lives moments of deconstruction of a limiting and criminal imaginary (albeit unconsciously), especially for children and adolescents, for the construction of another aware of the relationships between diversity and difference.

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