

ARTICLE

Escrevivências: possibilities for an anti-racist education

Nathália Pereira de Oliveira¹ 

Regina Lúcia Sucupira Pedroza¹ 

Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino¹ 

ABSTRACT

In this study we discuss the concept of *escrevivência* [writing-living], created by Conceição Evaristo, as a possibility of pedagogical practice aligned with the prerogatives of Law No. 10.639/2003. We use Paulo Freire's notion of *assunção de si*, bell hooks's defense of education as a practice of freedom, and Evaristo's *escrevivência* concept to think about educational practices that consider the plural perspectives of historically marginalized subjects, based on their multiple experiences. Thus, we heard how high school students from a public school in the Federal District perceive the dynamics of racial relations in the school. From their experiences, the adolescents signaled changes in the activities and in the relational dynamics of the school when it comes to racial issues, thus promoting the power of *escrevivência* as a pedagogical practice that enables an anti-racist education.

KEYWORDS

racial relations; blackness; high school; *escrevivência*.

¹Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brazil.

ESCREVIVÊNCIAS: POSSIBILIDADES PARA UMA EDUCAÇÃO ANTIRRACISTA

RESUMO

Neste estudo discutimos o conceito de *escrevivência*, cunhado por Conceição Evaristo, como possibilidade de prática pedagógica alinhada com as prerrogativas da Lei n.º 10.639/2003. Partimos da noção de *assunção de si* de Paulo Freire, da defesa de uma educação como prática da liberdade, de bell hooks e da *escrevivência* de Evaristo para pensarmos práticas educativas que considerem, de modo plural, as perspectivas de sujeitos historicamente marginalizados, com base em suas vivências múltiplas. Dessa forma, ouvimos como estudantes do Ensino Médio de uma escola pública do Distrito Federal percebem a dinâmica das relações raciais no ambiente escolar. Apoiados em suas vivências, os/as adolescentes sinalizaram modificações nas atividades e nas dinâmicas relacionais da escola quando se trata da temática racial, fomentando assim a potência da *escrevivência* como prática pedagógica que possibilita uma educação antirracista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

relações raciais; negritude; ensino médio; *escrevivência*.

ESCREVIVÊNCIAS: POSIBILIDADES DE UNA EDUCACIÓN ANTIRRACISTA

RESUMEN

En este estudio discutimos el concepto de *escrevivência*, acuñado por Conceição Evaristo, como una posibilidad de práctica pedagógica alineada con las prerrogativas de la Ley no. 10.639/2003. Partimos de la noción de *assunção de si*, de Paulo Freire, de la defensa de la educación como práctica de libertad, de bell hooks, y de la *escrevivência* de Evaristo para pensar en prácticas educativas que consideren de manera plural las perspectivas de sujetos históricamente marginados, a partir de sus experiencias múltiples. Así, escuchamos cómo los estudiantes de secundaria de una escuela pública del Distrito Federal perciben la dinámica de las relaciones raciales en el entorno escolar. A partir de sus vivencias, los adolescentes señalaron cambios en las actividades y en las dinámicas relacionales de la escuela en temas raciales, promoviendo así el poder de la *escrevivência* como práctica pedagógica que posibilita una educación antirracista.

PALABRAS CLAVE

relaciones raciales; negrura; escuela secundaria; *escrevivência*.

INTRODUCTION

As a place of multiple encounters, the school is configured as a context of interaction and sociability, as well as the propagation and questioning of ideologies. Beyond the sharing of information considered neutral, the school also disseminates and reinforces values, beliefs, habits, race, class, and gender prejudices (Gomes, 2003a), as well as providing access to cultural objects (Pedroza, Oliveira, and Pulino, 2020). In this way, the school context can both function as a space that works in favor of a hegemonic ideological apparatus and assume a position that allows the development of autonomous forms of subjectivity.

If it is through education that culture internalizes the systems of representation used in everyday life, and considering that the school is one of the institutions responsible for educational processes, we believe that the educational institution reflects and (re)constructs cultural aspects. In activities related to racial relations, these representations influence the way certain conceptions of Blackness are formed and how Black identity is constructed in this process. We emphasize that these activities occur not only in a programmed manner through content, but also in the construction of relationships that happen within the school environment, in events promoted by the institution, and in the connections and communications that the school establishes with other cultural and community spaces (Souza, 2016).

Legally, the study of Africa and African history, of the struggle, culture, and the contribution of the Black population to the formation of national society is provided for in the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law — Law No. 9.394 of 1996 (in Portuguese, *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* — LDB — Lei n.º 9.394 — Brasil, 1996). Articles 26A and 79B were included and modified by Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), which establishes the mandatory teaching of “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture”. In addition, these articles have implications in the Resolution of the National Council of Education/Full Council 01/04 (CNE/CP 01/04 — Ministério da Educação, 2004b) and Opinion 003/04 (Ministério da Educação, 2004a), which aim to recognize, disseminate, promote, and produce knowledge and attitudes that value ethnic-racial diversity as well as education. Broadly speaking, the mentioned legal framework aims to educate citizens to negotiate social changes, considering respect for rights and the valorization of identity, with the goal of consolidating Brazilian democracy.

If, on one hand, we have possibilities opened by law, on the other hand, we face difficulties when it comes to activities related to racial relations carried out in daily school life (Coelho and Dias, 2020). In a certain way, the materials used, the belief that race can only be addressed within humanities disciplines, the stereotyping of Blackness, the training of educators, and lack of integration with the concrete racial experiences of students are obstacles to the construction of a liberating, democratic, and diverse education.

