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African-affective Literature: Anti-Racism, Resistance, and Possible Affections in Children's Literary books

Literatura negroafetiva: antirracismo, resistências e afetos possíveis em livros literários para crianças

Literatura negroafectiva: antirracismo, resistencias y afectos posibles en libros literarios para niñas y niños

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Abstract

The study of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures, one of the most important contemporary educational demands in Brazil, has been driven by black and indigenous movements and ratified through Acts 10.639/2003 and 11.645/2008. Children's literature opens up possibilities for aesthetically articulating Early Childhood Education and Ethnic-Racial Relations Education. This article aims to discuss how children's literature can be a space of resistance and creation of possible pathways for anti-racist education, in light of the concept of African-Affective literature as proposed by writer Sônia Rosa. The qualitative methodology involves screening works with black protagonists, approved by the Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material

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Didático – PNLD 2022 – Educação Infantil, and selecting seven literary works for in-depth analysis. The results have evidenced that a growing number of literary works with black characters have been approved for inclusion in the collection of “PNLD Literário”, but the range of narratives featuring black protagonists remains rather limited. The reading and discussion of some selected works have highlighted the potential of African-affective literature to broaden children’s repertoires, as it promotes positive, plural, and complex representations of black characters in a variety of plots that both diversify and value human experiences. Finally, it is possible to observe the importance of expanding literary collections that not only include black characters as a representation of ethnic-racial diversity, but that, above all, value black experiences, by inserting the characters into networks of affection and support.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. African-affective Literature. Ethnic-Racial Relations.

Resumo

O estudo das culturas afro-brasileiras e indígenas, uma das mais importantes demandas educacionais contemporâneas no Brasil, é impulsionado pela ação dos movimentos negros e indígenas e ratificado por meio das leis 10.639/2003 e 11.645/2008. A literatura infantil abre possibilidades para articular esteticamente Educação Infantil e Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais. No presente artigo, o objetivo é discutir como a literatura para crianças pode ser espaço de resistências e de criação de possíveis caminhos para a educação antirracista, à luz do conceito de “literatura negroafetiva” da escritora Sonia Rosa. A metodologia, de viés qualitativo, envolve o rastreio de obras com protagonistas negros, aprovadas pelo Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático – PNLD 2022 – Educação Infantil, e a seleção de sete obras literárias para uma análise mais detida. Os resultados da pesquisa indicam um crescimento no número de obras literárias com personagens diversos em termos étnico-raciais aprovadas para compor acervos do PNLD Literário, mas ainda é bastante restrito o universo de narrativas cujo protagonismo é negro. A leitura e discussão de algumas obras selecionadas indicam o potencial da literatura negroafetiva para ampliar repertórios da criança, à medida que promove representações positivas, plurais e complexas de personagens negras, localizadas em enredos múltiplos que diversificam e valorizam as experiências humanas. Observa-se, por fim, a relevância de ampliar acervos literários que não apenas incluem personagens negras como representação da diversidade étnico-racial, mas que, sobretudo, valorizem vivências e experiências negras, inserindo as personagens em redes de afeto e acolhimento.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Literatura negroafetiva. Relações étnico-raciais.

Resumen

El estudio de las culturas afrobrasileñas e indígenas, una de las demandas educativas contemporáneas más importantes en Brasil, es impulsado por la acción de los movimientos negros e indígenas y ratificado mediante las leyes 10.639/2003 y 11.645/2008. La literatura infantil abre posibilidades para articular estéticamente la Educación Infantil y la Educación de las Relaciones Étnico-Raciales. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo discutir cómo la literatura infantil puede ser un espacio de resistencia y de creación de posibles caminos para la educación antirracista, a la luz del concepto de literatura negroafetiva de la escritora Sonia Rosa. La metodología, de enfoque cualitativo, incluye la identificación de obras con protagonistas negros, aprobadas por el Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático - PNLD 2022 - Educação Infantil, y la selección de siete obras literarias para un análisis más detallado. Los resultados de la investigación indican un crecimiento en el número de obras literarias con personajes diversos en términos étnico-raciales aprobadas para integrar los acervos del PNLD Literario, aunque el universo de narrativas protagonizadas por personajes negros sigue siendo bastante limitado. La lectura y análisis de algunas obras seleccionadas señalan el potencial de la literatura negroafetiva para ampliar los repertorios infantiles, en la medida en que promueve representaciones positivas, plurales y complejas de personajes negros, ubicados en tramas múltiples que diversifican y valoran las experiencias humanas. Finalmente, se observa la relevancia de ampliar los acervos literarios que no solo incluyan personajes negros como representación de la diversidad étnico-racial, sino que, sobre todo, valoren vivencias y experiencias negras, insertando a los personajes en redes de afecto y acogida.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil. Literatura negroafetiva. Relaciones Étnico-Raciales.

1. Introduction

The study of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures is one of the most important contemporary educational demands in Brazil. From a legal standpoint, Laws 10,639/2003 (Brazil, 2003) and 11,645/2008 (Brazil, 2008) amended Article 26 of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Brazil, 1996), establishing the mandatory inclusion of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous histories and cultures at all levels of Basic Education. This change affects curricular approaches, responding to demands raised by Black and Indigenous movements that have historically fought against racism and that, in the present day, call for representation in all spaces and spheres of social life. It constitutes a broad movement aimed at questioning educational proposals, unsettling Eurocentric alignments, and promoting the recognition and respect of Black and Indigenous identities, memories, ancestries, and epistemologies in every cultural artifact produced. The background of the struggles of black movements in the field of education can be exemplified by the *Zumbi March Against Racism, for Citizenship and Life*, held in Brasília in 1995 to mark the 300th anniversary of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares. The march brought together around 30,000 people, and its main focus was combating racism and denouncing the lack of public policies for the black population. In the Manifesto prepared on this occasion, it is stated that “[...] the school appears as a privileged space for the learning of racism, especially due to the Eurocentric content of the school curriculum, educational programs, school textbooks, and the differentiated behavior of teachers toward black and white children” (*Zumbi March...*, 1996, p. 11, our translation).

