

Poverty, race and skin color: Perceptions and relationships among children at school

Maria de Fátima Salum Moreira¹; Deise Maria Santos de Aguiar²

Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, UNESP, Presidente Prudente, SP, Brazil

Abstract

Here are presented the results of a research whose objective was to analyze what were saying and how were acting poor and/or black boy(s) and girl(s) about unequal treatment, shaped by discrimination through mockery, swearing, derogatory nicknames, separations, among other things, experienced in school. These children were students from the 5th year of primary school, in a public school located in a mid-sized city in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil. It was intended to undertake an analysis of the practices of class and racial differentiation that hierarchize, discriminate and exclude certain children, performed by adults and/or by children themselves. The ethnographic study made use of their stories, a questionnaire about denomination and classification of color/race, answered by children in the classroom, socio-economic survey, observations of children in different school environments and semi-structured interview with children and teacher. Among other results, it was confirmed that, children that were black, black and brown, poor and with a history of educational failure, suffer bigger discrimination at school from teachers and other children. In addition it was found that even among those who are poor and or black, it takes place the building of borders for the distinction that each one makes of themselves in relation to others. Therefore, the research provided the acknowledgement of the diversity of positions related to the recognition that they make regarding their identification of race and class. When verifying how children's actions are mediated by school educational practices, we support that in such spaces it should be granted the conditions of possibilities for them to speak - and be heard - about their doubts and desires, about what they do and why they do it, in the relations between them. Finally, provide the emergence of their curiosities, imagination and inventiveness to, maybe, see the burst of something new in our world that strives for incompleteness.

Keywords: Children, Poverty, Race, School.

Closer of children: their eyes, our lenses

The purpose of this article is to present the results of research in education in which was investigated and discussed how children perceive and position themselves in relation to the school practices that differentiate, hierarchize and discriminate from the social and racial point of view, carried out among them or between them and the adults.

Unlike the prevalence of studies on childhood and children, this study started from the observation of their school routine, their own reports and actions. Therewith

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- 1 Professor collaborator at the Education Master's Program of UNESP/President Prudent and also, permanent Professor at the Postgraduate Program in Education of Unoeste, in Presidente Prudente. E-mail: fatimasalum@gmail.com
 - 2 Biology Professor, Pedagogue and School Director of São Paulo State public network. E-mail: deise.aguiar@uol.com.br

we shared from criticism to the understanding of children as human beings “in development” and/or without capacity and autonomy to draw up their own ways to look, think, act, contest and propose other ways to live and to relate. Contrariwise, we have used a methodology that conceives children as capable of peculiar symbolic productions, in addition to being competent to talk about themselves. We agree with Sarmiento and Pinto (1997), who consider them as social actors and culture agents that participate in structural construction of society. The authors emphasize:

The children gaze can reveal social phenomena that adult eyes leave in the shadow or obscure completely. Thus, interpret the social representations of children cannot be just a way of access to childhood as a social category, but to their own structures and social dynamics that are uncovered in the speech of children. (1997, p.25).

Sarmiento (2004) points out that, among the several generational groups, childhood is the one more deeply affected by poverty, since in the present world, there are more children than adults or elderly, living in a situation of poverty. Social changes that occur currently produce differentiated effects among the various generations. The childhood, taken as a social generational category, suffers these consequences in a particular mode and each child considered in his/her individuality is affected in different ways, as they are more or less poor, rich, boy or girl, white or black, Christian, Muslim or Buddhist, etc.

However, we highlight that, to presume the need to widen the understanding about how school education is involved with the production of inequality, we agree with Boaventura de Souza Santos, which states: “We have the right to be equal whenever the difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different every time equality mischaracterize us” (SANTOS, 2006, p. 316). This implies admitting that we are not talking about treating everyone and all homogeneously, as if were the same, since the cultural and personal difference is the founding characteristic of every social life.

With these premises, we have developed our studies and analyzes aiming to recognize how acted and what were saying to notice, think and feel boy(s) or girl(s) poor and/or black about discrimination, unequal treatment and exclusionary conducts experienced in school. These children were student(s) of the 5th year of basic education, in a public school located in a medium-sized town in the interior of the State of São Paulo. The choice of the class occurred in function of this group composition be representative of the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity that are presented in public schools and the acceptance by the children, parents and teachers. The main interest was to observe and analyze the practices of differentiation, both of class and racial, that were part of the school routine, placed by and among children themselves, as well as their reactions when they were in relation with the adults from school (AGUIAR, 2008). The study, of the ethnographic kind, made use of observations of children in different school environments, realization of a semi-structured interview with them and the teacher, reports of the daily routine of each one of them, questionnaire on denomination and classification of color/race which was answered in the classroom, survey of their life contexts outside of school.

The theme that we covered also entails the explicitness of conceptual assumptions related to “equality”, “difference” and “identity”, so that we have started from

the understanding that identities are mobile, various and are constituted in many contexts. In addition, they are founded at the crossroads of a range of socio-cultural markers - color/race, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexuality, socioeconomic condition, etc. - that are characterized, equally, by the diversity in its interior. Here, we remind Rutheford, who said in an interview:

The first element of reflection is that once what is being questioned is the possibility or the assumption that all forms of cultural diversity are liable to understand based on a particular universal concept, being it the one of 'humanity, class or race'. Why? Because any attempt to understand from a universal particular concept can be at once very dangerous and too limiting in the perception of the modes by which the cultural practices build their own signification systems and social organization. RUTHERFORD, 1996, p. 36 apud ABRAMOWICZ; OLIVEIRA, 2010, p.45).

