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AFRO-BRAZILIAN REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

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Abstract: Throughout history, we see that the feeling of childhood has not always existed, however, over time, children have come to be seen as subjects who need care, and thus schools emerge with a welfare function to meet these needs. Currently, the reality is different, as schools have an educational character and, in addition to care, aim at the full training of their students. In this process of human formation, children's literature is essential, because, in addition to contributing to the cognitive aspect, it promotes the construction of ethical, moral, identity, historical and cultural concepts in childhood. This way, this study aims to expose the importance of representing Afro-Brazilian culture in children's literature with a focus on portraying black protagonists in stories for the influence of black and white readers in the classroom. For the development of the study, we opted for bibliographical research, carried out in books and articles printed or available on Google Scholar. Thus, it was possible to understand the trajectory of childhood and the relevance of literature and reading for the growth of children and the importance of Afro-Brazilian representation. In addition, suggestions are presented to academic pedagogues in relation to literature through book approaches on the subject in order to encourage questions and transformations about their practices in the classroom as future educators. It is intended, therefore, to lead the educator to think consciously about the type of book he will recommend to students so that they feel represented and not harmed. However, it appears that representativeness only brings benefits both for black students who feel represented because they have an image to mirror, and for white students, who will better understand identity issues and obtain a diversified view of ethnic representations in society. literature.

Keywords: Children's literature.

Representation. Identity. afro-brazilian culture.

INTRODUCTION

When we think of childhood, we need to think about how it came about, how it was developed up to the present day, what were its changes and which still need to be done to be considered ideal and able to create knowledge in order to make students more ethical citizens, aware of their choices and assume a more active role in society. Based on this reflection, this study aims to expose the need for representation of Afro-Brazilian culture in Children's Literature and to show the importance of portraying black protagonists in stories for the influence of black and white readers who acquire access to them.

Based on the above, it is understood that children internalize the stories and adapt to the standards of right and wrong, good and bad experienced in the books, which are mostly composed of white protagonists, usually of European origin. Within this theme, the Afro-descendant student does not idealize himself with the image of the protagonist of the stories due to the lack of black representation as an important role in children's literature.

Thus, this research reflects on Monteiro Lobato's conservative and racist thinking regarding characters of African origin, despite being considered by consensus as an exponent writer of pre-Modernism. In addition, it discusses the relevance of presenting Afro-descendant protagonists in the stories told to children.

METHODOLOGY

The method used for the development of this study was the bibliographic review which, according to Vergara (2007), is the systematic study developed based on material published in books, magazines, newspapers, electronic networks, among others, that is,

material accessible to the public in general. This research method, according to Lakatos and Marconi (2001), is divided into eight important parts for achieving success in a research: the first and main one is the choice of theme; followed by the elaboration of works, identification of texts, location, compilation, filing, analysis and interpretation, and finally, the result, which is the elaborated text.

All research was carried out with an online database on the Google search site, research in books, articles, monographs in order to acquire theoretical foundations for the execution of this research in a more contextualized way. The selected texts were those of greater relevance on the subject, especially more current articles.

ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDHOOD

Throughout history, it can be noted that the feeling of childhood did not always exist, since children were not treated with affection, on the contrary, they were despised and almost imperceptible. Parents or guardians did not care about their clothes, food and health, so at that time, the infant mortality rate was very high.

In the twelfth century, according to Ariès (1978, p.50), “[...] medieval art ignored childhood or did not try to represent it. It is difficult to believe that this absence was due to incompetence or lack of skill. It is more likely that there was no place for childhood in this world.”

It was from the 17th century that the feeling of childhood developed among the so-called moralists and educators of the time and, thus, children began to receive the necessary care for survival.

[...] attachment to childhood and its particularity was no longer expressed through distraction and play, but through psychological interest and moral concern.

The child was neither amusing nor pleasant: “Every man feels within himself that insipidity of childhood which is repugnant to sound reason; that roughness of youth, which is only satisfied with sensible objects and is nothing more than the rough outline of rational man” (ARIÈS, 1978, p. 162).