Among the various possible and necessary changes to broaden the racial debate in schools, we emphasize the importance of anchoring activities in the experiences lived by students. In this way, we can envision an education that values what is experienced by the individuals who compose it as the pedagogical and political,

creating space for diversity and aiming to build a democratic and plural society. Thus, this article aims to discuss the concept of *escrevivência* [writing-living], coined by Conceição Evaristo (2020a), as a possibility for a pedagogical practice that aligns with the prerogatives of Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003). To achieve this, we listened to Black students and how they perceive the dynamics of racial relations in the school context based on their experiences.

RACIAL RELATIONS IN SCHOOL DISCOURSE

In the face of a racist society, it is possible to consider the school as an institution that can, to some extent, favor subtle and entrenched forms of various types of discrimination, including the diffusion of derogatory representations of Blackness. The formation of a discriminatory and racist discourse is evident, among other factors, in educational materials that omit the existence and positioning of ethnic groups at various moments in history and/or in the lack of preparation of educators to address topics such as ethnic-racial relations (Coelho and Coelho, 2018).

The way in which Black individuals are named and defined within the school environment can be understood based on how their history is told. The history of Africa and Africans is limited to the period of slavery. Speaking about Black people in Brazil is reduced to mentioning colonialism, human trafficking, and slavery, which supposedly ended without resistance, struggle, or political and economic pressure in 1888. The Black body, represented only as pertaining to the period of slavery, points to how it is socially perceived: “a slave, servile, sick, and chained body” (Gomes, 2003b, p. 81). This restriction in how the history of Black people is addressed in Brazil is partly due to a need to reformulate the educational materials that do not promote reflections or support debates, and also due to the stance of educators in the classroom, who are often not prepared or supported institutionally and socially to initiate certain discussions (Ramos and Santoro, 2017).

In addition to the way Blackness is described and assimilated in textbooks, there are the activities typically carried out on the Day of Black Consciousness, November 20th, established by Law No. 12.519/2011 (Brasil, 2011) and chosen in reference to the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, a symbol of Black resistance in Brazil. Although the date serves as a way to highlight the struggle of the Black population and contribute to the redefinition of what it means to be Black in Brazil, it is often treated as the only moment when the racial issue is mentioned, contributing to the exoticization of Blackness and the construction of “difference” as the other and distant (Coelho and Coelho, 2018).

By seeing the school as a space for socialization, encounters, and exchanges, it becomes important to include in activities concerning racial issues the relationships that are established within the school environment, with the aim of reducing prejudice and racist practices. This is because culture in schools materializes through gestures and actions, often intentional, from the silencing of minority groups within curricular proposals and textbooks to jokes that reflect racism in a Brazilian context. Despite the violence that characterizes this racism, it provides the practitioner with the necessary defenses, to the point of making it difficult to name it as racism since it has many possible interpretations and is socially perceived as innocent and trivial (Moreira, 2020).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that the school has also been a space in which positive representations of Blackness are constructed, in part due to the efforts of the Black community, the Black Movement, and families (Gomes, 2003b). While it may be seen as one of the settings where hegemonic culture manifests and establishes itself, the school can also be understood as a context in which marginalized thoughts and reflections find space. New attitudes towards racial relations constitute ways to promote equality and social justice, and, in other respects, to create a more democratic and egalitarian society in terms of respect for different races, rather than mere tolerance of them.

PERSPECTIVES FOR AN ANTIRACIST EDUCATION

Activities related to racial issues require improvement to align with both legal provisions and discourse that promotes diversity. Therefore, effective change requires initiatives that apply to everyday school life and a questioning and critical stance towards what is presented as truth. In this sense, the defense of a politicized education (hooks,¹ 2013), as opposed to a banking education (Freire, 2011), becomes necessary. A politicized and antiracist education presupposes questioning and taking a stance against social hierarchies and existing systems of domination.

In terms of the curriculum, it is necessary to review what is considered central in terms of content and to criticize the marginalization of racialized peoples in general, and specifically, Black people. A critical and reflective stance regarding content brings to light that the history being told, as well as the authors and theories being taught in various subjects, reflect knowledge constructed from a Northern perspective. A politicized and antiracist education assumes that so-called universal knowledge is not neutral and that there is a hierarchical and dominating logic that naturalizes them as truths (hooks, 2013).

Ethics are an integral part of education, and such commitment involves respect for what comes from others and the influences they bring, without pre-judgment or an equation of what may be right or wrong (Freire, 2011). In this perspective, the historicity of knowledge is recognized, acknowledging that there is not only one way to conceive the world. The figure of the educator as the holder of knowledge is removed, while a questioning of what is presented as truth is made possible by considering cultural contexts and the unique everyday experiences of students.

The assumption of oneself, named by Paulo Freire (2011) as a way to acknowledge oneself as a historical and transformative subject, cannot be dissociated from pedagogical practice. What comes from culture and the positioning of individuals in society is as much a part of education as the content currently being taught. Gestures, the organization of spaces, emotions, and relationships are emphasized and privileged in the school environment as diverse ways of engaging with knowledge.

Thus, the school environment, bodies, encounters, and discourses within the school reflect racial relations in that space. Where are Black people in the ins-

1 Bell hooks is the pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins, an American writer born in 1952. Her texts are signed in lowercase letters by the author's own decision.

titution? How are they dressed? How are they treated? What are their moments of entertainment? What elicits laughter? What causes embarrassment? Which discourses are considered excessive? Which media are chosen to address race? In what contexts? What types of touch, emotions, compliments, and criticisms are permitted? To whom are they directed?

The very reflection on the bodies present in the classroom — of the teacher and the students — also shows how power is legitimized in the classroom and translates into the neutralized way knowledge is passed on as if it has no effect on those involved in the teaching-learning process. However, it is understood that the body carries a history, and being a white educator is very different from being a Black educator, for example. Recognizing the privilege of voice held by a white man versus a Black woman also means breaking political barriers within the classroom, rather than neutralizing the presence of the body in the school environment (hooks, 2013).

