

Capoeira as an Educational Practice for Afro-Brazilian History and Culture

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ABSTRACT – Capoeira as an Educational Practice for Afro-Brazilian History and Culture. This study explores the use of capoeira as a practice for teaching Afro-Brazilian history and culture. This study aimed to describe the knowledge and experiences of integrated high school students regarding capoeira as an educational practice. We conducted action research with 35 Federal Institute of Acre students through a discussion circle. The conversations were recorded, typed up, and analyzed for themes. The findings indicated that students lacked a theoretical and practical foundation in capoeira, and only a few reported experiences related to ethnic-racial issues. Moreover, many expressed beliefs, particularly religious ones, associated with the topic. Therefore, it is essential to implement teaching practices that foster meaningful learning about capoeira as a fundamental element of Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

Keywords: Capoeira in Schools. African and Afro-Brazilian Culture. Teaching and Learning. Holistic Education.

RESUMO – A Capoeira como Prática de Ensino da História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira. Objetivou-se descrever os conhecimentos e experiências de estudantes do ensino médio integrado sobre a capoeira enquanto prática educativa. Para tanto, desenvolveu-se uma pesquisa-ação com 35 estudantes do Instituto Federal do Acre por meio de uma roda de conversa que teve seus diálogos gravados, transcritos e submetidos a análise temática. Verificou-se que os estudantes não demonstraram ter base teórico-prática sobre a capoeira e poucos relataram ter experiências e vivências com as questões étnico-raciais. Além disso, traziam muitas crenças, sobretudo religiosas, a respeito do tema. Assim, são necessárias práticas de ensino que possibilitem a aprendizagem significativa sobre a capoeira como elemento da história e cultura afro-brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Capoeira na Escola. Cultura Africana e Afro-Brasileira. Ensino-Aprendizagem. Formação Integral.

Introduction

Professional and Technological Education (EPT) is a form of education designed to develop individuals holistically, preparing them for both work and social life. However, EPT traces its origins to President Nilo Peçanha's Decree No. 7,566 of 1909, which established the Apprentice and Artisan Schools. In 1937, these schools were transformed into Industrial High Schools by Law No. 378 but were later abolished by Decree-Law No. 4,127 of 1942, which restructured them into industrial and technical schools. In 1959, industrial and technical schools maintained by the federal government were rebranded as Federal Technical Schools. By 1978, some of these institutions were further upgraded to Federal Technological Education Centers (Cefets) under Law No. 6,545. A major milestone in Brazilian professional education came in 2008 with the enactment of Law No. 11,892, which established the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific, and Technological Education (Brasil, 1909; 2008).

EPT spans all educational levels, integrates labor, science, culture, and technology, and is structured around technological axes (Brasil, 2021). The Federal Network promotes an integrated approach to knowledge, emphasizing polytechnic education that provides students with training grounded in scientific, technological, historical, and cultural methodologies (Ramos, 2014).

Frigotto and Ciavatta (2012) assert that integrated education aims to promote multifaceted development in individuals, considering the socio-historical conditions that shape human life.

In this context, Integrated Secondary Education (EMI) should offer a complete teaching system based on cultural history, the arts, work, science, and technology, supporting a humanistic approach to teaching. This model aims to bridge the gap between general and vocational education while addressing the specific needs of the working class (Ciavatta; Ramos, 2011).

So that this can happen, schools need to support multicultural teaching and learning that uses themes from different subjects in all parts of the curriculum and encourages students to think deeply about what they are learning (Santomé, 1998).

In this context, Law No. 11,645/2008 requires the incorporation of Afro-Brazilian, African, and Indigenous cultures into the school curriculum. Capoeira therefore serves as a powerful educational tool, particularly in physical education classes, helping to break down long-standing barriers. Beyond its role in developing motor skills – an essential aspect of physical education – capoeira also provides opportunities to address ethnic-racial issues, violence, religious intolerance, and prejudice, among other topics. Additionally, capoeira enhances the teaching and learning process by fostering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development for students (Paula; Bezerra, 2014).