With such foundations, we investigated the cultural and symbolic elements constitutive of the images that white and black children have built about themselves and about other children, while being part of the poor and/or black population. Therefore, we have questioned the relations lived in the school spaces, as these were distinguished by the gaze of the various children that were present there. Which practices, judgments and representations about the differences and social inequalities were expressing their gaze, attitudes and speeches? What would be the expressions of forms of differentiation and discrimination untangled there? How the children were acting and reacting, in the face of such occurrences?

Regarding the racial differences, Fazzi (2006) considers that it is in the socialization among children that beliefs and notions acquired will gain meaning for the relationship between them and the "other", "the different". Affirm that "[...] in these interactions among themselves, children are learning what does it mean to be of a racial category or another, creating and recreating the social significance of race" (FAZZI, 2006, p.218). Certainly, the same can be thought regarding the experiences of children in situations of poverty, emphasizing that how they identify themselves, differentiate and classify with respect to other people are variable and depend on their personal trajectories and of particular social contexts in which they are challenged and provoked. It is also important to highlight the malleability that characterizes such positions, bearing in mind that the subjects are in constant movement and transformation.

We have noted that discrimination, unequal treatment and the exclusion of poor and/or black children in the school system have been the theme of several studies. For decades these information are available in studies that present and discuss the issues related to childhood in the school setting: Rosenberg (1987), using the 1980 Census data and PNAD (National Survey by Domicile's Sample) of 1982, analyzed the school achievement of black and white children, verifying the inequality that invariably favors whites in detriment of blacks. According to the author, surveys show, since the decade of 1980, that the school that black and poor attend is not exactly the same school of whites and not poor, what leads her to the hypothesis that we would have a disguised racial segregation, difficult to perceive.

In addition, the research of Patto (1991), quite recognized in academia, problematized the conditions in which occurs the so-called school failure that affects mostly black children. Over the XXI century, studies like those of Cavalleiro (2000), Souza

(2002), Oliveira (2004) and Trinidad (2011) are focusing on the racial problems observed among children from 4 to 5 years and between them and the adults, in institutions of childhood education. Stands out, even, an interesting research in which Carvalho (2004) resized the analyzes previously made. The author concluded that the daily production of school failure reaches a higher percentage of boys than girls, being them, in general, blacks and/or poor. In her interpretation, the differences in the school achievement between boys and girls are quite associated with the inequalities of class, gender, race or color.

In this research, the concept of poverty is conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon and inter-related, so that their understanding should take into account as much the economic and social contexts as the diversity of cultures and the innumerable factors that vary as a function of questions such as age, gender, race, sexuality, nationality. According to Vêras (1999), poverty can be understood as the deprivation of employment, of ways to participate in the market as a consumer, lack of well-being, of rights, freedom, hope and other factors that are essential to a life with dignity. The author also emphasizes that

[...] poverty receives, today, a moral dimension, not offering more alternative not even the remote possibility of social ascension. Even if there is certain relativism in the demarcation between rich and poor, there seems to be a condemnation irretrievable to poverty, what makes the poor to prefer not to recognize themselves as such. (VÉRAS, 1999, p. 38).

In turn, we use the concept of “social race” according to the conception of Guimarães (2003), that is, in its sociological dimension, which is characterized as a construct and form of social identification, which, although being based on a false biological explanation, is quite effective in production, maintenance and social reproduction of differences and privileges. Therefore, the author affirms that

[...] the construction based on physiognomic traits, of phenotype or genotype, is something that has not the slightest scientific support. In other words, races are, scientifically, a social construction and should be studied by a proper branch of sociology or of social sciences that treat the social identities. We can say that ‘races’ are effects of speeches. [...] are speeches about the origins of a group, that use terms that refer to the transmission of physiognomic traits, moral qualities, intellectuals, psychological, etc., by blood (fundamental concept to understand races and some essences). (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 96).

We have observed that the racial classification drawn up by people support itself not only in appearance (considering phenotype, such as skin color or hair type) and in ascendancy but also in socioeconomic condition, being, therefore, fluid and variable, with the possibility to overpass the color line through the combination between appearance and social status. Thus, it is evident the influence of a fluid and variable racial classification in the demarcation of racial differences and inequalities. In this study, we adopted the classification by color based on the categories used by the IBGE: white, brown, black, yellow and indigenous.

To carry out this analysis and recognize what were the meanings they attributed to their school experiences, in relation to the racial and poverty questions, we made use of the theorizations proposed by the historians Roger Chartier and Michel de Certeau. Chartier (1990) emphasizes that it is in the daily routine that the practices

and representations are created, recreated and improvised. Certeau (1994, p. 41), in his turn, elucidates the processes with which the senses to the social ordering are daily reinvented (tactics of dominated), under several forms, by those who are imprisoned in networks of “vigilance” and power (strategies of the dominants). Finally, we consider the perspective of discourse analysis of Bakhtin (2006) that alert to the various voices that cross it, signaling for the importance of extra-verbal contexts, at wording analysis.

The word with children: when difference is transformed into inequality

When seeking the “word” of children or, yet, to “give voice to children”, we could verify that the meaning of what they say to think, do or feel was not exempt of other voices’ presence with whom they share the experience of social life, including the voice of the researchers. We cannot assume ourselves as innocents, therefore, in relation to what tells us Walter Benjamin (1995), when dealing with the distance between the narrator and the one who seeks to translate him, since these will be resubmitted by him with a submission of his own theoretical and political sieve, founded on the very questions that he proposes to life (CABICEIRA; MOREIRA, 2007).