From Gomes's perspective (2019, p. 24), we understand that the Unified Black Movement (*Movimento Negro Unificado* – MNU) chose education as its main agenda, understanding it as “[...] a social right arduously won by the non-hegemonic groups of Brazil and which, for a long time, was systematically denied to Black Brazilian men and women” (our translation). However, even after broad mobilizations by social segments around the rights of black people, the outcomes of Laws 10,639/2003 and 11,645/2008 at the national level remain insufficient in promoting effective curricular transformations. In this regard, Resolution CNE/CP No. 1/2004 (read in light of Opinion CNE/CP No. 3/2014)¹, Opinion CNE/CEB No. 14/2015² and the *A Cor da Cultura*³ Program can be mentioned as significant developments stemming from these laws, expanding their transformative potential. Nevertheless, we still witness a significant absence of projects and activities developed within schools that are firmly grounded in anti-racist education proposals. The lack of space for anti-racist agendas and for those involving Education for Ethnic-Racial Relations (*Educação para as Relações Étnico-Raciais* – ERER) in teacher training moments and in the construction and revision of school curricula remains a reality in many educational spaces.

In the present time, there is a growing critique within the academic sphere of representational practices grounded in Eurocentric perspectives, pointing to the relations of power and knowledge from which the white subject assumes the position of a central figure representing humanity. The concept of *whiteness* is brought into this discussion as an analytical tool that enables the problematization of this unnamed position of the white person within racial relations. According to Bento (2022, p. 62), whiteness constitutes “a point of view, a place from which white people look at themselves, at others, and at society” (our translation). This viewpoint reinforces privilege as if it were the result of merit, disregarding “the impact of different histories and inheritances on the contemporary lives of groups, such as the quality of schools attended, the availability of resources and access to the internet in family and school environments, access to the healthcare system, and basic sanitation in places of residence, among others” (Bento, 2022,

¹ Through Resolution CNE/CP No. 1, of June 17, 2004, read in light of Opinion CNE/CP No. 3, of March 10, 2004, the *National Curriculum Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture* were established.

² Opinion CNE/CEB No. 14/2015, approved on November 11, 2015, establishes the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the History and Cultures of Indigenous Peoples in Basic Education*, in accordance with Law No. 11,645/2008.

³ A program created in 2003, aimed at promoting anti-racist education, includes a set of actions in the fields of Education and Culture, with special emphasis on teacher training and the creation of pedagogical materials. According to information released by the Ministry of Education, the program was implemented in 18 states and 170 municipalities, with the collaboration of 11 training institutions, and involved 9,000 educators and multipliers. Within the scope of this program, approximately 11,000 pedagogical kits were created and distributed free of charge, and investments were made in audiovisual production, resulting in 56 television programs broadcast on *Canal Futura, TV Brasil*, and other public stations.

p. 22, *our translation*). In Carneiro's terms (2023), whiteness structures the social and educational world and produces for white people a silent enunciative position, that is, a point of view outside ethnic-racial relations, which neutralizes white racial identity. Thus, the social position of white people is established as a normativity: this identity is taken as central, as a supposedly "universal" and neutral point of reference.

In a similar vein, Sovik (2009, p. 50) explains:

Whiteness is an attribute of those who occupy a social position at the top of the pyramid; it is a social practice and the exercise of a function that reinforces and reproduces institutions; it is a place of speech for which a certain appearance is a sufficient condition. Whiteness maintains a complex relationship with skin color, nose shape, and hair type. It is complex because being more or less white does not simply depend on genetics, but on social status. Brazilian white people are white in everyday social relations: it is in practice — it is practice that matters — that they are white (*our translation*).

Thus, in societies structured by racism, white individuals are systematically privileged in terms of opportunities and access to material, economic, and symbolic resources. This privilege originates from colonial processes and persists within institutional relations and the structures of contemporary societies. In this regard, the question about the place of white people in ethnic-racial relations and about the ways in which whiteness structures representational practices is central to breaking historical silencing, or what Bento (2022) calls the "narcissistic pact" among white people, through which social, economic, and political advantages are safeguarded, while simultaneously promoting the denial of racism and the attempt to exempt themselves from responsibility for its maintenance. The pact of whiteness operates in such a way as to preserve hegemonic perspectives, which present themselves as universal, and the monopoly over spaces of power and knowledge.

The problematization of Eurocentric perspectives and whiteness in curricula and educational practices has been constructed collectively, through many hands and under various theoretical emphases (see, in this regard, Bento, 2022; Carneiro, 2023; Gomes, 2012, 2017; Silva, 2008). These studies show how whiteness, as both an identity and a position of racial privilege, is often rendered invisible within school curricula, which reinforces patterns of exclusion and silencing of Black and Indigenous voices. A curriculum, according to Silva (1999, p. 15), "is always a selection, and as such, always reflects relations of power" (*our translation*). Curricula result from interested selections of what counts and what does not count, based on a dominant worldview that has historically been white, male, heterosexual, and economically privileged. Thus, it can be said that curricula are cultural artifacts and, at the same time, social and political practices in which disputes, power relations, and games of interest are expressed, contributing to the establishment of what is to be taught.