Just as the body of the educator speaks of a history, the body of the student also positions itself in the same sense. It is necessary, therefore, to focus on the presence of bodies as questioners of ideologies and of the way power has been established within educational institutions (hooks, 2013). It involves questioning how the racial issue is addressed in the classroom, sometimes as unimportant, other times as a mere qualifier, and not as a pervasive force shaping experiences that determine opportunities and positions of power. In this context, race is understood as an unimportant, emotional, and individual factor, treated as isolated episodes that should be suspended since the focus is on the production and transmission of scientific, objective, and sanitized knowledge (Sousa and Izaú, 2017; Kilomba, 2019).

Dealing with the body and the assumption of oneself in the classroom means facing different histories that influence relationships within the educational space and, therefore, the way one engages with knowledge itself. The inclusion of racial relations as a theme goes beyond the inclusion of content in the curriculum, demanding a new stance in the school environment that recognizes the theme as something that permeates relationships as well.

THE PERSONAL AS POLITICAL: EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The construction of an engaged pedagogy presupposes that education takes place when the desire to think is stimulated and that learning develops when students and educators interact. For this, it is necessary to know who the students are, where they come from, and what their stories are. The emotional involvement stimulated by these interactions generates implication, awareness, and perception of what will be studied (hooks, 2020).

Giving importance to dialogue and critical thinking presupposes listening to all voices involved in the teaching-learning process and the need for educators to remain open to allow for reflections to take place (hooks, 2020). Even though personal history is not seen as academic, we understand that the way we speak about ourselves constitutes how we see ourselves and, therefore, speaks of our subjectivity, which is only constructed through experience (Evaristo, 2020a). It is from what is inherent to them that students engage, reflect, criticize, and dismantle knowledge as neutral, as stories, intersections, and the meanings of experiences are manifold.

The inclusion of themes that interact with the lives of students, as well as spaces that privilege personal reports, goes against an education that positions itself as neutral and does not question power dynamics, privileges, and the naturalization of oppressions. In this way, space is created in the school context for other narratives that contribute to problematizing the knowledge assumed as universal and, consequently, for the possibility of questioning the stereotypes created around the body and existence of Black individuals (Souza, Miranda, and Silva, 2020).

There are situations relating to the body of a Black woman that will not be experienced by someone who does not possess that social marker (Evaristo, 2009). Her narrative, not being a body nor an experience that occupies spaces of power, will not be privileged when telling history or determining what should be mandatory content and what is to be considered academic or scientific writing. Here lies the potentiality of tracing narratives about oneself simultaneously with the weaving of the stories of a marginalized collective.

At this point, we articulate the concept of self-assumption (Freire, 2011) as a way to understand students and educators as historical subjects, with the contribution of hooks (2020) regarding how personal stories gain importance in the pedagogical space and disrupt the construction of a supposedly neutral narrative. Thus, we understand that self-assumption and the proposal of education as a practice of freedom are articulated with Evaristo's (2020a, p. 30) concept of *escrevivência*, defined by the author as "an action that aims to block, to undo an image of the past in which the body-voice of enslaved Black women had its power of expression also over the control of slave owners".

Evaristo establishes that *escrevivência*, as a writing of oneself, of one's own experiences, as an act of self-seeing, subverts the control of slave owners over the voices of Black women, as it is initially a writing of Black authorship, different from those told in and for the *casa-grande* (manor house). In this sense, *escrevivência* constitutes memory from the moment it allows the construction of new universes, other symbolic systems — different from the hegemonic one — enabling new perspectives and new forms of existence (Barossi, 2017).

Writing is thus the (re)appropriation of that voice, through the appropriation of linguistic signs, without abandoning the oral heritage. Writing as the appropriation of linguistic signs, therefore, allows for self-inscription in the world and becomes central to the concept of *escrevivência*.

Escrevivência, as writing beyond a mere description of oneself, but as emerging from lived experiences, does not qualify as a merely narcissistic narrative, as it does not end in itself but speaks of a collectivity. Thus, while it takes shape as the writing of an individual experience, it goes beyond the biographical-fictional dichotomy to record the personal and the collective within the same literature (Silva, 2020). It should be considered that it is also a political and insubordinate writing, revealing a memory and rewriting the history of the Black population, which was previously portrayed from a colonial perspective, thus not being innocently produced (Leite and Nolasco, 2019; Evaristo, 2020b).

In this construction, literature and writing become both a way to endure the world and a way to engage with it (Evaristo, 2020b). We see, in this sense, the act

of *escreviver* as possible within pedagogical practice, as it allows for self-inscription in a context that is often sanitized, perceived as neutral and objective, but actually translates a series of relationships of domination and oppression. Thus, the purpose of this article is to discuss the concept of *escrevivência*, coined by Conceição Evaristo (2020a), as a possibility in a pedagogical practice that aligns with the prerogatives of Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003). To do so, we listened to the experiences of Black students in the school context and explored how they perceive the dynamics of racial relations in schools.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the proposed objective, we engaged in discussions with students from a public high school in the Federal District (Distrito Federal) of Brazil, exploring how they understand the dynamics of racial relations within the school space.² The purpose of these meetings was to create a space in which the students could freely express their perceptions and experiences regarding racial dynamics in the school, both in pedagogical and relational terms. Based on these discussions, students developed possible approaches for addressing racial issues within the school. These constructions emerged particularly when students actively engaged in the discussions, drawing from their own experiences.