The investigated public school attended approximately 1,000 students of Elementary and high school, in morning and afternoon shifts, with reasonable operating conditions, compared to other teaching units of the Municipality. The children focalized in this research were frequenting school in the morning period, being 12 boys and 14 girls. In its Quadrennial Management plan, was written: “[...] the neighborhood has little infrastructure and the socioeconomic and cultural context is disadvantaged: the shortage is explicit and the scenario is of social and juvenile vulnerability”.

The following children participated of the interviews: 1) Adriana, black, the only girl in class with darker skin, very poor, with family income of R\$ 150,00; 2) Tânia, brown, with lighter skin than Adriana’s and family income of R\$ 700,00; 3) Marina, brown and, among the 4th grade children studied is the one that has greatest family income declared - R\$ 1.400,00; 4) Miriam, white and with family income of R\$ 600,00; 5) Renan, brown, with family income of R\$ 845,00; 6) Diogo, brown, with family income of R\$ 380,00; 7) Renato, white, with family income of R\$200,00. The classification of color/race cited above is from children and the characterization of their economic condition as more or less poor is the one perceived by the researcher. Children were selected considering, in the first place, their concordance and desire to participate. Also was taken into account the economic condition and color perception - black, brown and white. They were yet those who were observed living situations of discrimination during the research.

At first sight, the socioeconomic condition of children was very homogeneous, since all came from low-income families. However, as we approach them, and each of them, we soon found that, even among the poorest children, were seen differences and economic inequalities that even when subtle, have induced unequal relationships and consequently different treatments among them and between them and adults. There, where all children have an economic situation quite disadvantaged, we could observe inequality between the unequal.

In front of me are Adriana and Tânia [black and brown, respectively as declared]. In my perception, both are black and by the appearance, I would say they are quite poor. I can notice by their shabby clothes, footwear and school supplies. Tânia brings several stumps of pencils and pens in a ripped plastic baggie and Adriana does not have even this. Tânia does not know how to read or write. Spends all the time drawing. It is cold, at 7.30 a.m. at this June morning, but Tânia is with havaiana sandals, well worn, in feet. (D.C. Jun. - 07).

Among children, such particularities were extremely valued. All were poor, but some were considered more poor than others, since other cultural marks were associated to them, depending on the life context of each one and of those who classify them. This is, in terms of being perceived as black or brown, good or bad student(s), boys or girls. During the interview, Renato, white boy on his perception, has made the following considerations:

- Who do you think is poor in your classroom?
[...]Adriana, because she has a house that is behind... Like in a wasteland and in the front is all full of grass, those things... Where she lives there is some kind of shed... She lives near my house. Nobody likes her, I think. Because she is somewhat poor... Her clothes are kind of ripped, like this. I think Diogo and Alex too. (Renato, Sept. 2007).

In addition, when asked if he was poor, Renato said: “[...] just a little because my house is made of wood”. Renato, as well as other children, delimits borders to constitute his identity. He does not consider himself poor as Adriana, because his house is different from hers and he does not use ripped clothes. As in school, the greater part of students are poor and black or brown; the kids use some demarcations for individual and group differences. Thus, for these children, who lives in a masonry house has more status than the one who lives in a wooden house. Those who come to school better dressed or have the lighter skin also are considered more by others.

To Marina, brown according to her perception, Diogo is poor, “because Diogo’s mother goes through the houses asking for food”, and, when questioned about her socioeconomic condition and who would be black in her class, she replied:

I do not think that I am poor, because I have a house to live, I have no difficulty like this of anything, my mother gives me almost everything I want.
- Who do you think is black in your class?
Adriana, Diogo and Rafael.

Also Tânia, brown according to her perception, stated that Diogo and Adriana are poor and black.

- Who do you think is poor in your class?
Diogo, once in a while comes with the same clothes, comes badly dressed... I do not know! Cannot know, but he is more or less poor. And Adriana. I have already been at her house. Teacher wanted to give gel for her, I do not want. I am not needing, if I want I buy.
- Are you poor?
Ah, I am not! Diogo and Adriana are, but not poor, poor, poor. More or less.

In relation to the color attribution, children were, initially, asked about their color/race through an open and direct question: “What is your color?”. The outcome was as follows: 19% or 5 children declared themselves as white; 4% or 1 child declared herself as brown; 8% or 2 children declared themselves as light brown; 23% or 6 children declared themselves as brunet; 12% or 3 children declared themselves as dark brown; 15% or 4 children declared themselves as mulatto; 4% or 1 child declared herself as “skin color” and 15% or 4 children did not attend, on the day of question application.

Then the children received a paper with the question “What is your color?” and alternatives according to the IBGE classification - white, brown, black, yellow, indigenous. They responded as follows: 14 brown, 1 black, 5 white, 1 indigenous; 4 were not present at the application moment, and 1 child did not sign any alternative, preferring to write on paper that was brunet.

We observed that those who identify themselves by different skin color tones, regarding their color, using the open question, declared themselves brown, when questioned at the IBGE model. On the other hand, children who declared themselves white did it, when using both questions proposals. According to children, we have obtained 54% of brown children, 19% white, 4% black, 4% indigenous and 15% undeclared, as they were not present in the application of the questions.