Specifically regarding curricular perspectives in Early Childhood Education, the study conducted by Silva and Souza (2013) examines pedagogical practices in a municipal Early Childhood Education school in southern Brazil and indicates that literature assumes a central role when addressing ethnic-racial relations from a perspective that values the black population. However, it also points out limitations when these approaches are compared with the pedagogical perspectives of school systems and individual schools. This is because "the implementation of policies in school systems and schools encompasses a complexity of contextual issues, interpretations, and contradictions, as well as choices, decisions, and acceptance by the social actors who work within these educational networks" (Silva & Souza, 2013, p. 37, *our translation*). The authors mention a set of other studies conducted over a decade (2000–2010) that focus on the context of Early Childhood Education, indicating that, although some progress can be observed regarding black representation — whether in the images displayed in classroom environments or in the selection of literary works for activities with children — in general, there is still a predominance of a whiteness aesthetic and the expression of racism, both implicit and explicit, in school practices involving young children.

In more recent years, studies that articulate Early Childhood Education and ethnic-racial relations have increased, expanding theoretical and academic debates through the lenses of black feminism (Corsino, 2021; Santiago & Faria, 2021), adopting intersectionality as an analytical operator (Esteves, 2020), and drawing on Afro-centered

perspectives (Lima & Lima, 2023; Silva & Furlan, 2023). These studies also highlight the need to broaden spaces for the consolidation of anti-racist education in the initial and continuing training of teachers working in Early Childhood Education.

The documents that guide school work are gradually incorporating perspectives for addressing issues related to ethnic-racial relations. In this regard, the *National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* indicate that pedagogical proposals should converge toward “the recognition, appreciation, respect, and interaction of children with African and Afro-Brazilian histories and cultures, as well as the fight against racism and discrimination” (Brazil, 2010, p. 21, *our translation*). With interactions and play as guiding axes, these proposals should provide — according to the aforementioned document — ethical and aesthetic experiences that broaden children’s reference frameworks through dialogue and knowledge of diversity, enabling interaction with and understanding of diverse Brazilian cultural expressions and traditions.

Although there are undeniable advances in the normative framework, these do not always reverberate in schools, plural spaces in which disputes are shaped around theoretical conceptions of childhoods, curricula, and pedagogical practices. Within this sphere of teaching practice, there are different understandings of what can be presented to children. On one hand, there are conceptions strongly marked by the modern notion of childhood (understood in the singular), which positions the child as a being “in lack,” a sign of incompleteness that legitimizes, for the adult, the place of completeness, maturity, and rationality. On the other hand, there are perspectives that consider childhoods (in the plural) and position children as subjects of rights who, within the educational process, are protagonists, children who participate in different communities of belonging and who are also intersectionally marked by different forms of oppression.

Within this broader panorama of discussions on Early Childhood Education and Ethnic-Racial Relations, the main objective of the present text is to discuss how literature for children can serve as a space for resistance and the creation of possible paths toward anti-racist education, in light of the concept of african-affective literature. The methodology, with a qualitative approach, involves two main procedures: the first concerns the tracking of works with Black protagonists that were approved by the National Textbook and Teaching Material Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático – PNLD*), 2022 edition, entirely dedicated to the selection of literary books for distribution in public Early Childhood Education schools. The second methodological procedure involves the selection and presentation of literary works that value black protagonism.

We organized the discussion of the results into three parts: in the first, we address literature for children and its potential to integrate anti-racist proposals; in the second, we identify the presence of works with black characters in the aforementioned *PNLD* edition; considering this set, we selected seven literary books that position black characters as protagonists, with the potential to expand repertoires and promote children’s affective relationships with these characters and their contexts.

2. Children’s Literature and Black Representation

Since the enactment of Law 10,639/2003, the production of children’s literature with Afro-Brazilian and African themes has expanded in the publishing market (Rosa, 2017), as well as works that seek to reverse the historical invisibility of black characters, broadening repertoires and forms of plot characterization. We highlight, in particular, the literary, aesthetic, and poetic productions within what has been called Brazilian Black literature (Evaristo, 2009), Afro-Brazilian literature (Duarte, 2011; Lobo, 2007), and African-affective literature (Rosa, 2017). This refers to a growing body of literary books guided by an anti-racist perspective, committed to expanding spaces of representation and positive images of black people, situating them in diverse contexts and positions, and exploring, in the composition of narratives, some of the complex and plural black experiences. These works, diverse in terms of their literary projects and approaches to ethnic-racial relations, incorporate their central characters into a human, social, cultural, and artistic

universe that takes black experiences as a reference (Duarte, 2011; Rosa, 2022). In this sense, a new perspective emerges, breaking with the long-standing literary tradition nurtured in Brazil.

The birth of Brazilian literature and, subsequently, the children's literature that accompanied it, was for decades the written expression of representatives of the dominant economic elite; consequently, it reinforced the idea that black people had no value. At that time, the black character was portrayed as an allegory, as an object, and never as a subject (Rosa, 2022, p. 46, *our translation*).

Research conducted in Brazil, particularly over the past four decades, has indicated the persistence of asymmetries between white and black characters in literary narratives. In this regard, looking back in time, Silva and Rosemberg (2008) note that the 1980s marked a subtle containment of the explicit racism that had historically been expressed in literary texts. However, according to the authors, invisibility was frequent, and it was not uncommon to find stereotypical portrayals of black characters in children's literature. Similarly, Kaercher (2006) identifies, in collections of literary works selected by the National School Library Program (*Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola – PNBE*) in 1999, a scarcity of black characters, as well as the prevalence of superficial and sometimes crude representations when such characters were presented. The study shows that literary works can neutralize whiteness and racialize blackness.

