Voices of *quilombo* children from Nazaré and literature for children: knowledge, identities, and reflections

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the voices of children belonging to the *Quilombola* community of Nazaré, located in Itapipoca, Ceará, regarding their perceptions, feelings, and observations about children's literature with ethnic-racial themes. The research adopts an ethnographic approach, understanding that this allows the researcher to observe, listen, and distance themselves from their own cultural references, positioning themselves sensitively in the face of new realities and behaviors. Based on the narratives of ten children, aged between seven and ten years old, it becomes evident that literature constitutes a space for social, emancipatory, and assertive reflection, enabling the recognition and appreciation of the identities, subjectivities, and experiences specific to the *Quilombola* universe. The study thus reinforces the importance of literature that contributes to the affirmation of the cultural and symbolic worlds of Black childhoods.
Keywords: Quilombola Children. Children's Literature. Ethnic-Racial Representation.

Vozes de crianças quilombolas de Nazaré e literatura para a infância: saberes, identidades e reflexões

Resumo

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo evidenciar as vozes de crianças pertencentes à comunidade quilombola de Nazaré, localizada em Itapipoca, Ceará, acerca de suas percepções, sentimentos e observações sobre obras de literatura infantil com temática étnico-racial. A pesquisa adota a abordagem etnográfica, por compreender que esta permite ao pesquisador observar, escutar e distanciar-se de seus próprios referenciais culturais, posicionando-se de forma sensível diante de novas realidades e comportamentos. A partir das narrativas de dez crianças, com idades entre sete e dez anos, evidencia-se que a literatura se constitui como espaço de reflexão social, emancipatória e reivindicativa, possibilitando o reconhecimento e a valorização das identidades, subjetividades e experiências próprias do universo quilombola. O estudo reforça, assim, a importância de uma literatura que contribua para a afirmação dos mundos culturais e simbólicos das infâncias negras.
Palavras-chave: Crianças Quilombolas. Literatura Infantil. Representatividade Étnico-Racial.

1 Introduction

In light of Antônio Cândido's (1995) thought, literature makes us sensitive and guides us toward a reflective stance that positions us to explore new paths for understanding our human condition. Following the same logic, we turn our attention to the universe of childhood, understanding that literature offers powerful possibilities for the constitutive dimensions of children's holistic development through fantasy and imagination.

Studies indicate that systematic exposure to literary narratives from early childhood expands vocabulary, enhances reading comprehension, stimulates symbolic thinking, and contributes to emergent literacy (Zilberman, 2003; Lajolo, 2007). Furthermore, literature allows children to experience emotions, conflicts, and diverse perspectives, promoting empathy, emotional self-regulation, and identity formation (Abramovich, 1997; Pulimeno et al., 2020).

Through the subjective reflections that literature provokes, we can highlight aspects of childhood culture that are often silenced, such as social class, gender, and ethnicity. Children's literature plays a significant role in valuing diversity and ethnic-racial and cultural representation, enabling children to recognize themselves and others in plural narratives, thus contributing to a more inclusive and humanizing education (Cavalleiro, 2012; Gomes, 2017).

However, while the importance of literature for children's development is recognized, it is also necessary to problematize which childhoods are being represented in children's stories and books. Understanding childhood as a plural category implies acknowledging that experiences of being a child are shaped by markers such as territory, ethnicity, social class, and cultural belonging.

In this sense, *quilombola* childhoods, historically rendered invisible in school, literary, and academic spaces[1], demand specific attention, especially when discussing

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[1] A previous study by Silva and Amorim (2023), published in the *International Journal of Teacher Education*, developed within the scope of the same master's research from which this article is derived, highlights the

children's literature and its formative potentials. By situating literature within the context of *quilombo* communities, it is understood that literature does not operate merely as an aesthetic or pedagogical resource, but as a space for identity affirmation, the valorization of ancestral knowledge, and the strengthening of connections with the territory.

Aligned with this perspective, we argue that literature presents itself as a powerful ally for education in ethnic-racial relations from early childhood, as it enables the expansion of symbolic repertoires, the construction of positive identities, and the confrontation of stereotypes. However, for these potentials to materialize, it is essential to consider not only the adult perspective on the works but also the voices of children as rights-bearing subjects and meaning-makers.

Engaging with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), we posit that the path to answers can only come from the voices of the children themselves. This gap is also noted by other researchers, such as Araújo (2018, p. 74), who concluded in their study that there is a significant "need to investigate how the reading public, especially those in training, interprets such works and what possibilities exist for expanding worldviews."