In the face of the various color classifications exposed above, it is worth to emphasize the observation made by Piza and Rosemberg (2002, p. 104) that since it is a relation, when we classify the other, we must consider our characteristics and how we classify ourselves. The children heard in the research regarding their racial belonging, when questioned about their color and/or race, presented a multiple racial classification mode and highlighted the term *brunet* as their self-declaration of color. For some children, the terms *black* and *negro* are understood as negative classification forms, being, thus, devalued. Diogo, a boy that classify himself as dark brown, when asked if there was someone negro and/or black in his class, replied:

Nobody... Thus, there is brunet people like me. I am not black, I am brunet. There is brunet people. Tânia is brunette. Call someone negro is very ugly, right? There are people that don't say negro, they say black. I think it is a lack of education, because there is some that calls Adriana, Tânia and even I black, huh? There is some that say: “get out of here, you black, little nigger *sarará*”. Just that we (sic) say it to the teacher and she tells us (sic) to go report at the police station. (Diogo, Aug./2007).

Marina, girl who identified herself as mulatto, when responding the opened question about color/race, declared herself as brown, among the IBGE options; when asked during the interview on who would be black in her class answered: “Adriana, Diogo, Rafael and I”. However, during an activity in the school yard where were present several children, teachers and some mothers and fathers invited, while the children, were sitting, waiting for the beginning of the activity, some boys began to imply with Adriana, calling her *toasted bread*, due to her skin color. Marina, sitting just ahead Adriana, entered the “game”, as they said, and started to call Adriana as *toasted bread* and laughed a lot, along with her colleagues. Adriana, very upset, snapped back: “Why are you calling me toasted bread? You have the same color as I!” Marina, with air of disdain, answered: “I do not! I am not black”.

3 Sarará is a pejorative terminology that refers to black people whose hair is frizzy with shades of blond or red (Author's note).

This fact led us to question the perception and the feeling of racial belonging of this child, that is, in the sense that, depending on the context, she classifies herself in one way or another. In the midst of other children and adults who were around, on that occasion - some mothers, the teacher, the researcher - Marina has not admitted to have the same color of Adriana, that classifies herself as black and who is perceived like that also by her colleagues. However, in other moments, she classifies herself differently. We believe that Marina, as well as other children, understands differently the associations commonly made between the categories color and race. Marina does not perceive herself as black, but with a color lighter than Adriana and therefore classifies herself as mulatto or brown. Nevertheless, when it was used the word black to ask who was like this in her class, Marina probably understood it not as color, but as a race, because she declared herself black, as well as Adriana. These are reflections that demand many investigations because, faced with such situation experienced by Marina, it is evident also the relational character of racial identities as expressed by Piza and Rosenberg (2002) and quoted also by Carvalho (2005): “[...] the ceaseless exchange between the gaze of oneself and the gaze of the other that (in)form the field of racial identity”.

Therefore, the idea of color while “[...] metaphor triggered to demarcate differences and inequalities based on race” (CARVALHO, 2005), allows the understanding of difficulties presented by some children and observed during this study, at the moment of deciding what were their color/race. Some children asked the researcher what were their color or what they should put as a response. Paulo, when answering the question with the IBGE options, asked if he could write another thing, being oriented to put the color that he thought he was. Paulo wrote skin color. Renato, a white boy, without oriental features - in our perception -, when asked about who was white in his class, during the interview, replied as follows:

- Who do you think is white in your class?
- Ah! Lucas and Alex.
- And you are not?
- I am not. I am a yellow kind. The family of my father is Spanish and my mother Italian.

Regarding the relationships experienced by the children in school, we highlight some events verified during the permanence with them. We questioned about their conviviality with boys and girls from the class, if they would like to change something and, if so, what they would change. They also answered about their relation with the teacher. The two girls recognized as black by their colleagues - Adriana and Tânia - declared that relations with the boys and girls of the class are not good, since both are victims of games, of which they do not like, such as: slapping, discriminatory nicknames, name-calling, mockery and maltreatment, involving even their relatives. Coincidentally, the two girls cited a colleague called Paulo as being the single friend with whom they relate well. Paulo is the boy who declared himself as *skin color*, quite poor, with low school performance, according to the professor. Quiet, remained always isolated in his place, seated, alone, very obliging - helped the teacher in various tasks, but participated little in learning activities. Paulo is part of a small group, along with Adriana, Tânia and Diogo. The four colleagues were always together, despite Paulo and/or Diogo having a disagreement sometimes

with the two girls. These, as well as others boys of the class, made jokes that they dislike, especially Adriana, who, sometimes, was called *toasted bread* and *volcano's hair*, in reference to her color and hair, respectively.

Sitting at the table, in the snack time, children are eating bread with mortadella and drinking juice. The four friends are together. Sitting next to them, I note the scene. Diogo, black, jokingly, talks about Adriana's hair and, calling her *toasted bread*, says: "You *toasted bread*! Tidy up your hair, girl!" He provokes, in high tone: "Leave this hair there, spiky!" The others laugh. Adriana retorts, saying that he is a dog tied in a chain.

Tânia caught two breads. While savoring one, the other is on the table. Adriana puts the hand in her bread and call her greedy, for having picked up two. Tânia says that Adriana should take out "her fat paws of dog" from her bread. Paulo, who until then was quiet, eating his snack, also mocks Adriana of *toasted bread*. The four continue to repeat these name-calling, whose target is Adriana, while they eat their snacks. Having finished, they come out together and walk to sit on the stairs that give access to the main building and stay there, talking and laughing.

