


African games: *Terra-Mar* as a tool for affirming cultural diversity in early childhood education

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This project was developed as part of the course “*Projeto Integrador*”, about “Multiculturalism in school environment”, a mandatory component of the Bachelor’s program in Pedagogy at the Virtual University of the State of São Paulo (Univesp). The objective of the project was to present and implement African games for students in final years of early childhood education, aiming to stimulate children’s interest and to value historically marginalized culture. The project was implemented at CEI 48 “Achilles Kloeckner”, in Sorocaba, SP, Brazil. The project followed a structured plan that included: research and planning; game selection; preliminary evaluation and feedback; implementation of the activity; discussion and reflection; future projections; and final evaluation and feedback. The project resulted in the development of a lesson plan; a brief lesson about Africa; the implementation of the *Terra-Mar* (Land-Sea) game; and the incorporation of multiculturalism into the school’s Political Pedagogical-Project (PPP).

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Multicultural Education. Playful Education. African Games. Cultural Diversity.

Brincadeiras africanas: Terra-Mar como ferramenta de afirmação da diversidade cultural na educação infantil

Resumo

Este trabalho foi desenvolvido a partir da disciplina Projeto Integrador, com o tema “Multiculturalismo no ambiente escolar”, componente obrigatório do curso de Licenciatura em Pedagogia da Universidade Virtual do Estado de São Paulo (Univesp). O objetivo do trabalho foi apresentar e executar brincadeiras africanas com alunos dos anos finais da educação infantil para estimular o interesse das crianças e valorizar culturas historicamente negligenciadas. O local de aplicação do projeto foi o CEI 48 “Achilles Kloeckner”, em Sorocaba, SP. Seguiu-se um plano

estruturado que incluiu: pesquisa e planejamento; escolha da brincadeira; avaliação e *feedback* preliminares; implementação da atividade; discussão e reflexão; projeções; e avaliação e *feedback* finais. Os resultados do projeto foram a elaboração de um plano de aula; uma breve aula sobre a África; a execução da brincadeira Terra-Mar; e a inclusão do tema multiculturalismo no Projeto Político-Pedagógico (PPP).

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Educação Multicultural. Educação Lúdica. Brincadeiras Africanas. Diversidade Cultural.

1 Introduction

This work was developed from the guiding theme “*Multiculturalism in the School Environment*”, a proposal of the *Integrative Project (PI)* course, which is a mandatory component of the Pedagogy undergraduate curriculum at the *Virtual University of the State of São Paulo (Univesp)*. The project was carried out with students in the final years of Early Childhood Education at *CEI 48 “Achilles Kloeckner”*, located in Sorocaba, São Paulo.

Considering the guiding theme, the school context, and the students’ age group, the following question arose: how can we enable young children in early childhood education to engage with multiculturalism? After discussions between the school and the project group, it was decided to implement activities in the form of games, focusing on African culture due to its historical, cultural, and social relevance.

To this end, the project planning included bibliographic research on topics related to the proposal, selection of games, and discussion and analysis of projections and expectations. As a result, a lesson plan was developed and carried out on October 9, 2024. The experience was then used to support the inclusion of the multiculturalism theme in the school’s *Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP)*.

The multiculturalist approach in education arises as a response to social demands that recognize the construction of reality through ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as gender, class, and other identity markers (Canen; Oliveira, 2002). Thus, multiculturalism in education plays a key role in confronting prejudice and social inequalities, aiming to form citizens who are more aware and capable of transforming their reality (Neira, 2011).

This proposal seeks to recover and value an ancestral culture that forms part of the history of most of the Brazilian population, yet has long been neglected within the school environment (Gomes, 2008). Currently, the *National Common Curricular Base (BNCC)* mandates the teaching of cultural diversity in its various dimensions, beginning in early childhood education, so that children may engage with multiculturalism, recognize and value their own culture, as well as others. Such engagement should arise through the demonstration and experience of artistic and cultural expressions, from local to global levels (Brazil, 2018).

Furthermore, even more than 20 years after the enactment of Law No. 10,639/2003 – which made the teaching of “*Afro-Brazilian History and Culture*” mandatory – there remain evident difficulties and challenges in developing an anti-racist education, particularly due to gaps in teacher training. In other words, most teacher education programs do not adequately prepare future educators to address Afro-Brazilian topics, nor to confront racism and other forms of prejudice, or to combat social inequalities, revealing numerous challenges that still need to be addressed (Lima, 2023). The *Integrative Project (PI)* at Univesp thus aims to practically address these educational demands.