Thus, the present study aims to highlight the voices of children belonging to a *quilombola* community, regarding what they think, discuss, feel, and observe in literature with ethnic-racial themes. The protagonists of this research are ten children aged seven to ten from the *quilombola* community of Nazaré, in the municipality of Itapipoca, Ceará. We selected an ethnographic approach as our methodological strategy, as it is primarily conceived through acts of observing and listening.

From the perspective that children's literature with an ethnic-racial focus can help *quilombola* children understand themselves and the community to which they belong, it also fosters the development of self-esteem and identity.

The work presented constitutes a segment of the master's research *Much More than Voices: An Ethnographic Study on Children's Literature with Quilombola Children*, linked

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existence of a gap in Brazilian educational academic production regarding investigations that consider *quilombola* children as central subjects of research.

to the Graduate Program in Education at the State University of Rio Grande do Norte, and was approved by the ethics committee of the aforementioned institution.

2 Research Methodology

Assuming multiple forms and expanding possibilities across various contexts, qualitative research plays a central role in investigations within the field of Education. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1994), this type of research privileges understanding behaviors from the perspective of the subjects themselves, which aligns with the approach adopted in the present study.

In our study, the child is the protagonist of the investigation. However, it is important to note that research **with** children, rather than about children, is still recent and requires new methodological and ethical stances that respect the specificities inherent to working with this group.

In our research, we adopted an approach that considers children's participation in the investigation as a step toward constructing a space of citizenship—a space in which the child is not merely present, but whose active engagement is indispensable for the development of the study (Soares, 2006).

However, for this to occur, methodologies appropriate to the study's context and objectives are required. Accordingly, we selected an ethnographic approach as our methodological strategy. This methodology facilitates researchers' engagement with children's perspectives, allowing them to participate directly and actively (Buss-Simão, 2014).

Ethnographic research requires more time in the field than is typically used in other studies, as it is essential for the researcher to immerse themselves in the world of the participants. According to Jorosky and Moreira (2015, p. 1075), "when conducting this type of research, the focus is on the study of the meanings and reasons that children attribute to the investigated phenomena, through the analysis of their responses and actions."

Research that seeks to understand children's worlds and regards them as social actors presents even greater challenges. Among these are questions such as: how can we learn what children think about a certain topic without the adult-centered perspective interfering? How can we approach children in a way that fosters safety and trust? What is the best way to achieve the research objectives while positioning children as protagonists of all processes?

For this reason, it was necessary to define how to approach children and their worlds, and we identified literature as a methodological facilitator for establishing an interaction characterized by playfulness, joy, trust, and security. Thus, children's literature is presented in this study as contributing to the subjective, intellectual, identity, and social development of the participants.

Itapipoca is a city in the state of Ceará, located 130 kilometers from the capital, Fortaleza, and belonging to the northern region of the state. Its historical origins reflect the presence of Europeans and various Tupi and Tapuia indigenous ethnicities, such as the Tremembés, Anacés, and Apuiarés, as well as the presence of captive and free Africans, whose labor was employed in sugarcane, coffee, and banana cultivation[2].

For this study, we entered the context of a *quilombola* community—*quilombola* referring to Afro-Brazilian communities historically formed by escaped enslaved people—called Nazaré. This community is located in the mountainous region of the city, specifically in the Arapari district. It lies 13.2 kilometers from the center of Itapipoca, with an altitude ranging from 640 to 750 meters, and currently comprises 46 families who identify as *quilombolas*.

Fieldwork began in September 2022 and continued throughout 2023. Initially, we presented the study and its objectives to the school manager and teachers, seeking authorization for the research activities to take place within the school environment. During the second meeting, we focused on understanding the school's regulatory and guiding documents, as well as its daily functioning and routines.

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[2] Information obtained from the website of the Municipal Government of Itapipoca. Available at: https://itapipoca.ce.gov.br. Accessed on: 17 Nov. 2022.

Our next meeting involved the children's parents and guardians, who signed the Informed Consent Form and authorized the use of their children's images and voices. A few days later, we returned to the school for a meeting with the children and to obtain their Assent Forms.

After obtaining the necessary authorizations from both guardians and children, we began organizing non-participant direct observation and participant direct observation. Initially, meetings were planned on a weekly basis. However, it was not possible to fix specific dates due to the school's schedule, and we adapted according to what was best for the children and the school community.

These initial meetings were used for the researcher's immersion in the school environment, aiming to better understand the social dynamics of the community and establish a natural rapport with the children, so as not to be perceived merely as "an outsider."