In my class, Raul keeps calling Adriana of *monkey*... He and Victor. And Vítor is mocking her as *little nigger of hard hair*. (D.C., Jul. 2007).

- Would you like to change something in the relations with other children?

"Ah! Mainly with Daniel and Vitor... If they were nice! Because they like to mock the mother of the others. The mother of Adriana, because she works at the dumping ground. But she doesn't work there. She brings things from there. And they mock Adriana". (Tânia, Oct. 2007).

Similarly to Adriana and Tânia, Marina, brown, declared also to not relate well with the classmates, for similar reasons, that is, because boys hit, mock and mistreat the girls. During the interview, Marina declared:

Thus, there are some colleagues that I like and some that I do not get along well. I would like to make everyone be my friend and everybody to be friends with everybody. The boys are rude, because they keep beating at the girls, mistreating the girls (Jul. 2007).

Miriam, white, by her turn, says that she has many friends among her classmates, but also not failed to mention that some boys "mess" with the girls, hit, swear and provoke. According to Miriam, "[...] they mock, and say: Hot! They use bad language. The teacher does not listen, but, when she does, she brawls with them". (Miriam, Oct. 2007).

The two boys interviewed expressed the conflicts that permeate their relations both with boys as with girls. Renan appoints the boys that are involved in conflicts of quarrelsome, and the girls of loudmouth, words indicative of a more rigorous judgment about girls, whose reactions in the fight moments are analyzed in function of practices considered as proper or inappropriate for women. Other testimonials, however, highlight actions of good coexistence and how they value and appreciate the friendships.

- How do you see the behavior of the boys of your class? And of the girls?

There are some boys who are quarrelsome, others are not. There are some girls who are loudmouth, others are not (Renan, Oct. 2007).

- How is your relationship with your classmates?

I think is good... I talk only with Adriana, with Paulo and with Tânia and Renato, Lucas and Renan. Because it is like this... They want (sic) be always stuck-up, be rich, right? It is also like: nobody is rich here. Only God is rich. [...] the majority of the boys from the class is very annoying and also want to make believe they are rich. (Diogo, Oct. 2007).

Although being important for the children the good reception by the colleagues and the personal valuation, we noticed that Tânia, Diogo, Renan and, specially, Adriana, which carry the stigma for being identified as black(s), for having darker skin, are at the mercy of perceptions and relations that mark them in a socially different place. Became evident, therefore, the conflictive relations between boys and girls where both are black, or between black(s) and white(s), guided by prejudices and racial discrimination, in addition to being crossed by the differentiation based on their criteria of distinction between poverty and wealth.

When living with the children, observing them and listening to them, we have concluded that, when the black girls - black and brown - present their arguments to explain why they do not get along well with their classmates and what they would do, if they could change something in these relations, in reality, what they really crave is to be accepted by their colleagues and to not suffer with the discriminations that happen in school, due to the color of their skin and hair type.

Miriam, white, declared that do not want to change nothing in the relations with her classmates and said to have many friends, despite getting upset with the boys, in some moments, as quoted previously. In this sense, we observed that, while the white girl declares to have many friends, the black girls practically have no friends in the group, being, only two boys - one black and poor like them and the other white, poor and with low school performance - raised to the category of colleagues. The brown girl, in her turn, when saying that she would like to change the relations, making everybody as her friend, make it evident that she also has few friends there, as well as the girls perceived as black by the others.

The children and the teacher: “Gives the impression that you feel yourselves outside the class. You both are in a world that is not of the class!”

The presence and the speeches of the teacher are highlighted in this section always in function of demonstrating the actions and reactions of children, when in relation with her. Discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes noticed in her attitudes, being so routine and usual, indicate that she does not perceive neither reflects on their effects.

During the interviews, the children reported some facts involving the teacher, as equally observed by the researcher, which indicated the discontent of student(s) regarding how she treated them. We have resumed some testimonials from students, as well as records made in the field diary, during the observations.

Adriana...I have already been to her house...I do not know... Teacher wanted to give gel for her, I do not want... I do not (sic) need...if I want, I buy it. (Tânia, Sep. 2007).

[...] it is such as Adriana... Teacher used to say because every time she comes with the hair of that size for school... “Adriana, you need to brush your hair before you come to school...”, Then the teacher even gave her a gel to pass,

right? Then she said: “Adriana, behave yourself...” because Adriana is always laughing... That high laugh of hers... One day she laughed and the teacher was at the blackboard... She and Tânia were talking... The teacher turned and said a lot for her. (Diogo, Sep. 2007).

At this moment, the door opens and arrives teacher Maria. The children scream loud. A girl runs to embrace her. A boy as well. She reciprocates the embrace. Both are white. Deborah, white, tells to the teacher that Adriana and Tânia have discussed. Then the teacher makes the correction of an activity on the blackboard. Adriana raises her notebook and says: I have finished teacher! Says it three times but teacher Maria does not give attention to her. Adriana then says the answers of her exercise, as the teacher goes by correcting the questions on the blackboard. However, her voice is overlapped by Deborah’s voice that speaks louder her answers to the teacher, who writes them on the blackboard. Adriana loses her interest and starts playing with Diogo, through signs. (D.C., Jun. 2007).

The teacher talks with Tânia: “Are you kidding?” That is why you became like this without knowing how to read! (D.C., Jun. 2007).