Between 2005 and 2006, Debus (2007) traced children's literature titles in the catalogs of eight national publishing houses and noted a slight increase in the presence of black characters; however, this presence remained proportionally unequal compared to white characters. In a later study, the same author reported that, out of a total of 2,416 titles selected for her research, 171 featured black characters, which corresponds to 7% of the analyzed publications (Debus, 2010). Moving forward a bit, Arena and Lopes (2013) examined works selected by the *PNBE* in 2010 and also identified the scarcity of black protagonists, reaffirming the asymmetries found in previous research on the topic. Similarly, Silva and Souza (2013) discuss the presence of black representation in collections distributed by the *PNBE* to schools across the country, finding that the number of books addressing this theme remains modest: for every 20 books, only one features characters or narratives that portray Afro-Brazilian identity in a positive light, which corresponds to 5% of the total distributed.

In a study conducted by P. Silva (2008), the author analyzes literary texts, paying attention to the general characterization of the characters. Among a total of 741 characters present in the literary texts, 698 are identified as white and 43 as black. According to the author, white characters exhibit more developed and valued traits (such as having proper names, making decisions, or playing leading roles in significant actions) than black characters, who are still portrayed in a caricatured, simplified, or vaguely represented manner within the narrative actions. The author notes that, although there has been an increase in the number of black characters in literary works over the past decades, this does not mean that the forms of representation have become more mindful or respectful. The discussion highlights that the selection of literary works that make up school libraries reaffirms a white standard of humanity, thereby naturalizing the complex system of racist-based social relations.

Another study that examines the collections of the National School Library Program (*Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola- PNBE*) is that of Spengler and Debus (2019), which focuses specifically on works intended for Early Childhood Education. The authors analyze four editions of the *PNBE* (2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014), tracing picture books and identifying those that include black characters. They indicate that, within the selected time frame, 360 literary books were distributed to Early Childhood Education schools, of which 77 were classified as picture books, and only 13 of these featured Black characters. Analyzing the compositional strategies used for these black characters, the authors point out that, in five of the works, their roles in the narrative were minor and lacked centrality, while in the remaining eight, the characters had greater participation in the main actions. However, of the entire set examined, only four books presented black characters as protagonists.

3. African-Affective Literature in Literary Works Selected by the PNLD 2022

When considering the possibilities of literature as an ally in anti-racist practices, we start from what Colomer (2002, p. 90) argues:

Literary works seek to provoke a range of emotions that allow the reader to participate more intensely in the fiction that unfolds before their eyes. Through different techniques, they construct scenes of great sensory, visual, and auditory power and seek ways to stir various emotional chords, whether terror or tenderness, calmness or excitement (*our translation*).

What emotions, feelings, and aesthetic experiences can literature offer if it is able to break away from representations that naturalize whiteness as the standard of humanity? This question leads us to affirm the importance of providing young readers with literary books that promote positive, plural, complex, and well-constructed representations of black characters, situated in multiple narratives that diversify human experiences.

In this regard, we draw on the concept of African-affective literature developed by the black author Sonia Rosa. With extensive leadership and activism in the field of teaching and teacher education for literary reading practices, Sonia Rosa combines her career as an educator and writer, and she began her production of children's literature with the work *O Menino Nito* (Rosa, 2002). The writer was troubled by the lack of positive representation available to black children when exploring the spaces of a library. In her broad and sensitively aesthetic literary production, Sonia Rosa creates black protagonist characters, diversifies their experiences and spheres of action, and constructs what she calls an African-affective perspective in literature. We highlight the definition given by the author herself: "My understanding of the expression 'African-affective' is identified as the feeling of love present in the lines and between the lines and/or in the images of my books" (Rosa, 2021, *our translation*). The author explains that the African-affective dimension is shaped and expanded from her studies of the concept of *Black Brazilian literature* (Cuti, 2010) and acquires distinctive contours through her interactions with children and young people.

Sonia Rosa inscribes, in the many stories she tells, traces of the everyday lives of black people, anchored in ancestry. Her work opens for the child reader a space for positive identification with black existences, with sensitive affective dimensions materialized in characters and plots, in texts and images. Discussing the characteristics of *African-affective* literary works, the author observes that they present

[...] diverse stories of experiences and ways of living filled with affection, tenderness, hugs, bonds of friendship, networks of care, warmth, laughter, tears, and joy. Even with thorny plots, even when addressing difficult themes, love and the feelings of "not being alone or abandoned" must be present. The characters portrayed should be overflowing with humanity. The work must also contemplate racial diversity, while prioritizing black protagonism. This positive black representation should be perceived through the texts and the images, as well as in the dialogue between them (Rosa, 2021, p. 14, *our translation*).

The author states that it is possible to develop a taste for literary reading through the selection of books that contain many and varied stories capable of mobilizing emotions and fostering the reader's enchantment with language and with the world. Literature, as an aesthetic expression, can become more meaningful for black readers and readings as it articulates black cultural experiences through affection, appreciation, and the dignity of black experience. Many stories need to be told — whether to challenge stereotypes or to build other possibilities of seeing oneself represented. Thus, in her literary production, the author repositions the black human figure and inscribes in it various roles, different from those repeated endlessly — of precarity, violence, and imposed suffering. Her characters experience common everyday situations, go to school, play in the street and at home, have access to doctors, are included in family circles, and live through experiences of emotional depth.

For the discussion that follows, we take as material the *Digital Guide of the National Textbook and Teaching Materials Program* (*Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático* - PNLD), considering only the 2022 edition,

which was entirely directed toward the Early Childhood Education audience. According to the information contained in the Guide, that edition of the Program comprised 23 literary collections, each with approximately 505 different books to be distributed to public Early Childhood Education schools. There are collections for daycare centers (ages 0-3), preschools (ages 4-5), and mixed collections.