According to Kishimoto (2023), play, by its very nature, stimulates children’s interest and enhances exploration and knowledge construction, while also fostering social interaction. For the author, traditional games are part of popular culture, as they are creations of a specific group within a given historical moment. Since they are transmitted primarily through oral tradition, these games evolve over time but continue to play a crucial role in preserving childhood culture, promoting social interaction, and providing the joy of play.

As stated by Urtiga Moreira and Nunes Henrique Silva (2015), being a *brincante* (player) represents a political act of resistance and struggle when it comes to traditional games. As an element of popular culture, the traditional game is not merely different but divergent from the hegemonic system and therefore devalued by the dominant culture.

Leonardeli, Conti, and Barbosa (2021) observed in their research that teachers propose games as activities to stimulate physical, cognitive, and social development, as

well as to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge in an engaging, enjoyable, and collective way. Beyond these characteristics, traditional or popular games also recover historical, social, artistic, and cultural elements that contribute to building collective memory and cultural identity.

The chosen game is called *Terra-Mar (Land-Sea)*, popular in Mozambique. Its objective is to follow the leader's instructions by standing in the correct area (land or sea) according to the command (Cunha, 2016).

During the activity, general information about Africa and the continent's original phenotypes – similar to those of the students – was shared as a way to foster identity connections, along with an explanation of the game's rules. The game was then played, followed by a brief reflection on similar games. Upon completion of the *Integrative Project (PI)*, the gathered information and experience supported the school unit's incorporation of multiculturalism into its *Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP)*, which is still under development.

2 Methodology

The project was developed at *CEI 48 "Achilles Kloeckner"*, located at *Rua Juvenal de Paula Souza, 285 – Bairro Cajuru do Sul*, in Sorocaba, São Paulo. The school has a staff of 70 employees and serves a total of 450 students. Its facilities comprise classrooms, a management office, a secretary's office, a cafeteria, a covered court with available play equipment, an outdoor playground, and a sandbox. The classrooms are equipped with furniture adapted to the early childhood age group, including tables, chairs, and shelves, as well as books, a digital whiteboard, a teacher's desk, and cabinets for the teacher's exclusive use. Initial contact with the school was made by phone to discuss the feasibility of developing the project, and once confirmed, a meeting was scheduled with the management team to present the project in detail and identify the institution's specific needs.

During the meeting, the central theme of the *Integrative Project (PI)*, “Curricular adaptation: multiculturalism in the school environment,” was discussed. The school’s management team reported that although the *Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP)* was undergoing a collective reconstruction, the concepts and practices discussed in the project had not yet been incorporated into the document, but there was an intention to integrate them. Since the *PPP* is the document that defines the institution’s identity by establishing objectives, content, schedules, methods, and activities (Neira, 2011), it is essential that the lesson plan developed be consistent with the school’s *PPP*. In this case, the project began to contribute to the elaboration and enrichment of debates regarding the *PPP*’s construction.

The management team also communicated that activities had been planned for the week of Children’s Day, including a storytelling session focused on multiculturalism, and it was suggested that the *PI* group carry out an activity in the same week to broaden the children’s contact with different cultures. It was established that the project would involve only the final-year early childhood classes in the morning and afternoon shifts. In addition, for data processing, materials production, and dissemination of the work, the administration signed a document authorizing the use of information pertinent to the project, and in all visual materials produced, the faces of students and school staff were blurred to preserve their identities.

The methodological process was structured in seven stages. Research and planning involved, in light of the theme, school context, age group, and the students’ cognitive and social development, investigations into multiculturalism in education, legislation on the teaching of African culture, play in child development, and traditional African games. Various materials from courses in the Pedagogy program, such as *Educational Psychology*, *Curriculum Theories*, *Didactics*, and *Integrative Project*, were used, and bibliographic searches were conducted in databases including the *CAPES Journals Portal*, *SciELO*, and the *Integrated Digital Library (UNIVESP)*. The individual histories and experiences of group members were also fundamental to planning the proposed activity. The selection of games considered the time available, the children’s age