In the school context, it is essential to incorporate capoeira into the curriculum through an interdisciplinary approach to raise students' awareness of their cultural roots, dispel prejudices, and foster the development of physical skills and abilities (Salvino; Amaral, 2021, p. 9).

Schools can use capoeira as a theme in their study of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture. This should be incorporated into subjects such as history, literature, and the arts. Physical education classes can also include it. This approach makes capoeira a central element in promoting equality, acceptance, and respect for diversity. This approach aligns with the goals outlined in the law (Pomin; Café, 2020).

However, capoeira should not be perceived solely for its technical aspects or as a mere folkloric manifestation. Instead, it represents a dynamic process that has evolved, dating back to the early stages of the country's historical formation. It has been structured and systematized for educational content to be effectively incorporated into the classroom (Falcão, 1996). Teaching capoeira in the school environment extends beyond the development of physical abilities; it enables interdisciplinary collaboration with other subjects, fostering diverse learning experiences. These include research projects, playful activities, and motor skill development, often utilizing low-cost resources. As a result, capoeira contributes to the holistic learning of all dimensions of physical education content: factual, conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal (Paula; Bezerra, 2014).

Drawing on Silva and Heine's (2008) framework regarding school sports, capoeira can be categorized into two different models depending on the pedagogical and administrative arrangements: capoeira at school and school capoeira. The teaching methods are what make a difference. Capoeira is usually introduced at school through extracurricular activities or outside projects, where the instructor teaches without formal academic training or alignment with the school's teaching methods. In contrast, a physical education teacher integrates school capoeira into the curriculum and teaches it, fostering interdisciplinarity and aligning with the school's educational goals. Consequently, school capoeira tends to occupy a more formal and institutionalized role within the school environment.

Both approaches contribute significantly to the educational process. Campos (2013), for instance, examined the implementation of the CapoeiraAção Project – an initiative carried out by the Municipal Department of Education in Unaí/MG – and found that students who participated in the project demonstrated notable improvements in cognitive, motor, affective, and social aspects compared to those who did not participate.

Similarly, Amorim and Rengel (2020) explored the impact of capoeira as the central theme of didactic pedagogical activities in a nursery school in Salvador/BA. Their findings indicated that the ini-

tiative fostered an appreciation for, recognition of, and respect for Afro-Brazilian culture among young children.

Regarding capoeira at school, Sabino and Benites (2010) conducted an extracurricular project in a private school in Rio Claro/SP, revealing that engagement with capoeira significantly enhanced children's motor dexterity, cognitive development, and social interactions. Moreover, parents reported that their children's participation positively influenced their day-to-day interpersonal relationships.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to describe the knowledge and experiences of integrated high school students regarding capoeira as an educational practice.

Methodology

We conducted this study as part of Ifac's Professional Master's Degree in Professional and Technological Education (ProfEPT). The study applies a qualitative approach with an exploratory and descriptive objective. The study uses the methods of participant-centered research to explore what the students think about capoeira and what it means to them as a teaching tool in physical education classes.

The study involved 35 students from the second year of the Technical Course in Internet Information Technology (IPI), integrated into the high school curriculum at the Federal Institute of Acre, Rio Branco Campus. Capoeira was introduced as a theoretical and practical component of their classes during the third quarter of the 2022 academic year.

Data were collected through a roundtable discussion facilitated by the teacher and researchers, following a semi-structured script designed to assess students' prior knowledge of Afro-Brazilian history, culture, and capoeira.

The dialogues recorded during the discussion were transcribed and analyzed, with careful attention to preserving the exact wording and nuances of the students' contributions.

We adopted Fontoura's (2011) analysis method, which consists of seven steps:

I) Transcription of all recorded dialogues to facilitate the analysis of students' discourse.