Adriana burped high, without wanting to. Some children heard and laughed. Tânia calls the teacher sort of complaining about it, but in a low voice. It does not seemed to me that she had the intention to make herself heard, in fact. However, the teacher realized what was happening, interrupted what she was doing and erupted speaking quite annoyed and in a high tone. “I do not want to know, Tânia! This is not our conversation, now! Say it, Tânia, now! What is it that is happening that you interrupted the lesson? For me to give attention to the crap are you doing there? Since the first day of class, you have changed nothing! It gives the impression that you feel yourselves outside of the class. You both are in a world that is not of the class! Out of class...” (D.C., Jul. 2007).

On another occasion, Adriana had been missing the classes for several days and, thus, when questioned about the reason for the non-attendance of the student, the teacher declared:

She is like that; sometimes she gets clothes, comes all tidy, and sits here in the front... Stinky! Does not take a shower, I think. Nor at night and nor in the morning. Nobody bear it. Then, she goes there to the back and, then, starts to miss. (Teacher, Sep./2007).

Questioned about having seen already any child being treated differently by their peers, the teacher has declared that the children were grouped according to similar characteristics and, for her, the student(s) did this naturally, that is, she has considered that the children were treated differently and, therefore, they met with similar pairs. “There is the group composed by black children, for example.” “There are no conflicts therefore”, the teacher declared. “The students remain in groups with similar characteristics and work well” (E., Aug. 2007). Contradicting her own statements, when asked if she had already seen, any child treated differently for being black, the teacher said: ‘No, in this school there are many blacks, what make it unfeasible the discrimination by the black color’. Again, we have noticed that the maintenance of exclusionary and discriminatory behaviors can occur in an unnoticed way, seen that teachers have internalized particular representation systems that were not problematized nor even in their professional training, so that they remain distant from reflections able of transform their understandings of the world.

During classes, we recorded several situations where teacher interventions were made in a diversified form, when it came to deal with black and/or brown children, poor and with low school performance. We remind that these children were identified as poor as well by other children due to the ripped and dirty clothing they used. The white and/or brown, with better economic conditions and better school performance, were addressed with more attention and praise, friendly conversations, affectionate gazes, games and, occasionally, by physical contact, through hugs, kisses and care, evidencing affection.

Conversely, black children, brown and poor were treated with attitudes somewhat unfriendly, inhibitory, without praises, without affectionate gazes, without games, without friendly conversations and without physical contact, cuddles or hugs. Adriana and Tânia, of darker skin and poor, received less attention of the teacher. Adriana, besides being black and poor, presented low school performance, while Tânia, in the worst situation, did not read nor wrote - was not literate. Renato, white, indicated as the best student, the smarter, was praised and admired by the teacher who, when talking with him, showed affection and esteem, as occurred with the best female students in the class, white or, at best, brown, with lighter skin.⁴

Marina, brown, when answering the same question, stated that she likes most "the way that she treats us, because it is a more educated way". Renato, white, has declared to like "her way of explain things, the subjects". Renan, black, stated to like most "her kindness because she teaches a lot of things, but only once." "And, does not like when she screams loud". Diogo, black, said to like "the way she gives the lessons, corrects the notebooks and speaks as well... Because she talks stressing the 'r' in the tongue". And "what he likes less is when she tells them to shut up". Draws attention this pronouncement of Diogo, by the detail that refers to the voice of the teacher. He does not like when she screams loud - which recalls the aggressive tone of voice. But what "he likes most" is her way of talking, "sort of stressing the 'r' in the tongue".

Adriana made it clear her displeasure, since said, for her, that everything should change in the school, from director to the teacher, of which she declared to not like, "because she is very angry". Tânia revealed also that she did not like anything in her teacher and, when asked about the reason, refused to answer, declaring only "because". The two girls made it evident their negative feelings in the face of the hostile experiences that hit them and the others classmates, when treated by the teacher with screams and aggressive or harsh words. It is appropriate to remember that such situations can generate low self-esteem and/or antipathy, discouraging the interest for learning.

In the first hours of the day, Tânia was quiet, lying above the desk arm and not unusually, with closed eyes, would even take some naps, but when someone messed with her, would be angry. She herself said that was grumpy in the morning... around 9h, Tânia would open her notebook and start drawing. Regardless of the lesson taught; the book indicated by the teacher was open on the desk and she remained drawing in her notebook. Sometimes, Tânia, as well as other children, placed the book standing for the teacher to do not see that she was doing something else - in her case, sketching. (DC, Jun. 2007).

4 These results are added to those who were also obtained in the research of Cavalleiro (2001, p. 147).

The children, contrary to what the teacher thinks, did not like when she screamed or was angry with them. In certain occasion, the teacher confided, “they do not care if you are mad at them. They are insensitive. I do not know what happens with them” (D.C., Sep. 2007). During the children’s speeches, it was possible to identify a critical understanding about the teacher attitudes, regarding the boys and girls perceived as blacks, as, for example, when Tânia reports the fact that teacher gave gel for Adriana to pass in her hair and she said that “did not want”, “did not need”; or when Diogo said that the teacher keeps telling Adriana to fix her hair.

When the teacher called the attention of Adriana, to fix her hair, even bringing gel to her, intentionally or not, she was disregarding a characteristic inherent of the black race, that is, the frizzy hair. Not that Adriana could not have the hair tidied with gel or without it, but the practice adopted by the teacher made it suppose to the children that the frizzy hair was ugly, clumsy, at the same time that emphasized another type of hair. The particular characteristics of the children were not valorized, once the differences between them were considered from the existing ideals of homogeneity and normality. So it is with the frizzy hair of Adriana, with the behavior of some girls taken as chatty and minx, with the boy seen as delicate or with the girl which, when coming “very good-looking”, in the teacher understanding, provoke the boys and still want to brawl with them, that is, the “blame” is of the girl. According to reports of the children, the teacher is who indicates more the bad behavior of the girls, nominating them and assigning them gender meanings that are repeated by them. In them, the girls are seen as “minx” and “sexualized”.