Following the period of non-participant observation, we began storytelling and reading mediation sessions, resulting in ten encounters designed to engage the children and discuss themes related to diversity, ethnic-racial identity, and their perceptions of various stories. In this article, we present a segment of these encounters with the aim of amplifying the children's voices and their perspectives.

Literature in the school environment—or any other environment—is not intended to teach something objectively; rather, it carries an exclusive language that is revealed through expression and engagement with experiences. We seek a literary education that expands the voices of *quilombola* children, offering "an opportunity for them to understand themselves as producers of meaning in their reading" (Simões; Souza, 2014, p. 13). In other words, literature acts as an ally in broadening cultural references in the school while valuing diversity.

2.1 The protagonists of the study: children from the *Quilombola* Community of Nazaré

In recent years in Brazil, there has been a continuous growth in research that regards children as active citizens of society and producers of culture, with the right to be heard. Ferreira (2010) points out that, while children actively participate in the world, they also assert themselves as different from it.

To emphasize the importance of *quilombola* children as active citizens and as central subjects of this study, we present ten children aged seven to ten from the *quilombola* community of Nazaré, Ceará. Therefore, our research considers it essential to understand the meanings and experiences lived by *quilombola* children, which can only be achieved through their voices.

Figure 1 – Some study participants playing freely in front of the school

Source: Authors' collection (2022)

Ethical dilemmas and methodological stances that assume the responsibility of respecting children as active rights-bearing subjects were present throughout the entire process. Thus, after ensuring that the children understood the study and its objectives, as

well as the voluntary nature of their participation and the possibility of renegotiating it, the next step addressed confidentiality and anonymity.

While reviewing the theoretical framework on ethics in research with children, as well as dissertations and theses that positioned children as research subjects, we observed that children chose names of animals, flowers, superheroes, famous characters, or objects to represent themselves. We draw on the thinking of Graue and Walsh (2003), who assert that to act ethically is to act in the same way we would with people we respect, to reflect on the following episode from our research.

We explained to the children the importance of confidentiality and that they could choose how they wished to be represented in the study. Their choices are presented in the table below, alongside their age, favorite book or story, and favorite game.

Box 1 – Research Participants

Name	Age	Favorite Book or Story	Favorite Game
Novo	7	*The Little Black Prince*	Tag
Henrique	7	*Little Red Riding Hood*	Kite Flying
Leonardo	7	*Werewolf*	Playing Soccer
Sofia	8	*The Sleepy House*	Hide and Seek
Nayara	8	*Blackberries*	Hide and Seek
Neymar	8	*Saci Pererê*	Playing Soccer
Nimona	9	*The Little Prince*	Tag
Eduardo	10	*The Goat and the Jaguar*	Playing Soccer
Eduarda	10	*The Prince and the Princess*	Seven Sins
Vitória	10	*Blackberries*	Seven Sins

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023)

We can observe that the names chosen by the children were proper names that bear little resemblance to those seen in other studies. We dare confess that we reiterated

other possibilities, offering examples of flowers and characters, in the adult desire to transform their choices into poetic forms.

We reminded ourselves that subtleties also reflect power relations, so we respected their choices and recorded what they said. However, as they spoke their "nicknames," the children laughed, whispered to one another, and chose with joy. This episode caused us considerable reflection, and we asked whether they knew the people to whom they were referring. Upon confirming that they did, they explained that the names corresponded to mothers, fathers, uncles, grandparents, and even a soccer player.

The children who participated in this study belong to a *quilombola* community, whose formation and existence have historically been guided by a sense of collectivity and strong family and community bonds. When given the opportunity to choose another name, they thought of those they admire, those who give them affection, and seemingly simple elements that, nonetheless, reveal a unique and singular wisdom.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Being a Black Child and Being a *Quilombola* Child

It is not insignificant to recall the etymological origin of the term "childhood." Derived from the Latin *infantia*, it carries the element *fan*, which means "speaker," and the prefix *in*, which denotes negation—that is, one who has no voice, who does not speak. This reinforces the idea that a child depends on others to communicate and develop. According to Ariés (1978), the notion of dependence has always been associated with childhood.

This prompts reflection on how the Western, adult-centered perspective places children in a position of exclusion, where they are disempowered from thinking and acting autonomously, thus prevented from speaking for themselves. What is the reason for this? The maintenance of power over children? We align with Abramowicz (2011, p. 24), who

states that "the child, in speaking, enacts a discursive hierarchical inversion that gives voice to those whose words are not taken into account, not considered."