II) Thorough reading of the transcribed material, with a specific focus on the study's object, enabling an in-depth understanding of the content and aiding in the identification of relevant aspects for further examination.

III) Examine and explore the text sections considered most significant and relevant to the analysis.

IV) Grouping the data based on coherence, similarity, relevance, completeness, and exclusivity.

V) Definition of context units (long passages) and meaning units (words and expressions), accompanied by thematic analysis to identify core meanings embedded in the discourse.

VI) Organization and classification of context and meaning units using tables to facilitate visualization and interpretation.

VII) Interpretation of data in light of the theoretical frameworks adopted in the study, contextualizing and supporting the analysis of identified themes and patterns. This step provided deeper insights into the dialogues and their implications for the study. The final interpretation offered a significant and contextualized understanding of the content discussed during the conversation circle.

Under CAAE No. 63779922.8.0000.0233, the study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal Institute of Acre, in line with the National Health Council's Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016. Legal guardians of underage participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), while the students themselves signed the Free and Informed Assent Form.

Results and Discussion

The students actively engaged in the discussions facilitated during the round table. The cohort consisted of 35 students – 17 males and 18 females, aged 15 to 18 years.

The discussions led to the creation of five main groups that will be used to test the students' existing knowledge of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, especially when it comes to capoeira. Such factors included how important the students thought it was to teach Afro-Brazilian history, culture, and capoeira in schools, whether they had been to similar programs focusing on Afro-Brazilian history, culture, and capoeira in other schools, their personal experiences with capoeira both in and out of school, how much they knew about the history of capoeira, and how they knew they might be able to practice capoeira in a school setting when they had personal problems or limitations.

When discussing the incorporation of Afro-Brazilian history and culture into school curricula, students recognized both its significance and necessity. They agreed that it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that students can access this information, emphasizing that a lack of it perpetuates prejudice. Students identified capoeira as a vital aspect of Afro-Brazilian culture that should be included in the school curriculum.

However, when asked about the legislation requiring the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in school curricula, only one student mentioned having heard of it but could not offer additional details. The researchers then introduced Law No. 11.645/2008 (Brasil, 2008).

Upon being presented with this legislation, students emphasized its importance in preserving cultural heritage. However, they al-

so acknowledged the law's poor implementation, citing only one recorded instance in an art class (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Teaching African and Afro-Brazilian History and Culture, Including Capoeira, in Schools: Perspectives from EMI Students

Meaning unit	Context Unit
Necessity and importance to study/know	"In my view, it is essential to understand the history of Africa and our country, especially since we live here. It is also our responsibility to learn about the past of the peoples who once inhabited this land" (E1). "I believe it is important because capoeira is also part of our history – it is embedded in Brazil's history. I consider it fundamentally significant, as it represents our people and our culture" (E2).
It is the school decision to introduce students to it	"I believe this is highly important because it is not adequately addressed in schools, and I genuinely miss the opportunity to engage with this cultural heritage. This is particularly true in our state, where such topics receive little attention in the school environment, despite being extremely necessary" (E3).
Lack of knowledge about Afro-Brazilian culture leads to prejudice	"It is well known that Black culture in Brazil has been significantly erased due to prejudice. Therefore, reclaiming this heritage – beyond just capoeira, but also traditions, customs, and cuisine – is essential. The majority of Brazilians are of African descent, which is evident, yet most people know very little about this cultural legacy. I believe it is crucial to integrate this aspect of African culture, including capoeira, into our education. We need to recognize these historical ties because, at present, there is little visibility or discussion about these cultural elements. This kind of learning is incredibly important" (E5).
The law contribution to safeguarding culture	"Yes, I believe it is a crucial way to preserve the culture. It is highly necessary" (E1).
Legislation insufficiently applied in the curriculum	"It is evident that this is hardly applied nowadays. In my experience, I do not recall ever studying Afro-Brazilian culture in depth. I only encountered it last year in my art class, where I first learned about the law. I had to write an essay on the topic, which led me to discover the legislation. However, as I mentioned, it is not effectively implemented" (E2).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Brazil is a country characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity; therefore, including Afro-Brazilian history and culture in school curricula is essential, as it reinforces national identity (Brasil, 2008; Falcão, 1996). Capoeira is an integral part of Brazil's cultural heritage and should be incorporated into school education as a central theme for teaching Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2023), most people in Brazil identify as Black or Brown. However, the students in this study agree that not knowing much about Afro-Brazilian history and culture makes it easier to forget about and deny the Black roots of Brazilian identity. This, in turn, results in prejudice