With these renovations pointed out by Ariès, it was essential to change the vision of childhood, which led to adaptations for children’s lives.

Therefore, the sense of childhood was being developed over the centuries and, with that, children began to achieve a certain dedication in the childhood phase. This feeling brings us a new concept of historical transformation, according to Niehues; Costa (2012, p. 285):

It was only in the 18th century, with the emergence of the feeling of childhood, that the conception of childhood became effective. From there, they begin, from a biological point of view, to be treated with particularities, to be perceived in their uniqueness because they have feelings of their own.

Highlighting the importance of childhood in Brazil, we arrive at the 19th century, when the first asylums, orphanages and day care centers were created only on an assistencialist basis, since these spaces provided care for the children of widowed mothers who needed to work to support the house and had no with whom to leave them, in addition to orphaned children, who needed help in this regard. Over time, these institutions began to expand care for children with malnutrition and domestic accidents, which resulted in a drop in the infant mortality rate.

This process is seen as a reform for Oliveira (2005, p. 93):

[...] a project to reform education in the country, distinguishing asylum rooms, nursery schools and kindergartens, it was also observed the strengthening of a movement to protect children, which started from a prejudiced view of poverty,

defending service characterized as a gift to the underprivileged.

Around 1930 to 1980, the institutions that housed children, as described above by Oliveira, needed to be expanded to four (4) to six (6) years of age due to the strong entry of women into the labor market. Consequently, care for the child at the time lacked, in addition to welfare care, aspects of education to stimulate the cognitive system and prepare them for the moment of literacy.

According to this thought, Sarmento and Pinto (1997, p. 49-50) describe:

The process of valuing childhood and studies of the process of development and socialization of children have known, since the last century, qualitative developments to which the new framework of social problems originated by industrialization and the social movement is certainly not unconnected” for the rights of the child”, which began to manifest itself as early as the 18th century, but which would end up seeing its concerns translated into legislation only in the 19th century and especially in the 20th century [...].

From then on, the look on the child and the awareness of the importance of childhood were considered through laws that ensured these rights to citizenship, such as, for example, law No. ECA) which provides in its article 7 that “- Children and adolescents have the right to protection of life and health, through the implementation of public social policies that allow the birth and healthy and harmonious development, in dignified conditions of existence.”

It is also worth highlighting the 1998 Constitution which guarantees in Article 7: “All are equal before the law and are entitled, without any distinction, to equal protection of the law” (CONSTITUIÇÃO, 1998).

In contemporary times, education understands the child as a subject capable of learning in a disciplinary structure. According

to Scurciatto (2007, p. 29):

[...] the notion of subject designates the individual linked to his own identity, an individualization, constructed by the processes of subjectivation that are juxtaposed with the processes of objectification and this, in turn, transforms him into a docile and productive object through disciplinary strategies.

Due to this concept, it is observed that education must take into consideration, the student as a social subject, covered by discourses and, therefore, it is necessary to think of children individually, whose learning process favors the development of ethical and scientific values. and, for that, it is necessary that the child feels that he belongs to this scenario and is represented in it. From the above, it is essential to address children's literature and the role of reading for the social, emotional, historical and cognitive formation of the child.

CHILDREN LITERATURE

Cecília Meireles (2001), Brazilian writer renowned and famous for reading books for children, such as: “*Isto ou aquilo*”, “*O menino azul*”, “*A festa das letras*”, among others, she theorizes about the general problems of literature for children, and, as she herself defends, this would be any book in which the child is interested and that has scientific, poetic or moral value.

According to Meireles (1979), the book for children needs to have a useful subject for them, in addition to being presented in a pleasant way for better use. However, for this to happen, good books must be offered, like true works of art in literature, in order to cause them to wonder when they come into contact with the stories.

This way, literature for children is a learning process and not a hobby, so the reader must feel attracted and interested in reading. A

beautiful book, then, is one that presents rich and harmonious contents and not a book that has a good cover appearance.