In contrast, we draw on the concept of childhood from the Xhosa cultures in South Africa, which is more aligned with our perspective. The word *ubuntwana* refers to childhood, and *umntwana* means child; the construction of the word with the prefixes *ubunto* and *twana* conveys an understanding of affectivity, holistic love, and a delight in life (Noguera; Barreto, 2018).

We share this belief in children and the understandings that emerge from the space-time in which they live. We seek to recognize that, through their active and autonomous voices, the child who imagines, creates, and comprehends is revealed—a child who "resists, transgresses, and threatens the order of the minimal space that society grants them" (Faria; Finco, 2011, p. 13).

Thus, even though the concept of childhood has been socially and historically constructed and multiple understandings exist, it is necessary to emphasize that it transcends the biological dimension. The field of Childhood Sociology posits that childhood is independent of individual children, as it constitutes a generational category in which members continuously enter and exit.

> Childhood Sociology has been problematizing the psychological and biological approaches to understanding children, as it rejects a uniform conception of childhood. While acknowledging factors of homogeneity among children as a group with similar age characteristics, it also emphasizes the importance of considering heterogeneity, given that different structural contexts differentiate children (Abramowicz; Oliveira, 2010, p. 43).

The child is a concrete social actor who constitutes childhood, and it is essential to recognize that this subject lives in a specific geographical location and belongs to a social class, a gender, an ethnicity, a religion—in short, variables that can lead to diverse understandings of childhood. Thus, it is important to emphasize that there are multiple childhoods.

From this perspective, we highlight that the conditions of being born, growing up, developing, dreaming, and existing are not the same for all children. Data from the 17th

Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, published in 2023, underscore racial inequality, showing that 67.1% of children and 85.1% of adolescents who are victims of intentional violent deaths are Black.

Although there has been a significant expansion of studies on children in recent years, research on Black children has not progressed at the same pace, and "to the extent that this child is Black and *quilombola*, the invisibility of this social subject in academic production becomes evident" (Matos; Eugênio, 2019).

As we sought to delve deeper into investigations, perceptions, and data concerning *quilombola* children, we observed that they are often categorized simply within the broader group of Black children without distinction. This generalization hinders the development and implementation of public policies and affirmative actions in social, political, legal, and even academic spheres that are tailored to the reality and regional particularities of this group. This situation reminds us that the invisibility of *quilombos* in Brazil has been and continues to be actively produced, directly affecting the children belonging to these communities.

> The identity of Black *quilombola* children is shaped by distinct social phenomena and by difference; however, their identity is regulated and recognized through affirmative policies, with one of the criteria being racial self-identification, which distinguishes them from Black children who are not *quilombolas* (Doria, 2015. p. 48).

It is essential to point out that, when a social standardization of children occurs, all plural identities, including those of *quilombola* children, are erased. Silva (2011), when highlighting the racism experienced by *quilombola* children, warns of three forms of prejudice to which they are subjected: the first for being children, the second for being Black, and the third for being *quilombolas*. Matos and Eugênio (2019) add a fourth type of prejudice in their study: for being from rural areas.

Quilombola children are social, cultural, and political subjects whose childhoods are intertwined with territory, historicity, ancestry, and the notion of well-being (*bem-viver*)[3]. They are also linked to struggles for social, political, and regional recognition, to geographical conditions, power relations, and access to—or lack of—rights. Childhoods that traverse the formations of each *quilombo*.

> Since *quilombos* remain largely unknown to most of Brazilian society, presenting a glimpse of what they are, from the perspective of their children, constitutes a valuable path toward deconstructing stereotypes and fostering processes of respect and appreciation for peoples who have historically resisted and continue to resist diverse forms of oppression, racism, and attempts to annihilate their cultures (Gomes; Araújo, 2023, p.62-63).

Their reflections, gestures, movements, bodies, laughter, play, silences, concerns, speech, and all other forms of expression are approached as languages that convey the culture of *quilombola* childhoods within their plurality.

3.2 Voices and perceptions of children from the Nazaré Community through literary moments

Novo: E tudo que a gente falar você vai escrever?

Pesquisadora: Às vezes vou escrever, mas também vou gravar e filmar. Tudo bem?

Novo: Assim é bom que não perde nada né, tia?

Pesquisadora: Essa é a intenção. Não perder nada do que conversamos aqui.

Novo: Vou começar a falar. Ta gravando?[4]

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[3] According to Santana (2023), *bem-viver* constitutes a practice that strengthens democracy through communal life, respect for diversity, and forms of family organization. The author further highlights that *quilombola* and Indigenous peoples have historically been agents of these principles.