group, and the possibility of involving many participants, and two games were chosen, *Chakyti Cha* (Barbosa, 2019) and *Terra-Mar* (Cunha, 2016). Preliminary evaluation and feedback took place before implementation through meetings with the school administration, teachers, and group members to identify positive and negative aspects and discuss possible improvements; a lesson plan was presented so that the school team could evaluate it and suggest refinements. Initially, it was established that only *Terra-Mar* would be carried out with the *Pré I* classes and that both games would be carried out with the *Pré II* classes, but given the time available for organizing and executing the activities, only *Terra-Mar* was carried out with all classes. Implementation of the activity took place within the school's *Semana da Criança* context; in the welcoming and explanation phase held in the classroom, a laptop and the digital whiteboard were used to present slides with images to contextualize Africa and the game, and in the execution phase held on the school court, chalk and white adhesive tape were used to mark the areas needed for *Terra-Mar*, while a speaker and microphone ensured that all students could hear the instructions and allowed for the use of music during the activity. Discussion and reflection followed in a corner of the court, giving students the opportunity to share their impressions and the knowledge acquired during the activities. The projections envisioned that this playful approach would enable students to experience, in a practical and interactive way, cultural aspects of the African continent; through these games, African traditions and cultural characteristics were represented with the aim of encouraging respect for diversity and promoting reflection on the impact of these cultures in students' daily lives, and these expectations were compared with the results described in the final solution. Final evaluation and feedback occurred after implementation in a conversation with the school administration, teachers, and group members to note the project's positive and negative aspects and its impact on the school community, which are presented in the final considerations.

3 Results and Discussion

The first result of the project, derived from discussions between the project members and the school, was the development of the following lesson plan (Table 1), in which the organization and planning for the implementation of the activity were systematized.

7

Table 1 – Lesson Plan (final years of early childhood education)

Theme	African games
Fields of experience (BNCC)	The self, the other, and us; Body, gesture, and movement. ¹
Objectives (BNCC)	<p>(EI03EO06) Demonstrate interest in and respect for different cultures and ways of life.</p> <p>(EI03CG02) Demonstrate control and appropriate use of the body in games and play, listening to and retelling stories, artistic activities, among other possibilities.</p> <p>(EI03EO03) Broaden interpersonal relationships by developing attitudes of participation and cooperation.²</p>
Content	Practice of the games <i>Chakyti Cha</i> (Barbosa, 2019) and <i>Terra-Mar</i> (Cunha, 2016), contextualized with their respective places of origin.
Duration	35 minutes per session.
Didactic resources	Digital whiteboard, slide presentation, lecture-based explanation, chalk, adhesive tape, and the school courtyard space.
Methodology	<p><i>Chakyti Cha</i> and <i>Terra-Mar</i> are rule-based games. The stages of the activity were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome circle with students (5 min); • Explanation of the game rules (5 min);

¹ O eu, o outro e o nós; Corpo, gesto e movimentos.

² (EI03EO06) Manifestar interesse e respeito por diferentes culturas e modos de vida.

(EI03CG02) Demonstrar controle e adequação do uso de seu corpo em brincadeiras e jogos, escuta e reconto de histórias, atividades artísticas, entre outras possibilidades.

(EI03EO03) Ampliar as relações interpessoais, desenvolvendo atitudes de participação e cooperação.

- Game execution (20 min);
- Closing reflection (5 min).

Evaluation

Aspects evaluated:

- Engagement during the games;
- Participation in the discussion circle and understanding of the theme;
- Development of motor skills and cooperation.

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Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Terra-Mar is a popular game in Mozambique whose objective is to follow the leader's instructions by positioning oneself correctly in the indicated area (*terra* or *mar*) according to the command. The game requires attention and agility and is excellent for stimulating motor coordination and quick thinking. To set it up, the space must be divided with a line on the floor separating the area called *Terra* from the one called *Mar*. The children stand on the line and the leader gives the commands, shouting "*Terra*" or "*Mar*," and everyone must jump to the corresponding area. If a child jumps to the wrong area, they are eliminated, and the last remaining participant becomes the winner and the new leader. If there are many mistakes, the leader may offer tips, making the game more educational and less competitive (Cunha, 2016).

Chakyti Cha means playing dog and hyena, a game popular among children in Ghana, similar to tag, which involves agility, attention, and teamwork. To play, the children

are divided into two equal groups and form two lines in which each participant holds the waist of the person in front. They then move forward and backward while repeatedly singing: “Chakyti Cha, Chakyti Cha.” At the same time, the first two in each group, without letting go, try to capture the last child in the opposing group’s line. Captured children move to the rival team’s line. The group that captures the most children wins (Barbosa, 2019).

The project was carried out on October 9, 2024, as agreed upon in the planning meetings. In the morning period there were two *Pré I* classes and three *Pré II* classes, organized into stage-based groupings, meaning there was one working period with the *Pré I* classes and another with the *Pré II* classes. In the afternoon period there were three *Pré I* classes and two *Pré II* classes. However, due to the specific characteristics of each class, unlike in the morning, the work with the *Pré I* classes was conducted separately from the others.