In addition, the author points out the importance of oral literature in cultures in general, practiced by mothers who told stories to their children before going to sleep, the stories told by the elderly that were passed down from one generation to another, sometimes to teach, sometimes to entertain. With that, the knowledge of other cultures was assimilated and the imagination was expanded with legends, fables, tales.

The taste of telling is identical to that of writing – and the first narrators are the anonymous ancestors of all writers. The taste of listening is like the taste of reading. Thus, libraries, before being these infinite shelves, with the voices trapped inside the books, living and human forms, noisy, with gestures, songs, dances interspersed with the narratives. (MEIRELES, 1979, p. 42).

However, according to the writer, it is necessary to know intimately the conditions of children to indicate a beautiful book. Therefore, the writer's commitment is essential when producing literary works for children, adapting them to the true desire of the reader, and not just a book that is commercial.

THE ROLE OF READING IN THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

With the arrival of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), a document that includes a set of guidelines that guarantees students the right to essential learning, skills and abilities in schools, approved by Mendonça Filho on April 2, 2018, there is a change in this regard. of previous paradigms, because it aims, throughout the national State, to favor level, fair, democratic and inclusive education. However, it is structured in the same thinking brought by the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education.

This document contains several changes,

especially with regard to greater emphasis on the social use of selected texts in the classroom, digital culture in multimodal texts and the development of skills to read, understand and criticize different texts. For this, the BNCC is divided into specific competences for the student's evolution as a critical reader.

Thinking about the competences that are divided by fields of experience in each stage of education, there are the competences of Early Childhood Education, which are divided into fields of experiences: *I, the other and the we, Body, gestures and movements, Traits, sounds, colors and shapes, Listening, speech, thought and imagination, space, time, quantities, relationships and transformations*, that aim to contact children, up to six years old, with all textual genres, such as: short stories, fables, poems, strings, among others.

Thus, when contact with reading of different genres is provided, the imagination and creativity of these children expands, who will become more active readers in society. The contact with cultural, ethnic and identity diversity proposed by the BNCC, from Kindergarten to Elementary School cycle I, aims to develop the feeling of empathy in the students' interpersonal relationships. So, the literature addressed in this paradigm allows them to have contact with different values, behaviors and beliefs so that their knowledge of the world is expanded and, therefore, results in a generation that, among other precepts, values and respects differences.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND ITS INFLUENCES

For a better understanding of the issue of identity and its influences on the subject, it is necessary to understand that, according to the sociologist Stuart Hall (2006), there are three distinct conceptions about the subject: the first is the Enlightenment subject, the one who was born and he developed according to

his own existence, always thinking of himself, an individualistic life; the second type is the sociological subject, who understands that he needs to relate to other people to be part of a society; and finally, the post-modern subject, whose identity is shaped by cultural and historical diversities. Thus, Hall (2006, p.13) explains that:

The fully unified, complete, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as systems of cultural representation and signification multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering and shifting multiplicity of possible identities, each of which we might identify with – at least temporarily.

As mentioned above by the author, the postmodern subject presents instability of identity, especially with globalization and the appropriations of different cultures, the concepts of identity become fragile and change very quickly.

However, people of African descent are always found in minor positions or even in positions of slavery, both in real life and in fiction. For this reason, Afro-descendant characters are often represented this way in children's books. If we go back in time, in 1921, the short story "The girl with an upturned nose" was released, which had a second version in 1956 with the title changed to "Reinações de Narizinho", it is noticed that the protagonist Narizinho and her doll Emília uttered offensive lines to the character aunt Anastácia (a black cook in the story), saying that she was the "black pet", clearly showing the black servitude to a white family.

From this point of view, it can be said that the works of Monteiro Lobato present cultural racism that, according to Silvio Luiz de Almeida (2018), in addition to moral aspects, structural racism serves for an economic and racial domination, which results in the racial inequalities. In the racist structural process, the author also draws attention to our society, which still considers it normal for people

of African descent to have lower and more exhausting jobs, receive lower wages and, most of the time, are unable to attend higher education or reach prominent positions.