and the devaluation of their cultural heritage. Consequently, adding capoeira into the curriculum can work as an educational tool to promote awareness and understanding of national history and culture.

In this context, Ivasac (2018) highlights the significance of studying and engaging with capoeira in schools as a means of integrating Afro-Brazilian history and culture into the curriculum. This approach can promote the recognition and appreciation of Brazil's diverse heritage, contribute to mitigating racial prejudice, and offer individuals a deeper understanding of the country's authentic cultural identity and origins.

Such an educational proposal aligns with Freire's (1987) assertion that providing a liberating education means fostering changes in the course of history. True education, according to Freire, raises awareness, and this awareness creates avenues for expressing social dissatisfaction and advocating for transformation.

Chart 2 highlights the students' awareness of projects and initiatives related to Afro-Brazilian history and culture developed at Ifac, Rio Branco Campus. Only a few students reported being aware of such initiatives, specifically mentioning the extension project that offers capoeira and folguedos classes to the community, in which some students participate. Additionally, they mentioned that one of the researchers, who also serves as their professor, coordinates research activities on capoeira.

It is also important to emphasize the contributions of history teachers, who, in addition to being part of the research team, are also members of the Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Studies Center at the Rio Branco Campus of Ifac (Neabi/CRB/Ifac). Thus, all these initiatives are aligned with the center's objectives.

It was approved by Decree No. 6.872/2009, along with Law No. 11.645/2008, and is part of the positive measures outlined in that document. Neabi/CRB/Ifac is an institutional initiative that aims to support teaching and learning methods that encourage learning about Africa, African literature, Black culture, and Black history in Brazil, as well as Indigenous issues in the areas of teaching, research, and outreach (Instituto Federal do Acre, 2017).

Chart 2 – Initiatives on Afro-Brazilian History, Culture, and Capoeira at Ifac and Other Schools Attended by Students

Meaning Unit	Context Unit
Action at Ifac	"Yes, there was his project [referring to the teacher's extension project], as well as a research project in which some students participated" (E1). "Last year, the teacher [mentions the name of a history teacher] led a project that involved the production of a video, in which some students took part. Additionally, this year, the history teacher developed another project, but I don't think anyone participated, as it was a research initiative. There were also projects organized by Neabi, which invited us to participate" (E2).

Ifac's Center for Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Studies	"Last year, we created a video for our class on the topic of prejudice, during which we learned about Neabi, the Center for Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Education. The video was produced in collaboration with our teacher [name of the history teacher], involved ten students, and had a duration of nine minutes. Does anyone have a link to the video? [Other students respond negatively.] Our objective in making this video was to raise awareness about prejudice. We developed a compelling scenario set in a store, where we simulated a situation involving racial discrimination. In the simulation, a Black customer entered the store to make a purchase, while another student played the role of the sales clerk. Additionally, a white customer was also present. The white customer caused significant disorder in the store, yet the sales clerk treated them politely and with patience. However, the same courtesy was not extended to the Black customer, who was treated with hostility. This scene was a staged representation of racism, designed to illustrate the issue through a practical example" (E3). "Only a minority is aware of this" (E4).
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Source: Prepared by the authors.