[4] The narratives produced by the children are presented in 12-point font, without typographic reduction, as a methodological choice to value their voices. These narratives are not treated as long quotations, but as empirical material of the study.

Translation:

Novo: So everything we say, you're going to write it down?

Researcher: Sometimes I'll write, but I'll also record and film. Is that okay?

Novo: That's good then, so nothing gets lost, right, auntie?

Researcher: That's the intention. Not to lose anything we talk about here.

Novo: I'll start talking. Are you recording?

This dialogue between Novo and the researcher occurred after the explanation of the study, its objectives, and the steps we would follow. It represents one of the initial engagements and demonstrates the excitement and naturalness with which we were received by the children. Below, we present some of the children's narratives during literary moments.

Before starting the first storytelling session, we introduced the children to the sung activity "Creating Colorful Stories", which consists of imagining a cauldron where we put ingredients of a chosen color, which will then become part of the story. This activity was very relaxed, with a lot of interaction, and produced the results reflected in the following dialogue:

Pesquisadora: Todo mundo compreendeu? Posso começar? Eu canto primeiro e depois repetimos juntos.

Todos: Sim!

Pesquisadora (cantando e fazendo o movimento de mexer o caldeirão colocando os ingredientes): Vamos fazer uma história rosa, sa. Vamos fazer uma história rosa, sa. Coloca uma princesa rosa e um cachorro rosa. Vamos fazer uma história rosa, sa. Qual foi a próxima que combinamos?

Neymar: Amarela, foi amarela!

Todos (cantando): Vamos fazer uma história amarela, la. Vamos fazer uma história amarela, la. Coloca uma fada amarela e um gigante amarelo. Vamos fazer uma história amarela, la. Agora alguém começa a cantar!

Nimona: Eu! (cantando) Vamos fazer uma história verde, de. (Todos acompanharam) Vamos fazer uma história verde, de. Coloca um sapo verde e um limão verde. Vamos fazer uma história verde, de.

Todos (cantando): Vamos fazer uma história laranja, ja. Vamos fazer uma história laranja, ja. Coloca um cururu laranja e uma roupa laranja. Vamos fazer uma história laranja, ja.

Translation:

Researcher: Did everyone understand? Can I start? I'll sing first and then we'll repeat together.

All: Yes!

Researcher (singing and making the motion of stirring the cauldron while adding ingredients): *Let's make a pink story, sa. Let's make a pink story, sa. Put in a pink princess and a pink dog. Let's make a pink story, sa. What was the next color we agreed on?*

Neymar: Yellow, it was yellow!

All (singing): Let's make a yellow story, la. Let's make a yellow story, la. Put in a yellow fairy and a yellow giant. Let's make a yellow story, la. Now someone start singing!

Nimona: Me! (singing) Let's make a green story, de. (Everyone joined in) Let's make a green story, de. Put in a green frog and a green lime. Let's make a green story, de.

All (singing): Let's make an orange story, ja. Let's make an orange story, ja. Put in an orange toad and an orange outfit. Let's make an orange story, ja.

The colors and ingredients had already been chosen by everyone. Seeking the children's spontaneous responses, no decision was made regarding the last color chosen, black. This moment served as an introduction to the first book to be presented: *O pequeno príncipe preto* by Rodrigo França, resulting in the following dialogue:

Pesquisadora: Podemos fazer mais uma?

Todos: Sim!

Pesquisadora: O que vocês colocariam em uma história preta?

Sofia: Um gato! Ou um lápis!

Leonardo: Cabelo!

Pesquisadora: Ótimo! Mais alguma coisa?

Nimona: Uma princesa.

Novo: Um príncipe é melhor, teve princesa na história rosa.

Nimona: verdade, ta bom.

Pesquisadora: Então ficamos com um gato, um lápis e um príncipe?

Todos: Sim

Novo: Principe preto é massa!

Todos (cantando): Vamos fazer uma história preta, ta. Vamos fazer uma história preta, ta. Coloca um gato preto, um lápis preto e um príncipe preto, Vamos fazer uma história preta, ta.

Pesquisadora: Acho que o pensamento de vocês tem um poder muito forte. Olha a história que apareceu por aqui...

Translation:

Researcher: Can we make one more?

All: Yes!

Researcher: What would you put in a black story?

Sofia: A cat! Or a pencil!

Leonardo: Hair!

Researcher: Great! Anything else?

Nimona: A princess.