Therefore, in the classroom, the teacher needs to reflect on historical and cultural concepts through the protagonism of Afro-descendants in order to create identities and allow them greater visibility when they feel protagonist agents of their stories, equal to the protagonists of the books, and not supporting the story as explained by Hall (2006. P.22):

(...) individuals could in no way be the "authors" or agents of history, since they could act only on the basis of historical conditions created by others and under which they were born, using the resources (material and cultural) given to them provided by previous generations.

It is important to emphasize the historical period in which the stories were written by Monteiro Lobato, since the author is considered pre-modernist, a moment in which, in Brazil, the rise of the bourgeoisie was taking place, in addition to the prejudice against former slaves after abolition, the emergence of the proletariat and the arrival of some European immigrants. However, in this period, there is also recognition, even if subtle, of Afro-descendants.

Despite many scenes of racial prejudice in Lobato's stories, there is a speech by Narizinho in the book: "Viagem ao Céu e o Saci", published in 1962, which draws attention: the doll Emília goes to Aunt Anastácia who is resting and without any empathy calls her to get up, saying that she is old and black, she does not need to rest, and Narizinho, when hearing what Emília he said, looks at the doll with a disapproving look, defending the employee, arguing that she is one of the most deserving rest for everything she does.

Lajolo (1998) assures that it is a mistake to consider the author Monteiro Lobato as a racist, because, in his works, the author leads

the reader to a feeling of solidarity with the cited character. Below, representation in children's literature will be discussed in more detail.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPRESENTATIVENESS OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's Literature, in the process of intellectual and social formation of the subject, has the following functions: to develop the habit of reading through stories, characters, places, plots, emotions that favor the expansion of the world view; generate critical thinking; expand the linguistic repertoire; sharpen creativity and imagination; to teach; train more active subjects in society, especially when they feel represented in it.

Literature is a social fact and is embedded in culture which, in turn, represents society's way of being. Therefore, the stories influence the formation of the reader as foundations that support the first readings of the world and help them to elaborate meanings, build senses and identities. In addition, children's literature plays a fundamental role in literacy, which, when associated with the social context, makes the child's cognitive development more significant. With literature and literacy together, the mediation process between reality and fantasy for understanding reality becomes more accessible through stories, as each book contains a great cultural variety, language diversity, illustration, characteristics that provide children with the experimentation of each world lived by her.

Professor and researcher Dayse Cabral, coordinator of the Nucleus of Afro-Brazilian Studies at ``Universidade Federal de Pernambuco``, declares that it is crucial to present narratives with black protagonists in a situation of empowerment, especially to children, so that, from childhood, they feel

represented in a fair way in society, since, historically, the representation that Brazilian literature produces of Afro-descendants has been in situations of subalternity, slavery and poverty, as verified in Lobato's literature. In the words of the researcher:

White people are always given representations of kings, queens, princesses, princes, heroes and heroines. Black children grow up without having the opportunity to see themselves represented in these important roles. This represents an impact on their self-esteem, self-concept and understanding of their ancestry. It has implications on the lack of knowledge about the African legacy and the affirmation of its racial identity (*apud* MEDEIROS, 2019).

For these listed reasons, it is understood that Afro-Brazilian representation in Children's Literature has to be more valued, it is understood that the debate on the relevance of Afro-Brazilian identity in the construction of society is essential to provide transformation in pedagogical practices, since this topic is little considered in the educational field.

Transferring this issue to children's literature, one can highlight the importance of book illustrations, in particular, of black characters who lead stories.

Cavalleiro (2001, p.196 *apud* Sousa 2016) talks about this topic and its relevance:

The images raised both by the illustrations and by the descriptions and actions of the black character can be used in a constructive way, so that they contribute to the self-esteem of black children, as well as to the awareness of non-black children.