It is widely recognized that Neabi/CRB/Ifac organizes a variation of activities, along with individual initiatives by its members, aimed at addressing Afro-Brazilian history and culture on campus. However, it has become evident that these actions are not adequately publicized and fail to effectively reach students, thus limiting their educational impact and reducing their overall effectiveness.

On the other hand, it's important to note that many of Neabi/CRB/Ifac's initiatives happen at random, sometimes focusing on EMI students and other times on students in technical or undergraduate programs after high school. This lack of consistency shows that these actions need to be better planned and carried out, with continuous activities being given more weight than one-time events. This approach would guarantee that students don't perceive participation as a limited opportunity.

Students need to learn about and value racial diversity as part of their education so they can understand how important it is to respect different social groups. Classrooms are a key part of promoting an educational approach that values social diversity (Guimarães, 2020).

Reflecting on the presence of Afro-Brazilian cultural elements in schools is essential, as it fosters the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity within society. The African cultural heritage brought by enslaved individuals during colonial Brazil was integrated into various local and European traditions, shaping what is now recognized as Afro-Brazilian culture. Acknowledging that each culture holds intrinsic value and contributes to national identity is crucial, particularly within educational environments, where such recognition should not be overlooked (Guimarães, 2020).

Chart 3 shows that the few students who said they had tried capoeira in school had mostly done so as part of individual teacher-led projects or sporadic initiatives, usually as performances during holidays. Consequently, neither physical education teachers nor edu-

cators from other disciplines effectively incorporated capoeira as a valued subject.

Chart 3 – Experiences with Capoeira in School Settings

Meaning Unit	Context Unit
Individual projects (capoeira at school); One-off actions (presentations); It is a subject that is not valued by physical education and other subjects teachers.	“In 2016, when I was in the 5th grade and studying at Raimundo Gomes, there was a project at Candeias led by a teacher. He invited me to join, so I went, started practicing capoeira there, and continued until 2018. Then, he left. (E1). Some schools have incorporated capoeira into their curriculum, but they have not fully developed the subject. Many teachers, including both physical education teachers and those from other disciplines, do not see the need to study it in depth. As a result, most students have never had the opportunity to learn more about capoeira and its cultural significance in Brazil. ”(E2).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

According to the few students who reported having experienced capoeira at school in previous years, these activities were not integrated into physical education classes but were instead offered as complementary extracurricular activities. Teachers, committed to capoeira and the school, carried out these initiatives without officially incorporating them into their work schedules. This highlights the fragility of such projects, as they relied solely on the teacher's willingness and availability to engage in voluntary work.

Additionally, schools invite a mestre (a master or teacher in capoeira) to give presentations and discuss capoeira during sporadic activities, often related to other subjects. These events are typically associated with Black Awareness Week, held in November, a time when capoeira and capoeiristas are recognized by schools as potential educational agents.

Oliveira and Amaral (2018) argue that incorporating capoeira into schools can facilitate the integration of students from diverse social classes, religions, and ethnic backgrounds, aiming to bridge the socio-cultural gaps imposed by capitalist society. Silva (2019) further encourages reflection on the challenges faced by teachers in addressing this subject, particularly due to the prejudice that capoeira still encounters.

When capoeira's origin was being discussed, the students' answers showed a basic and broad understanding that was based mostly on a lack of knowledge about the different points of view of Brazilian capoeira and the Afro-Brazilian origin theory (Chart 4).