Specifically regarding this edition of the PNLD, the master's research conducted by Fulgencio (2023) focused on a selection of five collections — those containing works intended for preschool. The study indicates that, out of a total of 270 works included in these five collections, 56 books feature black characters on their covers. This finding contributes to an understanding of the proportion of works that affirm white identities and those that incorporate ethnic-racial diversity in their compositions.

To continue the discussion proposed in this article, we conducted searches in the mixed collections of the PNLD, aiming to identify works that could be analyzed in light of the experiences and thematic focuses proposed by the authors. Thus, by reviewing the lists of titles included in the PNLD 2022, we selected seven that can be considered through the concept of *African-affective literature* (Rosa, 2021). The books were read in their entirety, and we sought to identify compositional elements that would allow us to examine how affective and positive dimensions of black identities are inscribed within them.

The seven books are briefly presented below, and the discussion aims to identify elements of African-affective literature within them, as well as the ways in which they construct perspectives of positive and central black character representation.

We begin with the book *Enquanto o almoço não fica pronto* (2020), written by Sonia Rosa and illustrated by Bruna Assis Brasil (Zit Publishing Group). The graphic and editorial design emphasizes the narrated story and the characters, featuring large, colorful illustrations that dominate over the verbal text, which is written in uppercase letters and short blocks. The narrative — set in the daily life of a black family — describes routine actions that occur while the mother prepares the meal. The activities involve domestic life and are carried out by different characters: "the father sweeps the floor of the house, the children take a bath in the bathtub, the grandmother braids their hair..." (Rosa, 2020, *our translation*). Each new page places the characters in another set of everyday actions: "While lunch is not ready... the father makes the beds, the children read storybooks, the grandmother answers the phone, the baby crawls across the living room" (Rosa, 2020, *our translation*). There is also a dog character that plays in the domestic space alongside the children.

By shifting certain representations of family present in literature, this work places the father character within the household routines — sweeping the floor, making the bed, preparing juice, serving the meal — which helps to redefine the roles of men and women as responsible for domestic work and family care, challenging the notion that this responsibility falls exclusively within the sphere of the mother-woman.

Entendemos que esse livro possibilita à criança negra o reconhecimento de situações que possivelmente envolvem sua vida diária, colocadas desde um viés positivo, sendo as personagens representadas em ambientes favoráveis, em redes de afeto, carinho e participação.

Another literary work we highlight, based on the concept of *African-affective literature*, is *Amoras* (2018), written by the Brazilian composer and rapper Emicida and illustrated by Aldo Fabrini (Companhia das Letrinhas Publishing). The cover features the title in colorful letters and an image of the girl protagonist. The back cover shows a caricature of the author — Emicida — and the following comment by Sérgio Vaz: "A book that waters children with the clear-sighted gaze of one who dreams of planting springs to harvest the sweet fruit of humanity" (*our translation*).

All the human characters in the illustrations are black, and the verbal text, with a simple plot and rhymed structure, begins as follows: "There is no better stage for a thought that dances / than the inside of a child's head" (Emicida, 2018, *our translation*). Subsequently, the child's thought is linked to the purity and depth of the orixá Obatalá, the creator of the world in Yoruba cosmology. The plurality of religious traditions is subtly referenced when, within the

narrative, "Obatalá," "God," and "Allah" are presented as variations of names: "On this planet, God has so many different names / that, to make it easier, decided to dwell / in the sparkle of our eyes" (Emicida, 2018, *our translation*).

The book explores, as a visual and auditory device, the repetition of the final phrase of a textual sequence on certain pages, which is then visually elaborated and presented in the following illustration. For example, in one part of the poem, it says: "On a walk/with the little one in the orchard,/I explain that the little black girls/are the best there is." The page is illustrated with a drawing of a hand delicately picking a blackberry, and on the next two pages, in large letters on a contrasting background, it reads: "the little black girls are the best there is." The word "best" is highlighted. Natural elements of black color gain dynamism in the text: the lightness of thought is associated with the girl's cloud-like hair; the sweetness of her eyes is compared to that of jabuticabas; and the color of her skin is associated with that of fully ripe blackberries. A positive self-affirmation is expressed in the only direct speech of the girl character: "...She looked me in the eyes and said, 'Daddy, that's great, because I'm a little black girl too'" (Emicida, 2018, *our translation*).

The positive approach to black identity is expressed in the plot in many ways — through the images and texts that create opportunities for black children to see themselves represented, as well as through explicit references to black figures such as Martin Luther King and Zumbi dos Palmares, who appear in the illustrations and texts of the literary work and are also presented in a glossary as a paratext at the end of the book. Reading the work can positively promote black image, experiences, and aesthetics, in addition to representing positivity and affection in the relationships between the child and the adults responsible for them.

Another title we identify as *African-affective literature* is *O pequeno príncipe preto para pequenos* (2020), written by Rodrigo França and illustrated by Juliana Barbosa Pereira (Nova Fronteira Publishing). In this literary text, the classic *The Little Prince* by the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is reimagined, shifting the primacy of whiteness. The story narrates the adventures of a black child who lives on a small planet with his only companion, a Baobab tree: "On a small planet lives a black boy. black as the night. The Little Black Prince" (França, 2020, pp. 6–7, *our translation*). The boy's skin color is associated with other cultural references that, in our shared cultural experience, carry positive connotations: the color of wet soil; the color of chocolate; the color of hot coffee. There is also a positive affirmation of certain ethnic-racial traits, directly inserted into the text: "He really likes his color, his hair, his nose. His smile of an affectionate, cheerful, and happy boy" (França, 2020, p. 9, *our translation*). In the illustration, which spans two pages, the boy is shown with loose hair, accompanied by the first-person affirmation, "I love my hair."