Novo: A prince is better, there was a princess in the pink story.

Nimona: True, okay.

Researcher: So we'll go with a cat, a pencil, and a prince?

All: Yes

Novo: Black Prince is awesome!

All (singing): Let's make a black story, ta. Let's make a black story, ta. Put in a black cat, a black pencil, and a black prince. Let's make a black story, ta.

Researcher: I think your ideas are very powerful. Look at the story that appeared here...

The joy, playfulness, and imagination accompanied us throughout the data collection process, since our participants were children and we wanted them to feel comfortable and safe during the research. After this last remark from the researcher, the book was presented to the group. To our initial surprise, Novo quickly said: "*I know it, auntie, I have this book at home!*" And Nimona added: "*Me too, my godmother gave it to me as a gift.*"

The mentioned book, in addition to featuring a Black prince as the main character, addresses ancestry, physical characteristics, the Baobab tree, and other topics. It was published in 2020, so it can be considered a relatively recent book. Therefore, the presence of children from a rural *quilombola* community with this type of access shows that the importance of this literature is also recognized by their families. It is worth noting that, in Brazilian public schools and at home, children still have little contact with Black children's literature or works featuring Black characters in positions of value.

When we finished reading the story, Novo asked to hold the book, placed it beside his face, and said: "*He looks like me, right, auntie?*" Clearly, Novo enjoyed the book and identified with the prince character, as he had already expressed with great enthusiasm saying: "*Black Prince is awesome!*" By demonstrating identification with the character, we reinforce the importance of ethnic diversity in positive ways in children's literature.

The book by Emicida, *And That's How Darkness and I Became Friends*, sparked a lot of curiosity among the children because it does not follow a traditional style of writing. There is a duality of fears: on one side, a girl who is afraid of the dark, and on the other, a character who is afraid of the light. In a vibrant and energetic way, the children pointed out the character Courage as their favorite, represented by a Black woman, with curly hair, smiling, who appears to help us face the challenges that cause us fear.

Pesquisadora: Querem falar mais alguma coisa sobre essa história?

Nayara: A Coragem é muito bonita e é mais forte que o Medo. Ela é uma rainha.

Pesquisadora: Você a acha uma rainha?

Nayara: Tem no livro, tem uma coroa aqui ó. Quem tem coroa é rainha.

Translation:

Researcher: Do you want to say anything else about this story?

Nayara: Courage is very beautiful and stronger than Fear. She is a queen.

Researcher: You think she is a queen?

Nayara: It's in the book, there's a crown here. Whoever has a crown is a queen.

From this inquiry, we can perceive how the illustrations in the books are powerful and enriching elements of the message being conveyed. Therefore, when selecting literature to be present in the classroom, illustrations must also be considered, analyzed, and reflected upon.

The book *Bucala: A pequena princesa do quilombo do Cabula* by Davi Nunes offered many possibilities for the encounter with the children. The children Henrique and Vitória said they had never seen a book that talked about a *quilombo*, which opened the way for a dialogue full of reflections on what it means to be *quilombola* and elements of identification present in the book.

Novo: Ser quilombola é querer paz.

Sofia: Quilombola é quando todo mundo se ajuda e não tem diferenças.

Eduarda: Antes quilombola era quem fugia da escravidão, mas não é mais assim. São pessoas que lutam por respeito e paz.

Translation:

Novo: Being quilombola *means wanting peace.*

Sofia: Quilombola *is when everyone helps each other and there are no differences.*
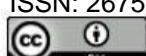
Eduarda: Before, quilombola *was someone who escaped from slavery, but not anymore. They are people who fight for respect and peace.*

Even though the history of the existence of *quilombos* in our country is entirely marked by racism, it is noticeable in these children a racial consciousness and knowledge of valuing themselves and their culture, which break the stereotypes, epistemicide, and ethnocide that society persistently seeks to sustain.

The right to equality and the promotion of the well-being of all are present in the principles of *quilombola* school education and are crucial to the objectives of the *quilombola* movement. It is interesting to note that the three children construct discourses emphasizing the pursuit of equality and peace in society.

Another aspect that appears in their statements is the importance of the place where they live, defining what it means to be *quilombola* by the territory they inhabit and their sense of collectivity. This observation is very important, as it aligns with what Graue and Walsh request in ethnographic research: "[...] researchers should think of children as living in specific contexts, with specific experiences and in real-life situations" (2003, p.25). This brings us to the following observations:

Nimona: Acho que pra ser quilombola tem que morar aqui em Nazaré. Ou outro quilombo como o da Bucala. E é muito bom morar aqui. É calmo, tem cachoeira e todo mundo cuida de todo mundo.