Beatriz is the more minx of the class. These days the teacher quarreled with her. Like this, because she stays playing around with the boys. She and some other girls, only that the other girls are not (sic) nor saint, they play (sic) because Beatriz calls them and after like, to do not undo the friendship, right? Then Beatriz remains playing at the break time, playing with the boys... Some days there is only her in the middle of several boys. Like this, she remains, running with the boys. She sits near a lot of boys. I also know that the right thing for her was to stay in the midst of girls, is it not? Ah, because the teacher has already argued with her because of this... That this cannot be. (Diogo, Oct. 2007).

The desks are occupied by pairs of boys and girls. Rita says something for the teacher about a boy. The boy says: “Shut your mouth!” to who Rita retorts: “Come make me shut!” The teacher does not intervene... Comments loud: “Rita comes very good-looking to school.” (D.C. Jun. 2007).

Of the boys, I think Artur is the most handsome. Like, I think he is handsome, but he is a bit weird. He has a way like... He does not behave like a man. It is because he is blond, whiter and he has blue eyes. Ah! I do not know! Like... He is a bit delicate. (Marina, Oct. 2007).

The situations described unveil prospects that are constituted in the midst of standards and rules of sociability both school as non-school. However, in school, children were found gathered, and it is in the context of their interactions that the models of identity and binaries of gender and body are learned, reinforced, monitored and controlled. As already observed in other studies of one of the authors (MOREIRA; SANTOS, 2004), the actions of school indiscipline of girls are associated with “sauciness and early sexuality”, while the non-correspondence to a given body style, both of girls as of boys, leads to the suspicion regarding their sexualities (MOREIRA; CUNHA, 2008).

The control of the teacher on children happens even in moments in which they could have freedom to play, at the break-time or at other free times from school tasks. By their turn, the children themselves, repeating the posture of adults, exercised control over each other, reporting to teacher the behaviors and games seen as inconvenient or unfit for boys or girls. In the class, the teacher called the attention of those children who behaved badly at the break-time. And the girls, mainly, received sermons because they were playing around with boys, running after the boys or giving trouble to the inspectors, when they should, according to the teacher, stay seated and well behaved as the girls should be. Thus, customarily, perhaps because they do not had greater freedom to decide what they wanted to do, in their free time, some children extended their times of playing and exercise their creativity and imagination for the time in which “they should” exercise their duty of student in the classroom (HOFMANN, 2015). Therefore, have performed games where they represented imaginary situations, allowing to emerge the uniqueness of their wishes and desires.

Rolled up the shirt and put it inside the sweatshirt, giving it the shape of an imaginary baby, then straightened it in her arm and started to swing. After lay down the imaginary baby on her thighs, hidden by the desk, so that the teacher would not see it. She tried to catch the pink cap of her colleague, to put it at one end of that mix of wrap and baby, simulating its head, but Marina did not let. Marina also plays with her pencil case covered with a shirt, as if it was a baby, and takes the cap that Bete wanted and put it on her baby. Marina leaves her imaginary baby on the desk, while Bete puts it on her lap. Bete finally begins to write, but every now and then, takes the baby in the arm and rock it without the teacher noticing. (D.C. Jun. 2007).

Next to me, Diogo and Paulo are playing, each in his desk, with their materials (pencil, eraser, sharpener, covers of pens, little bits of colored crayon) as if each piece was part of an imaginary army, with troops positioned for the attack. I asked Diogo of what they were playing and he explained to me that it was of soldier. (D.C., July. 2007).

The actions and reactions of children are different. We noticed how they position themselves, react, attack and defend themselves, demonstrating their satisfaction, displeasure, concordances, disagreements and desires. In these moments, they make use of their visibility and “disturb” the school environment. In others, however, their reactions are in another way: silent, hidden and quiet, hiding themselves behind books to draw, sleeping, playing with each other, disguisedly, inventing toys and imaginary worlds. While runs the class proposed by the teacher, they seek to remain invisible in the classroom. Even if does not have this same understanding of such occurrences, with her way of expressing herself, the teacher have corroborated with the ascertainment of such fact: “It gives the impression that you feel yourselves outside of the class. You both are in a world that is not of the class! Out of class...”

What is observed is a tension field that characterize the field of social relations either in childhood or in another phase of life. As suggested by Abramowicz, Rodrigues and Cruz (2011), what bothers, in schools, is the difference that insists on making itself visible, disrupt and derange the educational ideal that is guided by the idea of fixed identities, unique and homogeneous.

Final considerations: the difference and the inequality in the life of different children

Considering that the group investigated has particular characteristics and, therefore, what we have observed do not generalize for all children, this research allowed us to understand that children, regardless of color/race: 1) say that they come to school to learn, to play, find friend(s) and also to have a better future, that prepare them for work; 2) The children know exactly what the teacher expects of them: “to do everything right”, “to copy everything right”, “to behave”, “to do it by themselves”, “to do not quarrel” etc.; 3) the children that are black, black and brown, poor and with histories of school failure suffer more discrimination in school, also from their colleagues; 4) the pattern of beauty desired by black children corresponds to the white man and woman, which is valued equally by the white child; 5) the color/race for black and brown children has a relative and variable character; 6) regardless of the color/race and/or social class, boys and girls interviewed demonstrated to have similar perceptions of race/color.