In the book, large and colorful illustrations predominate, in close dialogue with the written text. The story engages with the classic tale but redefines, beyond its protagonist, the figure of the Baobab tree, giving it a positive role — the great tree that lives with the boy, teaching him to love; the tree he waters daily and cares for diligently, collecting and spreading its seeds. This tree serves as an icon of ancestry, just as the boy character looks affectionately toward his ancestors — parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents — who, in the narrative, are represented as those who paved the way for the Little Black Prince.

The affective dimension in the boy's relationship with the Baobab tree is present throughout the story, and especially when the Little Black Prince travels to other planets to spread his seeds. Upon arriving on Earth, he encounters other child characters going to school, saddened by the "words that cause sadness" they hear from their classmates. There, he plants the Baobab's last seed, teaching the power of the word *ubuntu* — "UBUNTU means being together, sticking close." At the end of the narrative, the child who reads or listens to the story is directly addressed: "The Little Black Prince wants to know from you: Where will your seed sprout? For the Baobab to grow beautifully and for you to know what it is to love" (França, 2020, p. 30, *our translation*). The narrative is offered to the reader as a text of resistance and love, as it presents situations in which black characters are protagonists — happy, thoughtful, and in affectionate relationships with their peers and the world. The text tenderly speaks to black children about their identity, their hair, their skin color, and their ancestry.

The book *Da Minha Janela* (2019), by Otávio Júnior, invites us into the everyday experiences of children living in favelas or peripheral spaces through the author's narrative and the vivid, colorful illustrations by Vanina Strakoff.

Published by Companhia das Letrinhas, the book received the Jabuti Award for Children's Book in 2020. The story features a black boy as the protagonist, who appreciates his community through the window of the house where he lives. Through the boy's perspective, we are transported to a positively represented reality of the periphery, which contrasts with many images portrayed in news broadcasts: instead of focusing on violence when depicting the Rio de Janeiro favela, the emphasis is placed on the experiences of a child — the ball games, the work of adults he observes, strategies to cope with the heat on sunny days, shared activities on rainy days, ways of bringing the sea into the community (through graffiti and *puxo*), and popular music, usually criminalized, presented here in rhyme and poetry. Special attention should be given to the illustrator's work in composing images that combine distinct graphic elements — for example, digital collages and textures, graffiti, and photographs — with vibrant colors that help convey a sense of pulsating life. These images oppose those that reinforce stereotypes about favelas, portraying them solely as disorderly, violent, precarious places without social bonds.

By bringing dreams and poetry into the imagination of black and favela populations, Otávio Júnior aligns his literary writing with the perspective proposed by Sonia Rosa (2024), who emphasizes the urgency of black representation in children's literature as a form of humanization. The author also explains that books shape mentalities and that, in the past, black characters in books were depicted barefoot, at the margins of the pages, rarely in the center, and without positive highlights. In *Da Minha Janela* (2019), there are brief glimpses of violence present in certain contexts, but this is not the focus of the narrative, and the theme is introduced in a light and subtle way when the narrator states: "on days of police operations, [the children] cannot go out to play or go to school" (Júnior, 2019, *our translation*). In different ways, the work repositions the black character and, along with them, black and peripheral experiences in a positive light and at the center. The window serves as a point of connection and as a space for constructing a sense of belonging to the community, observed and narrated by a child character represented with affection, agency, and belonging, whose perspective inscribes in the narrative a beautiful, joyful, and hopeful view of what is seen from their window. These elements also help to enhance the potential for readers to identify with the central character and their existential context.

The book *Lulu Adora Histórias* (2014) features an Irish tale written by Anna McQuinn, translated by Lis Dornelas, with illustrations by Rosalind Beardshaw (Pallas Editora). The plot is built around stories heard by the little girl at night, which transform into playful activities the following day, appealing to imagination. In the opening pages, we meet the protagonist, Lulu — a young black girl with her hair tied in three buns, wearing colorful clothes, walking happily alongside her father, a black adult character who shares and fosters relationships of enchantment, care, and joy with her. Only the illustrations indicate the ethnic-racial identity of the characters, who are mostly black. The images are expressive, colorful, and large, complementing the scenes narrated in the written text.

The story begins as follows: "On Saturdays, Lulu's father takes her to the library" (McQuinn, 2014, *our translation*). The following scenes show the girl among other child characters, surrounded by shelves of children's books within her reach. The narrative continues with Lulu's father flipping through the book she has chosen, in a setting reminiscent of a child's bedroom. The first story "[...] is about a beautiful fairy princess! And the next day, Lulu becomes a princess. She has a magical dress and a sparkling crown" (McQuinn, 2014, *our translation*). Other stories are read to the child character by her father or mother —about an incredible adventure, about friendship, about ferocious tigers, about a farm and its animals — and they transform into the protagonist's play with her parents or with other very young child characters. Although the story's ending is open, it invites the reader to complete the meanings by following the imaginative thread of the child character: the text informs that Lulu's father tells her the story of an evil monster and asks, "What will Lulu be tomorrow?" (McQuinn, 2014, *our translation*).

Thus, it is a narrative marked by the exercise of imagination, through which the girl character experiences adventures, explores various situations and roles, and is never alone in her imaginative creations. She is supported by a network of care, situated within a group of black characters who understand her play and respect her protagonism.

The character constructs a position as a happy subject, represented with subtlety and respect for childhood, for the possibility of dreaming and imagining — something often denied to black readers in the literary canon.

Through engagement with this work, black children can see themselves represented in situations of joy, discovery, affection, belonging, and other aspects of everyday life, not only in contexts that associate black people with suffering and struggle. The child protagonist thus emerges as a complex figure, with emotions, intelligence, autonomy, and sensitivity.