Nayara: Minha vó sempre fala que aqui é o nosso lugar e que tem que proteger porque somos todos uma família. Então é morar aqui com a sua família.

Translation:

Nimona: I think to be quilombola *you have to live here in Nazaré. Or in another* quilombo *like Bucala. And it's really good to live here. It's calm, there's a waterfall, and everyone takes care of everyone.*

Nayara: My grandma always says this is our place and we have to protect it because we are all one family. So it's living here with your family.

The *quilombola* movement brings in its conceptions values that have been historically constructed, such as respect for nature, for older people, and for traditions. In this context, it is considered that *quilombola* childhoods are marked by these values, especially as they are located in rural areas, where subsistence agriculture, daily contact with the land, and teachings related to environmental preservation constitute central formative experiences. The territory, therefore, is not only a physical space but also a place of belonging, memory, and meaning-making for the children.

The children pointed out that in the book *Bucala* there was a lot of nature and animals and discussed the positive relationship with the environment, showing strong identification with the natural elements present in the story, which was confirmed through their drawings. After presenting the place where the book's character lived, an activity was proposed in which the children would represent the place where they live. During the description of their drawings, recurring elements emerged, such as treehouses, rivers full of fish, waterfalls, and birds. These representations highlight the centrality of nature in the constitution of their identities and indicate a worldview shaped by their relationship with the natural environment, which directly aligns with the values of the *quilombola* movement and with an education committed to preservation, belonging, and the valorization of ancestral knowledge, as can be seen below.

Figure 2 – Leonardo's Drawing
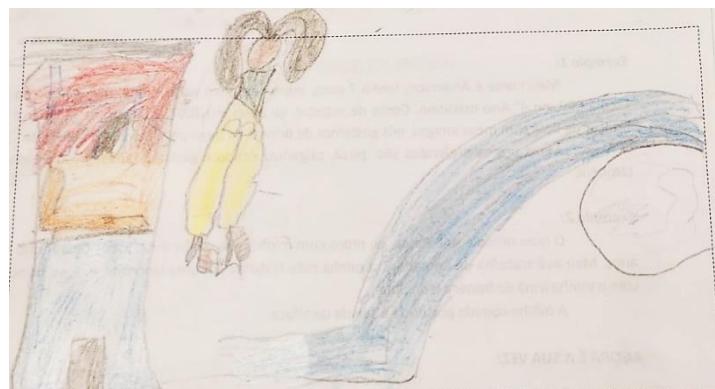
Source: Leonardo's production, Nazaré Community, Itapipoca – CE, 2022.

Figure 3 – Eduardo's Drawing

Source: Eduardo's production, Nazaré Community, Itapipoca – CE, 2022.

Figure 4 – Nimona's Drawing

Source: Nimona's production, Nazaré Community, Itapipoca – CE, 2022.

Drawing is a powerful form of communication for children. As Gomes (2009, p.31) states, "children's drawings acquire the dimension of a communication vehicle, facilitating the transmission of messages either alternatively or together with spoken language." In these drawings, we can see that the children's gaze highlights elements of the natural environment in which they are inserted. A child living in an urban center would hardly include rivers, fish, trees, and waterfalls in a drawing representing the place where they live.

Respect for what is offered through nature is fundamental in a *quilombola* community. From an early age, children come into contact with the knowledge of elders about agriculture, as well as in the school environment. The babaçu fruit, as well as its oil,

milk, flour, use in stews, and its importance in the community, are examples of local knowledge present in pedagogical practice.

The relationship with agriculture and understanding of planting also appears when Isadora reflects on her drawing. In dialogue with the researcher, the child demonstrates that she understands that the soil in her backyard is fertile.

Isadora: Olha, tia, aqui é minha casa, a grama, eu e uma árvore de morangos. No meu quintal tem muitas frutas!

Pesquisadora: E tem morango?

Isadora: Não, mas se plantar eu sei que nasce. Lá nasce de tudo!

Translation:

Isadora: Look, auntie, here is my house, the grass, me, and a strawberry tree. In my backyard there are many fruits!

Researcher: And are there strawberries?

Isadora: No, but if I plant it, I know it will grow. Everything grows there!

Figure 5 – Isadora's Drawing

Source: Isadora's production, Nazaré Community, Itapipoca – CE, 2022.

At a shared table, while producing drawings about the place where they lived, the children also shared pencils, crayons, erasers, and colored pencils. The following dialogue occurred:

Leonardo: Tem lápis cor de pele aqui?