Chart 4 – Knowledge of the Origins of Capoeira

Meaning Unit	Context Unit
Brazilian fight disguised as a dance and born in the slave quarters	"Enslaved people on the farms, in this context, disguised their practice so that the masters would not suspect they were engaging in combat but rather in dance. They incorporated fighting movements into dance as a form of concealment, as openly practicing combat would have had negative consequences for them. Thus, capoeira emerged appearing as a dance while, in reality, simulating a fight-developing in this way" (E1) "Capoeira did not originate in Africa but rather developed in Brazil. Enslaved Africans were prohibited by their masters from practicing combat, so they disguised it by integrating martial movements into dance. This allowed them to train without raising suspicion. Although capoeira appeared to be a dance, it was, in fact, a form of combat. Thus, capoeira emerged within this context" (E2).
Afro-Brazilian; it appeared here. Afro-Brazilian <i>disguise</i> in dance occurred here. Identification of the existence of different theories	"I believe capoeira is Afro-Brazilian because it incorporates elements of both African and Brazilian cultures. While it has roots in African traditions, its development took place in Brazil." (E3). "[...]I believe that before being enslaved, in Africa, capoeira did not exist as it does today; rather, it was more of a martial art. Technically, capoeira was about strength, and I think that, for them, it was perceived as a powerful combat technique. In order to soften its appearance and disguise it from their masters, they transformed it into a dance-like practice, making it seem less like a fight. Therefore, I consider capoeira to be Afro-Brazilian. However, before their arrival in Brazil, it was not Afro-Brazilian – it was purely African and was not even called capoeira; it was simply a form of combat." (E4). "What is the most widely accepted theory?" (E5). "It was brought from Africa and adapted to the Brazilian context" (E6). "I believe that some elements originate from Africa, while others developed here. Over time, these elements merged, forming a unified practice" (E7). "The essence still originates from there" (E8). "We need to conduct research to identify which elements originated in Africa and which developed here in Brazil." (E9).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Notably, none of the speakers supported the theory that claims capoeira to be strictly African. Furthermore, the speakers did not mention any other theories. For example, one theory says that capoeira came from Indigenous people in Brazil (Porto, 2010); another says that it is an African-American practice that came about when African cultural elements mixed with the local situations people experienced in the Americas, without naming a specific country as its birthplace (Pires, 2003). This demonstrates that students have a fragmented understanding of the emergence of capoeira.

When thinking about how people believe this idea, one interpretation might seem overly romanticized: the idea that capoeira started on plantations or in slave quarters as a form of dance meant to hide a martial art – possibly a weapon against the oppression of slavery that slave owners would have banned right away if they found out. In this context, students expressed the view that "[...] the enslaved individu-

als had the idea of incorporating dance, blending it with combat movements so that the plantation owners would not notice" (E1 and E2). From their perspective, this does not suggest that enslaved Africans brought capoeira from Africa and adapted it in Brazil, but rather that it emerged locally as a form of resistance disguised as a dance.

The discussion within the class becomes even more nuanced when some students, reflecting on their peers' statements, highlight the Afro-Brazilian theory. According to this perspective, the enslaved individuals brought their cultural heritage, which was subsequently reshaped by the specific conditions in Brazil – factors that were key to the formation of capoeira. However, once again, certain explanatory shortcomings become evident, as some statements support the notion that capoeira was primarily a martial art in Africa, which had to be disguised through the incorporation of dance and music upon its arrival in Brazil (E3, E4, E6, and E7).

Amid the divergent theories regarding the origins of capoeira, one student asked the researchers which theory is the most widely accepted. Another student, however, embodied the spirit of the learning environment by suggesting further research to resolve the debate, stating that "[...] it would be interesting to conduct research to determine which elements existed in Africa and which developed in Brazil so that, from there, a conclusion could be drawn" (E5).

Vieira and Assunção (1998), Pires (2003), and Lussac (2013) describe the origins of capoeira as still uncertain, with multiple theories attempting to explain its emergence. The first theory posits that capoeira originated in Africa and was brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans. Another less widely accepted theory argues that capoeira is African American, as it contains traces of similar practices observed in various regions where African peoples were enslaved in the Americas. Additionally, there is the theory – also not widely accepted – that capoeira is of Brazilian origin but was first practiced by Indigenous peoples, who later passed it on to enslaved Africans who had taken refuge in the forests.

The theory that capoeira originated in Brazil is further divided into two hypotheses: the first suggests that capoeira emerged in rural areas, specifically within the slave quarters, while the second asserts that it developed in urban settings, particularly in markets.