This way, the stories selected for the storytelling moment need to cater to all children in the school context, with emphasis also on Afro-Brazilian culture in order to lead children to gradually build their knowledge, in addition to becoming feel represented through child protagonists, which will contribute positively to the formation of identity and the

construction of their self-esteem.

The National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (2010) presents a section that refers to the Early Childhood Education stage and ensures that: “the institution needs to know and work with plural cultures, dialoguing with the cultural richness/diversity of families and the community” (BNCC, 2017).

Through this information, it is observed that the school needs to mediate and expand its literary and cultural knowledge for a wider range of its students. According to Meyer (2003), it is necessary to be attentive to the stories that are being produced within the school and in these curricula.

SOME BOOKS THAT ADDRESS THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN THEME

Thinking about the representation of black children in the classroom, the writer Ana Maria Machado (2000) revolutionized children’s literature in 1986 with the book *“Menina bonita do laço de fita”*, in which the protagonist is a black child who has the admiration of a rabbit who wants to have a daughter as black as the child, so he always asks her: “Beautiful girl with the ribbon bow, what is your secret for being so black?” (1986, p.6).

Ziraldo (2012), he also wrote a very significant book on this topic., *“O Menino Marrom”*, which tells the story of two children, one described as pink, and the other brown like pure chocolate. As the book develops, the appropriation of its color by the main character is noticed for the first time:

It was one afternoon, the two were playing with their colors, when the brown boy mixed all the paints he had in the watercolor box, all the colors of the rainbow. And then, do you know what result it gave? Mixing all the colors together gave a brown. A strong brown like pure chocolate. The brown boy looked at that color he had invented and said: “Look there, it’s my color!” (2013, p.15)

After this recognition, this issue is raised in the classroom, because until then, the color of the two children was considered an invisible issue.

The book: *“Flora”* by Bartolomeu Campos de Queiróz leads to the discovery of unusual situations in Flora’s life, the protagonist who lives closely observing her life cycle, and with her passion for seeds, understands that patience is needed for another life to grow, as the author makes it explicit: “And the girl passed by, watching over the promises of flowering” (2021, p. 4).

About *“Nó na garganta”*, book written by Mirna Pinsky (2009), presents the character Tânia, a child like all others who likes to play and have fun. At a certain point in the narrative, her parents move to the coast and live as caretakers in the house of a rich lady, where they suffer various types of prejudice, always silent. However, what is most surprising in little Tânia’s story are the treatments that her classmates give her, always because of her skin color, which makes the protagonist always feel a lump in her throat and, many times, awakens in her the desire to have been born a different color, as shown in one of her speeches:

Sometimes I’m crazy with the desire to wake up white, white with blue eyes, like a German, and have a white father and mother who are worth as much as the father and mother of others. And not having to stretch your hair until it hurts, so that it doesn’t look greasy (2009, p.72).

Tânia begins to understand, then, that these comments occur because of the historical context that black people have always gone through; thus, she begins to distance herself from these comments in order to start a fight against them.

In 2018, Rafael Calça and Jefferson Costa tell the story of the daily life of a child with the best averages in the classroom, with several friends, but who encounters face-to-face

prejudice because of the color of his skin. This way, the book: *Jeremias: Pele*, shows us how the protagonist reacted with prejudice.

Besides, in 2018, was the launch of ``*Amoras*`, book written by Leandro Roque de Oliveira, popularly called Emicida, which tells the story of a little girl in conversation with her father near a mulberry tree. In this dialogue, several important black figures are pointed out, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Zumbi dos Palmares.

When observing the blackberry trees, the father explains that the blacker the blackberry, the sweeter it is; then, the child concludes his understanding with the phrase: "Daddy, that's great, because I'm black too!" (2018, p.20).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the contemporary scenario is still not a great example of transformation in this sense, because the black person still appears much more as a theme than as an authorial voice, bringing this theme to the classroom is promising, because, from the children's contact with this theme in the literature, questions and solutions to these issues will be raised so that these children understand from an early age about respect for diversity.

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