The selected school is located in a satellite city of the Federal District and serves adolescents from various administrative regions, thus providing access to individuals from different contexts within the same setting. Furthermore, the school had already shown to be open to research and extension projects focusing on racial issues. It also has a pedagogical political project that explicitly commits to work focused on ethnic and racial diversity.

One of the objectives listed in its Political Pedagogical Project was a commitment to diversity and human rights, through the creation of practices that allowed for the questioning of existing values, norms, and rights, as well as the implementation of actions aimed at recognizing and valuing marginalized groups, such as Black individuals — based on the provisions of Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003) —, women, the LGBT population, indigenous people, rural residents, among others.

Only self-identified Black students who volunteered after the announcement of the meetings at the school in a different shift from classes participated in the groups. For this reason, only students from the 2nd and 3rd grades were able to participate, since the groups met in the afternoon, and all 1st grade classes had their lessons during that same shift.

The meetings with the students were open, allowing participants to come and leave as they wished. The first meeting had ten students present — six girls and four boys. However, three of the girls did not attend any of the subsequent groups. Chart 1 shows the characterization of each participant, with data obtained from a

2 This project was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of human sciences in the University of Brasilia. Number: 1,521,586.

Chart 1 - Characteristics of participants

Name	Age	Grade	Gender	Attendance at meetings
Alice	17	3 rd year	Female	1 st
Carolina	17	3 rd year	Female	1 st
Beatriz	17	2 nd year	Female	1 st
Luiz	16	2 nd year	Male	1 st and 2 nd
Diogo	16	3 rd year	Male	1 st and 2 nd
Manson	17	3 rd year	Male	1 st and 4 th
Joana	16	3 rd year	Female	1 st , 2 nd , and 4 th
Lorena	16	2 nd year	Female	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th
Elisa	17	3 rd year	Female	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th
Ramon	18	3 rd year	Male	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th

All names used in this research are fictional in order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Source: Elaboration by the authors.

sociodemographic questionnaire handed out at the beginning of the first group, as well as the meetings in which each participant was present.

We conducted Discussion Spaces inspired by the “Project Space for Reflection, Practice, and Dissemination in Philosophy, Arts, and Humanities: *Aion Space*” (in Portuguese, “*Projeto Espaço de Reflexão, Prática e Divulgação em Filosofia, Artes e Humanidades: Espaço Aion*”) developed at the University of Brasília by Professor Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino. *Aion* is configured as a place that values the questioning of concepts that are presented as truths since childhood. The meetings are based on questions formulated by the participants. The purpose of *Aion* is to understand the questions, contextualize them, and think about the various possibilities of answering them without, however, ranking any of the possible answers as the best for everyone, but respecting each person’s standpoint, allowing for the listening of others and oneself. Thus, an open space is formed where participants can express themselves without the fear of being judged. To foster dialogue, so-called pretexts are used — films, stories, photos, music (Pulino, 2007; 2010).

The Discussion Spaces inspired by the *Aion Space* allowed for spontaneous speaking, where students were encouraged to express their thoughts in the moment. Throughout the discussions, students formulated questions and answers based on their experiences within and outside of school. In this way, we believe that such spaces enabled the expression and articulation of students’ lived experiences, allowing them to prioritize their own stories and perceptions of the racial issues they face on a daily basis. We conducted four meetings, each lasting an average of 2 hours. The discussions were stimulated through drawings created in small groups (first meeting), photos (second meeting), *memes* circulating in school groups (third meeting), and topics brought up by students regarding the dynamics of racial relations within the school (fourth meeting).

Specifically, the first meeting focused on the discussion of equality and prejudice, as well as questioning the existence of racism in the school. The second meeting revolved around how students perceived both the activities related to racial diversity in the school and racist incidents that occurred within the institution. The central theme of the third meeting was the questioning of whether certain *memes* and jokes circulating in the students' WhatsApp groups were racist or not. Lastly, the final meeting primarily brought forth inquiries about the factors and experiences that were significant in shaping their identification as Black individuals.

All discussions were recorded in audio format. For data analysis, the recordings were transcribed, and their content was read and organized into themes, as presented below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

FROM THE POSSIBILITY OF LISTENING TO THE NAMING OF RACISM

Initially, the participants' expectations were focused on the researcher, who facilitated the groups, giving some sort of lecture or course on racial relations, even though it was emphasized that the purpose of the group was to learn their views on racial relations in their school. Throughout the meetings, the students modified their perceptions of their participation in the discussions.

This expectation, which sometimes translated into restlessness, reveals the model of a traditional education where one often expects to listen and absorb the content provided by the person who holds power in the classroom, following a banking education approach (Freire, 2011).

This becomes evident when the students mention that there is no space in the school where they can talk about their experiences. Although some educators facilitate discussions in the classroom about racial relations, the students perceive these spaces as prone to generating conflicts and jokes about Blackness.

In a way, speaking, especially about issues that affect us deeply, such as racial ones, requires a certain level of exposure and engagement. However, the students emphasized that what happens in the classroom, unlike an exposition that promotes the visualization of other ways of life and decenters hegemonic knowledge (hooks, 2013), leads to stereotyping and more cases of racism. In this aspect, the students highlight that the context provided by the Discussion Spaces is not found in other areas of the school, despite their need for such exchanges.

We understand that, throughout the meetings, the students felt comfortable discussing activities related to racial relations in school that were more connected to their experiences, pains, joys, doubts, and fears, as well as their perspectives and positions, which were previously seen as purely personal. From this, they highlighted what they believed could be implemented, improved, reduced, and restructured when it comes to racial discussions in school.

Silencing occurs when it is the white person and the colonial discourse that make comments, categorizations, and give names to a Black subject. However, the

Black individual is not given the right to express himself/herself, creating limitations on other possibilities of being/existing in the world that are not linked to inferiority (Fanon, 2008).