It is important to note that our goal is to promote capoeira as a subject to be taught in schools from a critical point of view, aiming to dismantle the simplistic ideas that often surround the discussion of its history, like the idea that the martial aspects of capoeira were just hidden as dance to avoid being discovered. This is not to deny the possibility that elements of combat were camouflaged through dance as a means of avoiding persecution. Rather, it is to highlight the broader context of Brazilian slavery, which continues to shape the lives of Afro-Brazilian communities. Capoeira stands as a legacy of a people who endured the expropriation of their lives, rebuilding them

through resilience, sweat, and blood, while simultaneously contributing to the construction of the nation and its cultural identity.

Capoeira is a product of Brazilian historical development and, as such, is a representation of national culture. It can be classified as Afro-Brazilian due to the fusion of elements that have contributed – and continue to contribute – to the formation of Brazil's cultural identity (Coutinho, 1993).

As part of the effort to assess prior knowledge regarding the history of capoeira among Ifac EMI students, now focusing on the local context, it became evident that none of them were familiar with the history of capoeira in Acre – not even those who had practiced capoeira at some point in their lives.

Just as a critical discussion on the history of capoeira must go beyond theories about its origins, it is equally essential to recognize and value its regional history. Capoeira offers an extensive range of educational possibilities, particularly when examined through the lens of its local development – in this case, within the context of Acre.

Due to a personal experience of one of the researchers, who saw students' reluctance to do capoeira in physical education classes because of biases – mostly religious – the discussion was mostly about whether students' personal beliefs made them reluctant to do capoeira-related activities. Five students reported having restrictions based on their religious beliefs or expressed uncertainty, indicating that they would need to consult their religious authorities or parents for further clarification. However, upon verifying these concerns with the respective authorities, only three students ultimately confirmed having religious restrictions that prevented their participation in practical capoeira sessions during the third semester of physical education.

When asked about the reasons for these restrictions, the students explained that capoeira was associated with African religions, which, according to their beliefs, worshipped deities considered to be demonic. Consequently, they feared that practicing capoeira would conflict with their faith.

We conducted a quick poll to identify the religious affiliations within the class as a strategy to encourage reflection on the importance of respecting diversity. The results indicated that only three students followed faiths distinct from the predominant Christian traditions. One student mentioned that her beliefs aligned with a syncretism between Christianity, Umbanda, and Santo Daime. Another identified as agnostic, while a third stated that he was a Spiritist. However, most of the class reported adhering to Christian faiths, with evangelical groups being the most prevalent faith.

To further engage the students in critical reflection on religious plurality, the class was asked to imagine a scenario in which Christianity was the minority faith. They were then prompted to consider how they would feel if the dominant religious group (non-Christian) questioned their beliefs, claiming that their God was abominable,

demonic, and that worshipping Him would lead to eternal suffering in hell. A moment of silence followed this exercise. When asked to share their thoughts on the experience, the students expressed discomfort, even though the scenario was hypothetical. They also acknowledged the importance of respecting diverse religious expressions and recognized that violence should never be a means of resolving such conflicts (Chart 5).

Chart 5 – Personal Restrictions on Capoeira Practice in Schools

Meaning Unit	Context Unit
Restrictions	Yes (E1) Yes (E2) Yes (E3)
Respect for religious diversity.	“Most people have developed a sense of anger, or even a feeling of revolt, right?” (E1). “Oh, those are words that may be quite strong for believers. That is why, if you adhere to a particular religion and do not share the beliefs of another, and your perspective differs, the best approach is simply to respect it without making further comments” (E2). “You must show respect, just as you expect to be respected in your own religion. It is essential to extend the same consideration to others” (E2). “As long as there is no physical or direct aggression, I believe there is no issue. The individual makes an effort to show respect” (E3). “Look, I sensed a certain disagreement, but I respect those who hold this belief because, for them, they have not yet arrived at what they consider to be the truth. In my belief, regardless of what someone does, I cannot resort to violence, harm them, or harbor hatred toward them (laughs)” (E4).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Through this experience, the students went over the legal rules about respecting religious diversity and making racism a crime, which can be found in Law 14.532/2023 and Articles 3, IV, 5, VI, and XLII of the Federal Constitution of 1988. Additionally, they recognized that prejudice elicited emotions similar to those they had experienced during the simulation (Brasil, 2023).