Initially, the lesson plan was expected to unfold in four stages – welcoming (5 minutes), explanation of the games (5 minutes), execution of the games (20 minutes), and finally reflection and closure (5 minutes) – totaling 35 minutes in duration. However, interaction with each grouping lasted around 45 to 55 minutes.

In addition, the *PI* group had planned to conduct *Terra-Mar* with the *Pré I* classes and *Chakyti Cha* plus *Terra-Mar* with the *Pré II* classes. Due to the time available for organizing the materials used, only *Terra-Mar* was carried out with all classes.

Because of the number of children participating simultaneously, the group chose to divide the floor into three parts in the sequence “*Mar, Terra, Mar,*” with two lines, in order to simulate an island surrounded by water (Image 1). Adhesive tape was used for the lines and chalk to distinguish and decorate the areas corresponding to *Terra* and *Mar*.

Image 1 – Marking made on the floor for the Terra-Mar game



Source: Author's own work (2024).

The welcoming moment took place in the classroom, beginning with an explanation about general information on Africa, aiming to establish connections with the children's prior knowledge. For this purpose, a slide presentation was projected onto the school's available digital whiteboards. The presentation consisted of four slides: one showing a map of Africa, two with photographs of landscapes from the continent, and the last featuring images of children from different African nations. The images presented were taken from the book *Children Just Like You: A New Celebration of Children Around the World* (Saunders; Priddy; Lennon, 2021) and from the websites *National Geographic Brasil* and *Pixabay*. Afterwards, the rules and characteristics of the selected game were explained (Image 2).

Image 2 – Welcoming moment and lecture-based activity



Source: Author's own work (2024).

Next, the students were taken to the sports court, an open and spacious area suitable for playing the game, and were organized into two rows along the adhesive tapes fixed to the floor. For atmosphere and rhythmic marking, the instrumental version of the song “*Terra/Mar – Música para brincadeira africana (Consciência Negra)*” (Soares, 2022) was used. As it was the students’ first experience with the game, the group members themselves gave the commands “*Terra*” and “*Mar*” (Image 3).

Image 3 – Execution of the Terra-Mar game



Source: Author's own work (2024).

The game was repeated twice with each group. Repetition of the activity revealed a significant increase in the students' confidence during its execution. This phenomenon suggests that familiarity with the game can contribute to the development of self-confidence as well as to the improvement of students' motor and social skills. Repeated practice allows students to feel more comfortable, fostering a learning environment in which they feel encouraged to participate actively.

Piaget (2024) characterizes forms of repetition as *circular reactions*, classified as primary, secondary, and tertiary, in addition to the repetition of form. According to the author, in the case of games – whether symbolic, rule-based, exercise, or constructive – children engage in repetition as a way of perfecting the form or structure of the game rather than the content of the action. In rule-based games, the objectives, materials, and rules remain the same; however, each round and its outcomes are different, meaning that what is repeated is the form or structure of the game. In this context, repetition enables participants to refine their skills (Piaget, 2024).

At the end, the students gathered in a corner of the court to reflect on games similar to *Terra-Mar* and to share their impressions of the experience (Image 4). The students showed positive engagement, expressing favorable impressions of the activities and even a desire to play the game again. The school team – teachers, assistants, and management – also expressed positive feedback and the intention to repeat the activity in the future.