Also included in the PNLD 2022 list is the book *A Menina e o Tambor* (2009), a story by Sônia Junqueira, visually narrated by Mariângela Haddad and published by Editora Autêntica. The book is part of the suggestive collection entitled *Histórias do Coração*. The actions in the narrative unfold through the movements of a child character and her sensitive perception of the people she encounters along the way. On the cover illustration, we can already see that the protagonist is a black girl with braided hair adorned with colorful beads. She is seated on the floor, playing a small flute, initially situated in a room surrounded by toys. In the illustration on the following page, she walks while whistling a song, an action indicated by musical notes scattered across the page, marking the path she has traveled.

In the following illustrations, we see the little girl happy, walking among characters — women and men of various ages, both white and black. She observes their facial expressions, as if identifying reflections of their feelings, mostly related to sadness, fatigue, or inattentiveness. In front of a sad man, she appears with a clown nose; in the next image, she stands before a woman character with downcast eyes, walking in the rain, and her thoughts are illuminated by the symbol of a bright sun. She offers a flower to a black character, a lollipop to a little white child, makes funny faces, and tries to entertain different people she encounters — who are invariably depicted with sad, dissatisfied, or stern expressions.

A well-constructed sequence of images, in the style of comic strips, then shows the character becoming sad, a feeling expressed not only in her facial expression but also in the fragile beating of her heart. She then appears smiling again. Exclamation marks, combined with symbols indicating her heartbeat, suggest that she has found a solution to the conflict. On the following pages, we see the girl rummaging through a toy chest, and then emerging smiling, walking with a small drum slung over her shoulders and two drumsticks in her hands. In the subsequent images, the other characters appear smiling, with symbols representing their hearts made visible, as if their hearts were harmonizing to the rhythm of the song.

In the final illustrations, other characters join in the percussion using matchboxes, cans, pots, shakers, and flutes, or simply by clapping their hands, uniting with the protagonist in a joyful, musical procession. In the last drawing, the protagonist seems to address the reader directly, smiling and winking, surrounded by red hearts beating in unison. The girl's hand is positioned in front of her chest, with her fingers in motion, symbolizing, in our shared cultural understanding, a "thumbs-up" gesture.

The story, constructed here entirely through images, weaves together elements that constitute *African-affective literature*: the protagonism of the black girl, who identifies a problem, reflects on it, finds solutions, and resolves the conflict through actions that retain a certain plausibility within the universe of a young child's experiences. In this narrative, affectivity is also established as a significant marker, combined with elements of black aesthetics reflected in hairstyles, clothing, and the toys in the room, for example. By presenting diverse situations experienced in an urban context not defined by precarious living conditions, the work allows readers to consider nuances and variations in the ways black people live and exist.

The literary work *Não Derrame o Leite* (2021), authored by Stephen Davies with illustrations by Christopher Corr and translated by Helena Carona (Pequena Zahar Publishing), begins by introducing Penda — a girl character situated within a black family and in a location identified as a country in the African continent — who wants to take food to her father. The narrative conveys that, during the winter, her father is away from home, working in distant pastures caring for a flock of sheep. The illustrations and text show the girl actively participating in family life, alongside predominantly female adult characters engaged in various activities within the community.

By expressing her desire to see her father, the girl character is encouraged to follow her wish. The adult characters listen to her, support her initiative, and guide her on the way to the pastures, thus reinforcing the girl's role as the protagonist within a set of positively presented experiences. Penda's protagonism can be understood in different ways: she takes initiative, follows the guidance of the elders, but also makes choices regarding her journey. In this sense, the text states: "Penda chose a path that crossed the dunes, climbed, descended, passed a caravan of camels and a group of desert spirits" (Davies, 2021, p. 11, *our translation*).

In the previous excerpt, we can observe the presence of elements from indigenous traditions, such as the allusion to spirits that coexist with living beings in a given territory. Regarding Penda's aesthetics, her hair is adorned with colorful beads, she wears a colorful dress, and she almost always appears with a smiling expression as she walks carrying the container of milk on her head. The other characters depicted in the illustrations are black and constructed through a variety of elements, colors, and forms, with their clothing and body adornments incorporating patterns and other significant, diverse elements, such as masks.

On her journey to find her father, the character faces a choice between continuing on her path or staying to have fun, for example, at the Mask Festival, where she encounters "a million little dancing creatures." The words used in the written text create the rhythm and cadence of both the narrative and the character's walk, and are often allusive to persistence: "don't get distracted, don't fall"; "left foot, right foot, never give up, girl" (*our translation*).

The affective dimension is expressed especially in the relationship established between the girl and the territory, a space traversed by different human and animal characters. It is also evident in her persistent effort to walk without spilling the milk, each time she decides to continue despite distractions or difficulties. At the end of the narrative, the girl finds her father sitting in the shade of a mango tree laden with ripe fruit. The care she demonstrated along the journey to avoid spilling the milk seems to be in vain when a mango falls from the tree directly into the bowl, causing the milk to overflow. The girl's sadness is embraced by her father, who whispers: "— Nothing is lost...; your love for me was also in this bowl, you carried it across the dunes, along the river, and up the mountain... This bowl was full of love, and still is. You didn't spill a single drop" (*our translation*). In the following part of the narrative, we see the girl and her father sharing a ripe mango cut into three pieces — one for the father, one for the girl, and one to take back in the bowl to give to her mother. "Tell her the mango comes with all my love!" says the father character (*our translation*).

We understand that this literary work exemplifies the qualified inclusion of stories that value the cultural aspects of the African continent as an expression of the plurality of human existence. Like the previous works, it diversifies the spaces, images, and social relationships in which black characters are situated. The narrative's starting point is the community, marking a different type of social relationship and location beyond those experienced by most children, the potential readers of this text. A prominent feature throughout the narrative is the affirmation of the bonds of love that unite the members of the protagonist's group, even when they are in distant places. Affection, care, and attentive listening are significant traits in this story, alongside the valorization of ancestry and the knowledge accumulated through the child character's journey. Black customs and aesthetics are positively affirmed in the representation of hair, skin color, clothing, ornaments, and even in the choice of names, for example.