When thinking about images that symbolize the work of racial relations in school — both through drawings and photographs — the students raised various questions and debates that evolved throughout the groups. In the beginning, they emphasized that school was a space that promoted equality, either because it brought together people with the same needs, such as eating when they gathered in the cafeteria, or studying when the common space was the library, or because the school is a place that enables the democratization of knowledge and opportunities.

In a second moment, when the discussion revolved around explicit racism in society, the students began to question whether the school was truly an egalitarian space. This is because, first and foremost, it is not separate from society; and, in general, making materials available, such as books in the library, does not guarantee equal opportunities. The students emphasized that there is a structure that generates a series of limitations in terms of access, availability of time and dedication for these opportunities to be the same for everyone.

Thinking about the enslaved Black people who did not receive support from the State after abolition, Elisa, a student in the 3rd year, pointed out that the fact that the school has very few Black teachers highlights this aspect of racism, as the lack of historical reparation prevents Black individuals from ascending socially.

Unfortunately, Black people are the ones who mostly live in favelas, Black individuals are the ones who are more frequently stopped by the police. The majority of doctors, as we were discussing, are white, and we hardly have any Black teachers in school, in the classroom, you know? I don't have any. They don't either. And when I tried to organize a debate or a literary activity where we had to interview someone, we could find only one Black teacher in school, that of PI or Sociology. (Elisa, 3rd year)

We can perceive in Elisa's statement that, even though the hiring of teachers is not directly decided by the school, as it is a public institution, the absence of black educators reflects how racism is present in the school environment. Thus, the school, as part of society and subject to the dynamics of structural racism, creates and maintains racial differences.

Through this debate, the students started discussing whether, in some way, they were trained not to perceive certain manifestations of racism and, therefore, not to react to it, or if, in fact, forms of racism have become more veiled, which also hinders denunciation. As a result of the myth of racial democracy, questioning, recognizing, and combating racism is difficult, as the idea sustained by the myth is that racism in Brazil does not exist, locating it far from interactions and social issues. At various moments, the students expressed that the racism they experienced within the school was most prevalent in the early grades, when they heard many derogatory nicknames and "jokes" that always referred to the characteristics of the black body. When they reach high school, they notice that these episodes fade out,

which leads them to question whether racism still exists today and how the school can act to value racial diversity.

The issue raised by the students, that education can serve to normalize what is discriminatory so that it is not seen, resonates with hooks' (2013) arguments about the construction of educational spaces as neutral places, where supposedly pure knowledge is transmitted, free from questioning, but which actually assumes a dominant ideology, whether through what is taught or through the configuration of the space and the people who circulate in it. We can think, in this sense, that racist practices can also be naturalized, not problematized, appearing under a sense of normality in a society that values "whitening". Thus, enabling the listening of black people's experiences, in a broad and profound way, means, at certain moments, revealing racism in society and undermining the knowledge reproduced in schools as neutral, singular, and devoid of ideology and politics.

ACTIVITIES RELATED TO RACIAL RELATIONS IN SCHOOL

After reflecting on the school's initiatives to address racial relations, as well as what is mandated by Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), the students identified a scarcity of activities. They generally stated that spaces where "social issues," including discussions involving racial perspectives, were taken into consideration were only present in Sociology classes and during the Black Consciousness Week, which occurred only once while the students were at school.

The Week, which commemorated November 20th, consisted of various activities in which students could choose to participate. Attending some workshops earned them extra points towards their overall grades. The activities mentioned included hip hop workshops, film debates, capoeira workshops, and musical performances.

Ramon and Joana, both 3rd year students, chose to participate in the film debate, where the movie *Twelve Years a Slave* was presented. The film tells the story of a freed African American man who lives as a musician in northern United States. However, one day, after accepting a job in another city, he is kidnapped and sold into slavery in the southern part of the country. The film portrays the physical and emotional humiliations he endures to survive. The impact of this event on Ramon and Joana is described in the following excerpt:

This week was... it was like a shock, I thought it would be a normal day, but then I went, watched the movie, I came out, and there was a guy dancing outside, and it was a punch to everyone like "Pay attention, black culture exists. It's something beautiful." It was very powerful, and after that, everyone started to see the importance. (Ramon, 3rd year)

For Joana, the importance of discussing films like *Twelve Years a Slave* is to see how black people suffered during that period and endorse affirmative policies for this population. Elisa, on the other hand, emphasizes the humanization of black people through highlighting their culture, resistance, and ancestry beyond slavery itself, as if this violent event defined blackness as a whole.

The practice of celebrating Black Consciousness Day can be questioned if it is limited to being the only activity promoting diversity in the school environment, further distancing what should be familiar, while creating the impression that by addressing the topic on one day or week of the year, the work on racial issues is done (Coelho and Coelho, 2018).

In general, the range of activities during Black Consciousness Week was seen by some participants in the group as a space that amplified new ways of perceiving black history and culture. However, Diogo believed that designating a specific day to address the issue implied the inferiorization of the black population, while also pointing out that there is no “White Day.” In response to this argument, the students who were impacted by Black Consciousness Week — Ramon, Luiz, Elisa — argued that white people in Brazil did not have their history marked by slavery and the restriction of rights, and because they occupy a position of social privilege, they do not need a day to celebrate their acts of resistance and struggle. Elisa acknowledges that the week is often about discussing a topic that is never addressed at other times in school, and that focusing on this work only on the commemorative date is problematic, but she considers it a starting point for further discussions.