Image 4 – Closing and reflection on the activity

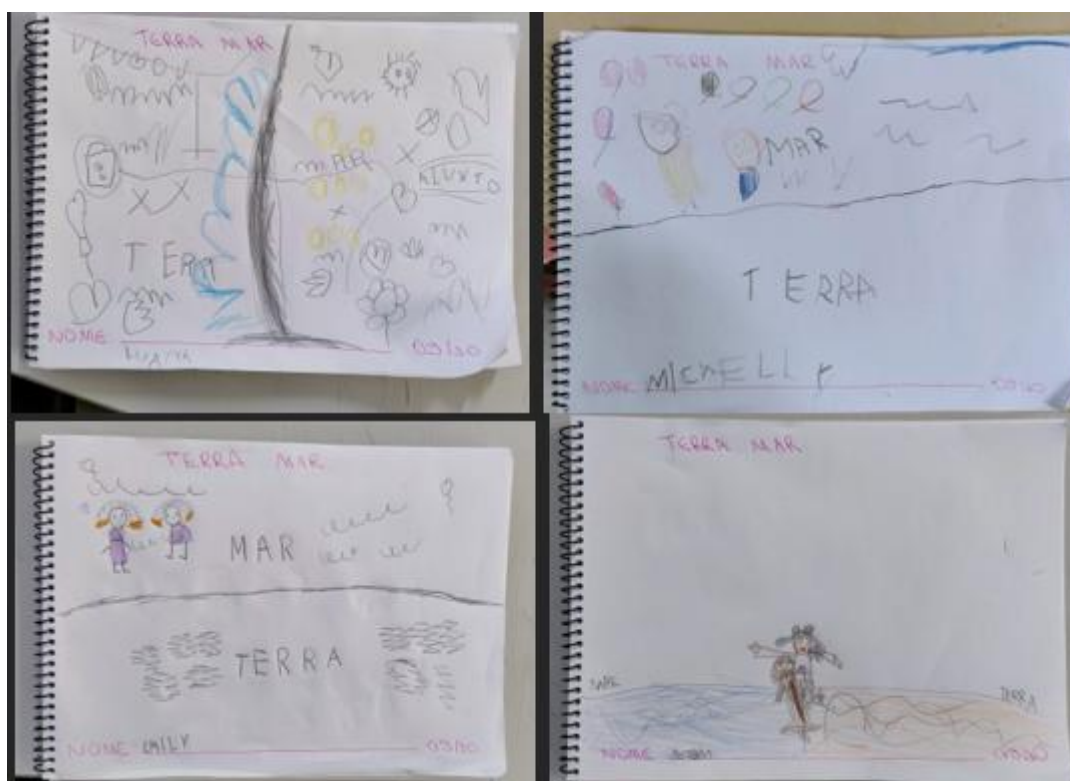


Source: Author's own work (2024).

In addition to the verbal feedback, the students from the afternoon period illustrated the *Terra-Mar* game from their own perspectives (Images 5, 6, 7, and 8). In these drawings, it is possible to observe the development of spatial awareness and a sense of collectivity, as well as the students' ability to record and express the emotions and meanings they attributed to the activity.

Images 5, 6, 7, and 8 – Examples of illustrations produced by the students

14



Source: Author's own work (2024).

4 Final considerations

According to the authors discussed in the sections “*Multiculturalism in Education*” and “*Legislation on the Teaching of African Culture*,” addressing topics related to cultures once suppressed by Eurocentric logic is of utmost importance. It is therefore essential to overcome prejudice and to strengthen the formation of identity and historicity among individuals. During the welcoming stage, when the children were asked if they identified with the photos of children of African origin, their initial response was negative; only after an explanation of those phenotypic traits did they begin to identify with the displayed images. This fact demonstrates the need to work on elements related to the construction of historical, ethnic, and cultural identity.

Regarding the authors presented in the section “*Play in Child Development*,” as discussed, it was observed that during the execution of the *Terra-Mar* game, playful practices attract children’s attention and enable the development of various motor, cognitive, and socialization skills that are essential for both collective and individual growth.

The main limitation encountered in the project’s implementation was the time available for the preparation and execution of the activities. Among these limitations were the verification and setup of resources necessary for image projection, since, although the classrooms were equipped with digital whiteboards, these lacked specific programs for displaying slides. Furthermore, the number of students expected at the beginning of the project was smaller than that agreed upon in the final meetings. For this reason, only the *Terra-Mar* game was carried out with all classes.

Some teachers expressed their intention to repeat the activity in the future. The school may adapt this lesson plan for all stages of early childhood education, using games appropriate for each age group and incorporating cultures beyond the African one, thereby bringing greater diversity into the school’s daily life.

It was also agreed with the school unit that the project would contribute to the inclusion of multicultural themes in the institution’s *Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP)*, with the aim of fostering debates on an issue of significant relevance to contemporary society.

Finally, the *Integrative Project (PI)* experience provided valuable learning for the teaching practice of the group members, who, although most already possess some professional and/or academic background in education, had not all previously experienced direct contact with Early Childhood Education.

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Responsible publisher: Genifer Andrade

Ad hoc experts: Priscila Nunes Brazil e Bruno Miranda Freitas.

How to cite this article (ABNT):

SEKI, Fernanda Gonçalves; *et al.* African games: *Terra-Mar* as a tool for affirming cultural diversity in early childhood education. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 8, e15943, 2026. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/15943>

Received on July 17, 2025.

Accepted on September 21, 2025.

Published in January 11, 2026.