Therefore, refusing to participate in the pedagogical practice of capoeira based on religious beliefs underscores the prevailing prejudice against various African and Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions. However, students who abstained from participation for this reason had their decisions respected, on the condition that they actively engaged in all other class activities, including games and exercises designed to recreate historical contexts and situations related to slavery in Brazil. When capoeira practice began, these students assumed the role of spectators, generating analytical reports based on their observations.

Capoeira is deeply rooted in Brazilian history, particularly in the experiences of Africans and their descendants, who, under conditions of enslavement, developed this martial art as a means of self-defense,

resistance, and cultural expression. Today, capoeira is appreciated as an art form, a sport, and a cultural practice, independent of the religious beliefs of its practitioners (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 2020).

It is essential to distinguish between “[...] what belongs to capoeira and what belongs to the capoeirista.” Each practitioner has the freedom to choose their own religion, just like any individual. Although some capoeira songs contain references to saints, orixás, or even passages from the Bible, this does not imply that capoeira itself is a religious practice. On the contrary, most lyrics serve as narratives that recount significant moments in the histories of both the Brazilian people and Africans.

Religious tensions surrounding capoeira extend beyond the school environment and have historically influenced how capoeiristas express themselves. Recent anthropological research on capoeira in Acre illustrates the existence of initiation rites necessary for its acceptance – adaptations that are particularly evident to religious aspects.

To reinforce the notion that capoeira is not a religion, practitioners employ the strategy of associating it with sports and education, positioning it as a physical activity beneficial to the body. Through these strategies, capoeira navigates the esteemed social structures that define norms and values for integration. This approach extends to the process of ‘schooling’ capoeira, incorporating it into curricula as a sporting practice, leveraging its polysemic nature (Alves; Lobregat, 2023, p. 151).

Capoeira must be incorporated into educational curricula; however, careful consideration must be given to the organization of instructional practices to ensure that it remains connected to its authentic roots. In other words, it is crucial to avoid “increasingly distancing it from aspects of its cosmology when regarded as the cultural heritage of enslaved peoples” (Alves; Lobregat, 2023, p. 133).

Final Considerations

The analysis of the data from the roundtable discussion revealed that students’ knowledge of Afro-Brazilian history, culture, and capoeira is generally superficial and fragmented. This is evident in their lack of a solid theoretical and practical foundation, as well as the fact that few reported having direct experiences with ethnic-racial issues. Additionally, many students held strong beliefs, myths, and taboos – particularly of a religious nature – regarding the subject.

Thus, the discussions during the chatting circle were designed to bridge these knowledge gaps and emphasize to students that capoeira plays a crucial role in understanding their historical roots and reclaiming national identity. By integrating fundamental principles and values from Afro-Brazilian history and culture, capoeira serves as a means to challenge Eurocentric worldviews, combat racial

prejudices and stereotypes, and dismantle deeply ingrained cultural and religious intolerance.

Therefore, it became evident that, despite the existence of affirmative policies and legal frameworks mandating education on ethnic-racial relations, these measures have not yet been effectively implemented in Ifac's integrated high school curriculum. This highlights the need for teaching practices that align with existing legislation, promote discussions on capoeira, and provide students with meaningful, engaging, and dynamic learning experiences related to Afro-Brazilian history and culture. These practices should extend beyond physical skills and abilities, fostering a comprehensive education that prepares students for both social life and the professional world.

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