The Black Consciousness Week is seen both as a way to break the white — historical, aesthetic, cultural — standard that is naturalized in daily life and as a way to exoticize and mark as distant a population that is constantly excluded from relationships and discourses. The celebration of a specific day can have both characteristics. However, what seems to demarcate the boundary between placing Blackness as a distant other and recognizing its history is bringing discussions about racial relations into everyday life, so that the commemorative date is not detached from other discourses and practices that permeate the school context.

In this regard, Sociology classes serve as a space for discussing gender and race, aligning with cases that gain media attention and involve racial and gender discrimination and violence. The teacher responsible for this subject was characterized as someone who cares about social issues and always brings such debates to the classroom. It becomes explicit, through the debate among students, that bringing these current topics into the curriculum and making correlations with the content is up to individual educators, depending on their interests.

Furthermore, students understand that these themes can only be discussed in certain subjects such as History, Sociology, Philosophy, and Literature, while the Natural Sciences fail to address these discussions. This type of argument does not consider that promoting diversity allows for multiple theories and ways of understanding the world, while the current theoretical models are predominantly Eurocentric and white, treated as universal and neutral (Veranga and Silva, 2010; hooks, 2013; Oliveira Júnior, 2021).

Another argument used by students to justify the lack of discussion on racial relations in the classroom is lack of time, as educators are “more concerned with their own subject matter.” Lack of time for discussing racial relations reveals the level of disconnect between a discussion that should be held across subjects, permeating different topics, and the content that constitutes the established curriculum. Another aspect related to this division between what is considered core

content and what is supplementary to students' education is questioning whether what happens in the classroom, in terms of relationships, also shapes their formation. We should consider this from a perspective that recognizes that education goes beyond content and involves practices, positions, what is said, and also what is not said in the classroom (hooks, 2013).

According to the adolescents, another viable space for discussing these topics would be the Interdisciplinary Project (PI) classes, as this is a subject with less content demands and greater flexibility in terms of organizing the material. However, the students feel that this space is not well utilized, since the classes can be taught by any teacher, who sometimes fails to engage with certain topics or choose uninteresting debates for the students.

The students cannot recognize the objective of this subject, where the topics are diverse and not chosen by them. Additionally, it is a course that, despite having assignments and activities, does not admit failing grades. Joana, when referring to Black Consciousness Week, mentioned that students only participated because they could earn extra points in their subjects. It is possible to think that the same logic applies to PI classes: without the reward of "points," the students do not show an interest in attending the classes. Nonetheless, the students in the research group expressed their interest, highlighted the potential of the subject, and mentioned that the debates could be more fruitful within this subject, without the need for the teacher's "points" to make topics interesting.

In accordance with the school's Political Pedagogical Project, PI is a subject with various objectives, depending on the grade level (1st, 2nd, or 3rd year). Additionally, there are two types of PI: the first one, called *PI-Differences: different is equal* (in Portuguese, *PI-Diferenças: o diferente é igual*), addresses social issues and aspects guaranteed by Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), while the second one focuses on Geometry. Both are taught throughout the high school years, with different objectives for each period, as following described:

In the first grade, the theme of social groups is addressed, aiming to provide students with reflections on the universe of women, children, indigenous people, black people, and individuals with special needs, based on concepts such as gender, social exclusion, identity, diversity, and difference. In the second grade, the theme explored is social inclusion. The objective is to encourage students to reflect on the evolution of societies from historical, political, cultural, and geographical perspectives, as well as to develop concepts and a social position of citizenship in the realm of social exclusion. In the third year, the focus shifts to the theme of racial issues, with the aim of promoting reflection among students on the evolution of global societies, their influences, processes of acculturation, as well as knowledge and the construction of affirmative actions in their community and social environment. (Excerpt taken from the Pedagogical Political Project of the researched school, p. 37-38).³

3 This reference is not included in the references, as it prioritizes the non-identification of the field of study, observing the ethical nature of the research.

Even though the objectives outlined in the Political Pedagogical Project aim to include activities related to racial relations, this does not seem explicit to the students. The perception is that the topics to be discussed are solely determined by the teacher responsible for each subject throughout the year. Unless it is a subject within the field of Humanities, the idea of cross-cutting racial relations into other disciplines is not observed.

Apart from Black Consciousness Week and Sociology classes, racial relations were discussed in a seminar held during History class, which the students did not present because it took place towards the end of the year. Gradually, the group became aware, despite the efforts of some teachers to address “social issues,” of the scarcity of racial themes within the classroom. This prompted reflection on how racial dynamics manifest in other contexts, such as recreational and informal moments.

BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

We understand that what is expressed in Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003) and guided by Resolution CNE/CP 01/04 (Ministério da Educação, 2004b) and Opinion 003/04 (Ministério da Educação, 2004a) is not achieved solely through the delivery of content. While Articles 26A and 79B of Law No. 10.639/2003 (Brasil, 2003) specifically focus on the mandatory content and the inclusion of November 20th in the school calendar, both the Resolution and the Opinion expand the proposition of content and emphasize collaboration with Black Movement groups, the development of respectful actions and relationships, and the integration of ethnic-racial education not only in curricular activities but in all areas of the school, including recreational spaces, throughout the entire year in a cross-cutting manner.

The adolescents who participated in the research groups reported everything from racist “jokes” to critical considerations about a Eurocentric and white beauty standard. It was mentioned that the racist “jokes” mainly highlighted the sexualization of the Black body, carried out by both students and educators, treating the bodies of Black individuals as objects. Elisa summarizes these accounts as follows: “It happens a lot here, the sexualization of the Black body, like, ‘Oh, there goes a *negão* [big Black guy], look, there’s a *negão*, I’d do a *negão*.’ As if the Black guy were a sexual object.”