An overview of the set of works presented above allows us to reflect on the potential of literature as a tool for working with children in ways that integrate the education of ethnic-racial relations. A considerable body of research makes it possible to understand how racism operates in shaping social relationships from a very early age. Literature that assumes an effective and affective commitment to antiracist struggles can be an important ally in the construction of alternative curricula and pedagogical practices across all levels of basic education.

From the earliest years of life, children begin to form representations and make sense of their experiences, drawing on their cultural and social repertoires. In this sense, early childhood education can be an important space for promoting racial equity and combating racism. A significant body of academic research addresses this level of education and the study of ethnic-racial relations. In this regard, Garcia and Santos (2019) provide an overview of research in this area, indicating that, despite advances in legislation and greater attention to the topic in relation to childhoods, the

number of academic studies remains modest within early childhood education⁴. They highlight the important contributions, over the past decades, of studies engaging with the sociology of childhood, as these approaches recognize the child as an active being, emphasizing their protagonism and the possible fields of experience and learning available to them.

In this sense, we hope that the discussion proposed in this article can contribute to the body of research that seeks to understand early childhood education as a space for promoting racial equality. For many black children, schooling constructs experiences that disqualify them in relation to white children. Racial markers are often used to humiliate, to wound, or even to create feelings of abandonment, so that exclusion is legitimized through everyday actions, as shown in the research by Fúlvia Rosemberg (2011; 2014). Children's literature can also be an element that perpetuates exclusion when black children do not find positive representations of their daily lives and their places in the world. As Chimamanda Adichie (2011) argues, Eurocentric stories have been (and continue to be) used to wound and humiliate, but stories can also empower.

In particular, the discussion proposed in this study focused on the power of african-affective literature, seen as a political act of valorization and resistance, in which black existences are fictionally represented in plural and positive ways. Within the PNLD, this broad and significant program for distributing books to Brazilian public schools, we find works that create alternative possibilities, challenging the naturalization of whiteness and composing stories, actions, and characters that affirm black existence positively.

Building on Rosa's arguments (2024), we affirm that the racial diversity of characters should be integrated into literary works "in a natural way, without surprise." According to her, "This characteristic should not be considered something exotic. Black people in prominent roles need to be part of the narratives in children's books" (Rosa, 2024, p. 23, *our translation*). In engaging with stories that value ethnic-racial diversity, black children find spaces of comfort and care in literature that represents them, while white children learn, in a playful, creative, and imaginative way, that the world is plural and that there are many other reference points. We understand, therefore, that literature can welcome, delight, and at the same time broaden horizons and possibilities for young children. In a similar vein, Piauí (2024, p. 46) states:

Literature is also a way of opening windows through which we can glimpse landscapes that go beyond our immediate and circumstantial vision. In this sense, literary works — and other forms of art — provide symbolic resources for the imagination. They allow us to envision possible worlds and nourish our dreams with images, stories, and memories that find a place within us, but do not necessarily represent what we experience in everyday life (*our translation*).

The same author argues that it is necessary to provide children with access to the cultural and symbolic legacy of literature, while at the same time, stories should be written, read, and told from many voices.

The democratization of literature is linked to the idea of access to diverse narrative sources for the production of knowledge, language, and imagination. Today, it is not possible to speak of the "quality" of a school's literary collection, or any other reading space, if this democratic foundation is not at its core (Piauí, 2024, p. 54, *our translation*).

Literature can therefore be a space of resistance and an opening to possible worlds for all children in early childhood education. It contributes to addressing ethnic-racial relations as a structuring axis of pedagogical practice, deeply respecting children, their experiences, and their social and cultural belongings.

⁴ Through searches in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog using descriptors such as *early childhood education; daycare or preschool and ethnic-racial relations or race*, the authors gathered 40 master's dissertations and 10 doctoral theses.

3. Final considerations

The analysis of selected works from the 2022 *PNLD* Literary collection allows us to reflect on the potential of literary productions that adopt, through different approaches, antiracist perspectives. The discussion aimed to highlight how African-affective literature builds forms of resistance and opens spaces to challenge stereotypes and promote the visibility of black identities. In particular, it is observed that the literary devices employed foster subtle ways of combating racism, which do not necessarily expose characters to situations of violence. In this sense, literature offers opportunities to present sensitive and delicate themes to young children through alternative paths, such as valuing diversity and affirming the protagonism of black characters situated in favorable contexts. It is also possible to valorize black histories, memories, everyday life, and forms of belonging without resorting to exoticization or the silencing of cultural differences.

What is observed in the narratives presented is a successful pluralization of the human experience, centrally marked by black presence and by the careful attention given to the composition of characters, relationships, settings, and narrative spaces. The relevance of the artistic creation work by illustrators is emphasized, as they highlight black aesthetics and identity using varied resources that contribute to producing positive images and a sense of care and belonging. There is, therefore, a creative and sensitive incorporation of symbols and signs, both in the text and in the illustrations, gradually building expanded meanings, imaginative openings, plural stories, and diversified forms of protagonism. It should also be noted that most of the characters who lead the previously highlighted stories are children, an aspect that can promote greater identification of readers with the central character and with the contexts and experiences depicted.

Finally, it should be noted that, although the 2022 *PNLD* literary collections include works with black characters, these remain quantitatively in the minority when considered in relation to the total number of books included in the program. Even fewer are the works featuring black protagonists, in which affection, protagonism, and black representation are articulated.

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