Sofia: Tem!

Leonardo: Me empresta rapidão?

Sofia entregou um lápis marrom escuro

Leonardo encara o lápis e pergunta: Esse é cor de pele?

Sofia com um tom carregado de trivialidade difere: Óbvio!

Leonardo começa a pintar com o lápis sem demonstrar dúvida.

Translation*:*

Leonardo: Is there a skin-colored pencil here?

Sofia: Yes!

Leonardo: Can you lend it to me quickly?

Sofia handed him a dark brown pencil.

Leonardo: Is this skin color?

Sofia (with a matter-of-fact tone): Obviously!

Leonardo starts coloring with the pencil without showing any doubt.

By sharing school supplies and being in close contact, the children also share knowledge. In their own world with peers, children actively experience social reality in their daily lives, producing, acting, altering their own repertoire, and, as evidenced in the dialogue above, also acting upon others.

In research involving childhood, Gomes and Araújo (2023, p.16) encourage us to present children's experiences and their "creative and courageous ways of dealing with racist tactics. And highlight the experiences of these children as cultural and social subjects who create and recreate their existence."

The next book is titled *Escola de Chuva* by James Rumford, and it addresses the challenges of a school in Kelo, Chad, a country in Central Africa. The illustrations stand out by breaking the stereotypes commonly found in children's literature. Every year, the school is destroyed by heavy rains, so to be able to study, the children need to rebuild it.

Among bricks, clay, wood, and straw, daily learning occurs, and through collective effort, the classroom is reconstructed. Interestingly, in response to this story, the children focused on the role of older children guiding the younger ones. Some notable statements include:

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> *Eduardo*: Olha aí, os mais velhos lideram o caminho.
> *Vitória*: Todos são pretos, você viu? Por isso cuidam um dos outros.
> *Henrique*: Nimona também me ajuda!

Translation:
> *Eduardo: Look, the older ones lead the way.*
> *Vitória: They're all Black, see? That's why they take care of each other.*
> *Henrique: Nimona also helps me!*

These observations were connected to another moment recorded in our research. We witnessed acts of care among the children in the classroom, when older students help the younger ones with activities. Vitória and Henrique are siblings and, even with different ages, because it is a multigrade class, they study together. Vitória shows some difficulty with reading but constantly tries to help Henrique, who is in the literacy phase. When she notices that the researcher is watching, she says: *"He is younger, we have to help"*.

Even in a large open space for free play, where they do not need to group together, a type of organization is visible during playtime: the younger children want to be near the older ones, while the older children make decisions about what games to play or how to divide teams.

It is in this context that we observe that the *quilombola* children of Nazaré experience a rich and dynamic childhood, full of principles such as identity, equality, and solidarity. While enjoying the freedom of access to nature and pride in living there, they also understand and perpetuate the preservation and conscious use of natural resources.

By presenting family and community bonds as a foundation, as well as the schoolwork developed, the children are producing and reinforcing daily practices that break

stereotypes and challenge the perpetuation of silence and violence historically inflicted upon *quilombos*.

4 Final considerations

The school environment should be a space for deconstructing, in the collective imagination, a depreciative, unfavorable, and stereotype-laden history of the Black community. The children of the *quilombola* community of Nazaré demonstrate that they are constructing their *quilombola* and Black identities in positive ways and express vigorous pride in their place and ancestry. The uniqueness of learning experiences, supported by family and community bonds, strengthens these children's sense of belonging.

In their narratives, it is possible to perceive that elements such as the color of the character, the theme addressed, the represented environment, and emotional and subjective aspects are recognized by the children when engaging with literary books. Beyond this, self-identification in stories—whether in a character or the environment—reinforces the importance of representativeness and its significant contribution to the positive construction of children's self-esteem.

We believe that the literature present in classrooms cannot propagate the denial of Black, *quilombola*, or other ethnic cultural identification. However, two points cannot be overlooked in this context. The first refers to a country whose structure was built on processes of discrimination and control of certain racial and social groups. In this historical context, access to and production of children's books in Brazil were, for a long time, primarily used as instruments to reproduce and reinforce a bourgeois and Eurocentric perspective.

Highlighting the potential of literature for identity construction and the formation of an affirmative and positive racial consciousness, it becomes necessary to adopt an approach that presents other childhoods and considers the real diversity of Brazilian society. This approach should integrate individual and collective perspectives, recover the

past to demonstrate its relevance in the present and future, and dare to construct together with the children.

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