Without consent, the Black body is used to fulfill white desire, stereotyped and sexually objectified. Although expressed in a general manner, framing the Black body in this way in discourse speaks to how it is socially perceived and historically constructed, as well as how and by whom it can be used, akin to a commodity. The body of Black women, for example, is seen as a sexual object used outside of matrimony, without commitment, and for the pleasure of the white man (Cândido and Feres Júnior, 2019; Gonzalez, 2020). Similarly, the virility and high sexual performance of Black men are recurrent in the social imaginary (Conrado and Ribeiro, 2017).

While these “jokes” often cause embarrassment, they also frequently prevent a reaction or the expression of discomfort since they are justified as funny and innocent. The violence conveyed through jokes can be experienced as hatred and shame towards oneself. Psychologically, when the offended person cannot express anger,

revolt, sadness, and everything that is triggered by the situation to the offender, all the generated aggression turns back onto the individual (Zygourius, 1995).

The same racism that is implicit in these “jokes” also manifests itself in beauty ideals that permeate the school environment, whether through beauty contests held in classrooms or through comments about aesthetic standards or even the selection of class representatives. The discussion among students generates disagreements as they debate to what extent beauty is merely a matter of personal taste or is socially constructed, as well as questioning the extent to which this aesthetic standard determines certain situations or not.

The girls in the group, in particular, point out that there is a beauty standard, and it is well-defined: fair skin, fair eyes, straight hair, “fine features.” Based on this, they question whether aesthetic preferences also influence elections that, at first glance, have nothing to do with beauty standards, such as the choice of class representatives. Joana, Lorena, and Elisa highlight that only people who fit the beauty standard run for these positions, and if someone outside of that standard were to run, they would not be elected. On the other hand, Diogo argues that beauty is not relevant in these cases because it is not a characteristic to be judged in these types of elections, but rather charisma and competence. To endorse his argument, he uses himself as an example since he has been a class representative for several consecutive years.

If we consider that beyond the dichotomy of beauty and ugliness, there are also discourses formed around bodies, it is possible to expand analysis of the beauty issue. For example, a Black body is not only considered ugly according to aesthetic standards but also seen as dirty, animalistic, sexualized, threatening, angry, incompetent, and emotional (Kilomba, 2019; Matos, 2021). If we examine all these meanings associated with Blackness, we can support the argument made by some students that a Black person would rarely be chosen to represent the class. In the face of certain representations that we encounter daily throughout our lives, especially through different media, would a Black person naturally be considered charismatic and competent?

Aesthetic standards also become evident in other situations, such as conversations among students and comments from teachers. In one instance, Elisa recounts that when she arrived at school, a classmate commented that she was a beautiful Black woman, while another classmate remarked, “She’s not Black, she’s beautiful.” Elisa understood that the latter comment exposed the notion that one couldn’t be both Black and beautiful at the same time, as if it was an either/or situation. Elisa’s interpretation of the comment stems from her awareness of being a light-skinned Black woman who is often whitewashed in the eyes of others when it is convenient.

The same student also describes comments made by a teacher about Black aesthetics on two different occasions. In both contexts, she tells how the teacher sexualizes the Black woman’s body. In the first instance, the teacher, while discussing moments when he believes “women become a menu when men have money,” commented that he did not understand what the “foreigners” saw in Black women and that “it depended on each person’s perception because here they were horrible, whereas in their home countries, there are many white women with blue eyes.”

Ramon, to argue that the teacher's comment was not racist, mentions that on another occasion the same teacher had complimented Elisa's beauty. Elisa points out how she found even that compliment invasive, while considering that she only received it because she is a light-skinned woman and not as exoticized as dark-skinned women, being considered "brunette" and receiving strange looks when she identifies herself as Black.

Elisa's recounted experiences remind Luiz of another moment when another teacher, upon seeing some students who had just come out of a workshop for kinky and curly hair — we are not sure if the workshop was organized by the school — commented that "now it's trendy to have bad hair." The teacher's remark highlights the existence of a beauty standard that should not be questioned or altered; otherwise, it becomes the subject of jokes and ridicule. However, we understand hair as a political struggle against a hegemonic model that dictates what is acceptable and desirable. At this point, Black aesthetics also find space in the educational field and become pedagogical by decentralizing what is considered ideal, good, and beautiful.

Both Elisa's and Luís' statements highlight that there is an acceptable Black aesthetic in certain spaces, as long as it allows for whitening, while others are considered ugly, exotic, and distant from what is accepted as the standard of beauty. Although there is an understanding that colorism diversifies forms of oppression and violence, it is evident that in both accounts, there is an objectification of Blackness, especially of Black women.

Situations like the ones illustrated above demonstrate that, even in contexts where diversity is valued in schools, embedded racism in comments and jokes remains prevalent. This raises questions about what other actions could be taken to foster a deep and daily reflection on the practices that circulate among both teachers and students. Perhaps one possible approach is to highlight what may seem implicit: an insult disguised as a joke, an aggression camouflaged as an opinion, a racist comment presented as any other statement. To problematize these events is to denaturalize them, to make them a matter of concern, and to encourage daily reflection that spreads beyond a single day on the calendar.

SPEAKING OF BLACKNESS, SPEAKING OF LIVED EXPERIENCES:

ESCREVIVÊNCIA AS A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

In the last meeting, when asked about the characteristics that would make them Black, the students initially pointed out their physical traits, and later on, the experiences that marked them as different, especially in the school environment and through derogatory comments about Blackness.

Beyond the physical traits and experiences that marked them as different, the students questioned whether all Black people shared the same culture and what would characterize that culture in terms of rituals. They came to the conclusion that Candomblé and Umbanda were markers of Black culture, suggesting that regions lacking a significant presence of these religions were acculturated, reflecting a racially mixed country. The question of Black culture remained unanswered, but it opened up other questions without definitive conclusions: What other factors characterize

Black culture? What aspects of this culture were erased by colonization? Is there more than one Black culture? Is there more than one way to be Black? Does living in a modern world erase the markers of Blackness? Is the experience of Blackness always characterized by pain?