Look for the school relations, using lenses focused on race/color and poverty markers, as they were realized in the daily lives of boys and girls in a single classroom, made it possible to observe more carefully how different children cope with practices that involve those differences. We have noticed that they stimulated as much unequal and hierarchical relationships among children, as provoked multiple reactions toward the reinvention of school routine. Besides, as indicated, children manifested a particular way of dealing with conflicts.

It became clear that the discriminations, comments and different glances about the racial belonging, about the cultural singularities and their expressions in the body and aesthetics of blacks are challenges faced by children in the daily life of our schools. Such characterization complete itself with the manifestations of poverty situations, because in general, they are poor and black: homelessness, hygiene, lack of access to consumer goods etc. It is also conspicuous how much they are not heard or considered, in the several institutional spaces that they inhabit, including the school.

Boundaries were observed to mark and distinguish the identifications of race/class among children that were white, black and brown and among those with worse or better economic and social conditions of life, perceiving the use of varied hierarchy criteria: who has a brick house is less poor than those with a wooden house, for example; or the one with lighter skin will be well accepted among the children themselves. According to Renato, Adriana is poor because her house is a shack, while he would be less poor because his house is wood. At last, children themselves reaffirm the inequalities according to differences that they establish between the cultural and material conditions existing among them.

Given these findings, we believe that the differences and inequalities established in the interactions among the children and between them and the adults allow different arrangements, according to each situation experienced at the school environment, which proves the idea that there is no unique, fixed and homogeneous identity.

The subjectivity processes of social actors are constituted in a multiple and flexible way and in line with the particularity of the contexts in which they occur, in a

way that the children appropriate themselves of the prevalent standards of normality, using the cultural elements and personal resources at their disposal.

In view of this, when provoked, the children participants in this study sometimes resisted and answered, returning the insults, sometimes they gave up arguing and sought invisibility. Anyhow, in the interviews, they attested the desire of change in the relations lived in school. They resisted and reinvented the representations, refusing the subjection and indicating new possibilities of life.

To deny that they live in conditions so helpless, humiliating and exclusionary is one of the answers that the children offer to provocations, indifference or disregard. In turn, the teasing due to poverty signs, the color of skin and the hair provoked as well reprisals, rematches and aggression. This occurred, however, in the context of everyday living where, usually, they played with each other through provocations, mockeries and challenges. Therefore, many times, they were fighting and right after talking and laughing together. Although they reveal to perceive already the socio-cultural diversity since childhood education, as some researches have pointed out, this is an interesting characteristic that deserves to be further examined, since it can be found there loopholes for the understanding of particularities of the leading role and of children actions, taking into account that childhood experiences are often marked by playfulness, imagination and inventiveness.

While some children demonstrate to realize their ethnic/racial belonging, most of them do not recognized themselves as black and poor and suffer quietly the embarrassing situations that they live. Adriana is a case that reveals the exercise of acceptance/accommodation and resistance in the same person. She makes herself clear, reacting and imposing herself when she is provoked by her classmates or, yet, takes the hidden form, when she seems to give up of what is offered to other children and not for her, in the classroom. Facing the colleagues when they made fun of her, Adriana did not deny her color/race. Adriana quarrels, defend herself, attack, impose herself, in several moments - reveals resistance, does not accept passively. Her color is that, her hair is that, however, even Adriana, at some moments, seemed to feel defeated and remained quiet. To give up and become "invisible" is also Tânia's strategy who hides behind the notebook to draw. Both give up on getting the attention of the teacher with their participation and build other field of relations in the class, definitely leaving that one determined by the teacher.

All these data are important to know better the schooling process of these children, since it determines priority models of social identification in detriment of other possibilities of being, feeling and thinking. Adults tend to ignore the symbolic differences, based on color and poverty marks, which prevail in the daily relations of school. The teacher, of the 5th grade, in the face of the conflict, the name-calling and discriminations, appealed for equality principles on the grounds that they were all equal, had the same rights, that no one was better than the other, as well as to recourse to Christian principles. In a place where the organization should be completely committed with the education of children and youth, educators do not have time to discuss and think about the meaning of their own practices.

We have concluded that, to elaborate discussions and proposals for school education, racial relations and others, it is important to reflect on the validity of providing a "fine listening" of what have said and think teacher(s) and student(s) about relations and social distinctions, with emphasis not only on race and class, but also in other

social markers that are associated with them. It is also relevant that we let emerge the potentialities and limits of the conceptual and theoretical field, which mark out our view in the search for the understanding of social phenomena. Especially with regard to children, we want to reaffirm the importance of building possibility conditions so they can talk about their doubts and desires, about what they do and why they do it in the relations between them. Lastly, providing the emergence of their curiosity, imagination and inventiveness to, maybe, see the burst of something new in our world that strives for incompleteness. This motivates to think on how operate the representations about the “other”, the “different”, it implies to understand that it is not only to “respect or tolerate” the multiple and irreducible differences. We refer to the political understanding, since the potentiation of differences and its malleability can be the shortest way to advance toward other forms of life, fairer and less hierarchical. If it is up to the school the formative role of the social, political, ethical and affective points of view, such categories should also be continuously discussed and reviewed. We crave for a school that is challenging, in the sense of bringing out the critical and creative capacities of both adults and children, which enable the reinvention of life in all aspects, in the present and in the future.

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