It is worth noting that the idea of racial mixing aims to embrace a diverse ethnic and cultural country but obscures the existence of a hegemonic culture that hinders the manifestation of historically marginalized cultures (Munanga, 2015). In this way, the cultural plurality of a people, its customs, rituals, habits, and ancestry, are erased. By distancing themselves from Black culture and associating it with religions they have no contact with, the students distance themselves from their own diverse and plural experiences that have shaped them as Black individuals beyond their pain. These stories move them away from being objects and position them as subjects who tell their own stories, their own experiences, which, while specific to them, also carry the history of the collective, of what is shared in a plural way.

Discussing their perceptions of racial dynamics enabled the students to understand what is important to them when discussing this topic in the school environment. Based on their life experiences and the racist incidents they have encountered over time, as well as the possibilities for valuing Blackness, the students were able to express what can be reformulated, encouraged, or eliminated from educational practices when it comes to activities promoted by the school to foster racial diversity. These propositions do not come from an external source unrelated to the reality of the individuals in the school setting but rather stem from conversations that engage with the racial dynamics that occur every day within the school environment. Therefore, it is essential to listen to these students who are impacted by racial dynamics and racism.

In this sense, although the students did not directly suggest specific activities, they emphasized, based on their experiences, that the way racial relations have been addressed is insufficient. They suggested that activities like Black Consciousness Week should be more prevalent in daily school life and that discussions in Sociology classes are thought-provoking, but there is a need to create a safe space where they feel comfortable expressing their opinions and sharing their experiences. Additionally, the aesthetics of Blackness, in its political sense, can find a place in daily school life through debates or workshops involving both educators and students. The dialogues conducted with the students were influenced by their life stories, which highlighted, on one hand, the racism present in school relationships, and on the other, potential avenues for discussions and reflections on racial relations.

In the same perspective, *escrivivência* as a pedagogical practice decenters the hegemonic knowledge that values scientific neutrality and detachment from the individuals who cannot engage with what is being created, researched, or studied. *Escrivivência* is a way of self-inscribing in the world, abandoning the stereotyped, prejudiced, exotic, and racist narratives about Blackness, and embracing self-inscription that includes both pain and joy, plurality and life. It is a form of writing that is present and projects a future beyond the colonial writing that echoes the

enslaved body and necropolitics itself, with its project of extermination (Evaristo, 2020b; Silva, 2020).

The students' questioning of whether racism exists in school at the beginning of the group discussions and their subsequent recognition of racist incidents in various contexts prompt us to consider how these racist episodes were rarely named or recognized due to their covert nature. In hindsight, the students realized that their experiences in elementary school were more painful as they were subjected to nicknames and insults based on their physical appearance. However, in high school, a joke that stereotypes a *negão* is initially not considered racist. Here, the importance of *escrevivência* as a means to name everyday racism arises, as these incidents are often not identified, and they appear as isolated, particular, and misunderstood experiences (Kilomba, 2019). While recognizing that experiences of pain and suffering should not be the sole focus within the school context, they become important in naming what is often considered non-existent in such a racially mixed country.

When it comes to a lived, embodied, and plural body, *escrevivência* as a pedagogical practice also works against the essentialization of the Black body and its exoticization, which positions it as distant, strange, and threatening. We believe that incorporating *escrevivência* in the school context, across different disciplines and settings, contributes to the possibility of protagonism for Black students, as their "writing-living" contributes to the formulation of activities, content, events, debates, workshops, and reflections that intersect racial relations in a present, current, and plural manner, considering that Blackness is also experienced in different ways.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering that changes in the curriculum structure alone do not guarantee an antiracist education, we emphasize the importance of incorporating spaces in pedagogical practice that consider the life experiences of Black students. In this way, their experiences inscribed in their bodies would have the opportunity to explicitly address how racial relations unfold in Brazil and enable the development of a politicized education open to diversity.

By listening to the experiences of adolescents, especially regarding how the school embraces racial relations in its daily life, we perceive how history itself provides clues as to what can be encouraged, reformulated, and created in pedagogical practices. Thus, the concept of *escrevivência* as a pedagogical practice opens up possibilities for constructing reflections, debates, and activities focused on racial diversity in the school context.

We understand that *escrevivência* serves as a subversion of what is considered universal knowledge. Deploying writing derived from experience — *escreviver* — also means making the everyday and plural history of the Black population visible, allowing the history, science, culture, and ways of life of the Black population to be told and recorded by its protagonists, rather than modified by those who hold the hegemonic discourse.

The use of “*escrevivência*” as a pedagogical practice allows us to understand that the stories considered personal and plural by students tell the history of a people. Perceiving them as emotional and distant from academic and scientific knowledge is a way to maintain social hierarchies and dominance over certain segments of the population, preventing spaces for diversity.

In this way, *escreviver* serves as a way to name racisms, pluralize the history that is told about the Black population, and support discussions and reflections in all school spaces regarding racial relations based on concrete and daily experiences. It also enables the construction of an antiracist education.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

NATHÁLIA PEREIRA DE OLIVEIRA is a doctoral student in Psychology from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB).

E-mail: nathalia.olivr@gmail.com

REGINA LÚCIA SUCUPIRA PEDROZA has a doctorate in Psychology from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). She is a professor at the same institution.

E-mail: pedroza@gmail.com

LÚCIA HELENA CAVASIN ZABOTTO PULINO has a doctorate in Philosophy from the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). She is a professor at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB).

E-mail: luciahelenaczp@gmail.com

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