



The Processes of Insertion and Sociability of Haitian Migrant Children in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The number of children, both accompanied and unaccompanied, currently crossing international borders in search of humanitarian refuge, has increased significantly in the last few decades of the Twenty-first Century. In Brazil, the presence of Haitian migrant children cannot be ignored, as, in addition to the lack of public policies, they are also victims of racism and xenophobia. Schools face a massive impact of migration, which alters their social structure. Often, the school community is not adequately prepared to cater for these children, as is the case with some schools in the Brazilian municipality of Balneário Camboriú. This research, which is linked to the Postgraduate Program in Education at the University of Vale do Itajaí, initially aims to investigate how Haitian migrant children interact with each other, and with Brazilian children, in two early childhood education schools in Balneário Camboriú. It also intends to investigate, based on the presence of Haitian migrant children, the processes of subjection or transgression of expressions of whiteness as a practice of power and representation of white identity, and to analyze the Municipality's Curricular Proposal regarding Ethnic-Racial Education. The study is based on the Sociology of Childhood, Racial Studies, and Migration. The research is qualitative and is based on a literature review in two databases. The studies analyzed indicate that one reason for the lack of interest and knowledge about ethnic-racial diversity issues in schools is the existing gap in this theme in both initial and continuing teacher education.

Keywords: children, curriculum, education, migration, racism

1. Introduction

Migratory phenomena have various configurations and typologies, composed of individuals from diverse origins and cultures. For these individuals, the search for job opportunities acts as a catalyst for the migrants' ideals, often being the primary objective of population displacements. In Brazil, at the end of the nineteenth century, with the abolition of slavery, the country sought to encourage migrant European labor to replace the former Black slave laborers. Not only was this strategy aligned with the economic interests associated with labor from

Europe and, to a lesser extent, Asia, but it was also intertwined with the whitening policy to which the Brazilian government aspired. This policy, imbued with a nationalist discourse, aimed at miscegenation as a means of gradually diluting the presence of the Black population in the country. According to Ghiggi & Coutinho (2022), in Brazil, research on the theme indicates that there is limited statistical data on migrant and refugee children, and in particular, a lack of data regarding schooling, care, and health services for these children at state and municipal levels.

Humanitarian, political, and natural disasters in Haiti are all factors that have influenced the migration of its population to other countries, in search of opportunities for a better life. In January 2010, an earthquake devastated Haiti, claiming thousands of lives. The lost lives, and the material and institutional damage caused by the earthquake, further exacerbated the country's political and social instability. This instability, together with economic issues, internal conflicts, and constant natural disasters, make the country's recovery a huge challenge.

Haiti ranks 170th in the Human Development Index, according to the 2019 data, being the poorest country in the Americas, with 24.5% of the population living below the poverty line. According to the United Nations Development Programme - Undp, between 2010 and 2020, the number of Haitian migrants heading to other countries increased by 57.5%, totaling 1.7 million people, which represents about 15% of the total population of the country (Undp, 2020). By comparison, in the same period, the total number of migrants worldwide grew by 27%, less than half that of Haiti.

This migration increased considerably after the 2010 earthquake, much of which came to Brazil, which became one of Haiti's migratory routes. The Haitians spread quickly around the world, particularly towards non-traditional directions, like Brazil (Seguy, 2015). The interest of the Haitian people in coming to the country increased with the presence of the Brazilian Army, which commanded the troops of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti - Minustah from 2004, and the Brazilian foreign policy of strengthening ties with Haiti.

During this period, the political and economic rise of Brazil and the government's rhetoric of hospitality towards Haitians were factors that contributed to the Haitian's choice of Brazil as a destination (Handersom, 2015). According to the Brazilian Federal Police, there were an estimated 93,000 Haitian migrants between 2010 and 2017, rising to around 143,000 in 2020 (Un, 2020). The Brazilian cities that received the first groups of Haitians seeking work and housing were Porto Velho and Manaus. These municipalities served as points of arrival for the migrants, and from there, they would move on to other Brazilian states. In the state of Santa Catarina, the arrival of the first Haitian migrants was recorded in 2011 (Gairf, 2015), when a group of unaccompanied men were sent to work for a meatpacking plant in the western part of the state.

In Balneário Camboriú, known nationally for its tourist potential and with an expanding real estate market that drives the city's economy, the Haitians perceived many job opportunities. According to Magalhães & Baeninger (2016), "the Haitian presence in Balneário Camboriú came to Brazil mainly in an undocumented manner, and its age structure is characterized by a concentration of immigrants of working age" (p. 226). According to records, the first mass arrival of Haitians in the city occurred in 2013, from then on, there has been a constant flow of migrants to the city in search of work, sometimes unaccompanied and sometimes with their families. Balneário Camboriú, with an estimated population of 149,000 inhabitants, is known as a tourist city with a high employment rate in construction. Since 2012, according to data from the Haitian Association of Balneário Camboriú, the local Haitian community has consisted of around seven hundred individuals, including one hundred ninety children, who are enrolled in the city's daycare centers and schools (Cotinguiba, 2014). In view of this scenario,

this article aims to present the most recent works in the field of Humanities in Brazil, regarding the migratory processes of Haitian children in early childhood education, discussing their insertion, interactions with peers and teachers, and how racial relations influence their identity formation in childcare institutions.

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive research of the "state of knowledge" type which, according to Morosini, Santos & Bittencourt (2021), involves to an efficient methodology for identifying, recording, and categorizing, in a reflective manner, studies and scientific productions in a specific area of knowledge, within a defined time and space. The first step is to conduct a literature search to find theses and dissertations on a specific subject.

The survey of Theses and Dissertations was conducted in two databases: the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations – Bdt, and the Catalog of Theses and Dissertations - Capes. The timeframe is the period from 2017 to 2023; this cut-off was guided by the implementation of the Migration Law No. 13.445 enacted on May 24 of 2017. The search was conducted in the field of Humanities with a total of 20 selected research studies, 15 of which were in the field of Education. The analysis was conducted using the technique of descriptive and interpretative analysis, which involves organizing and systematizing the data mapped in the survey (Soares, 2022).

3. Results

The survey was conducted using the following descriptors, quoted and combined with the Boolean operator "and": 1. Haitian children and Early Childhood Education; 2. Haitian children and racial relations; 3. Haitian children and racial studies; 4. Early childhood education and whiteness. All summaries of the identified productions were reviewed, and after eliminating repetitive research, we applied exclusion criteria for those that did not relate to the discussed theme or were conducted outside the school context. We also excluded studies that did not mention the above descriptors in the title, abstract, or keywords. After these filters, 20 studies were selected and read in full.

When it comes to universities, the theme is more discussed in federal universities; we identified seven federal, five state, one municipal, and one private university, in the Southeast region. Among these institutions, the highest number of studies were from Federal University of São Carlos - Ufscar, with three studies, followed by State University of Campinas - Unicamp, with two studies. In the South region, we located two studies from Regional University of Blumenau - Furb and Federal University of Paraná - Ufpr.

We infer that federal universities lead the research on the theme due to greater access to resources and funding, a commitment to social issues, and the ability to undertake interdisciplinary approaches, also influenced by geographical location and regional migratory dynamics, as well as institutional policies of inclusion and diversity.

In terms of regions of the country, the highest number of studies were from the South region, with ten studies: two from Rio Grande do Sul, four from Santa Catarina, and four from Paraná. There were eight studies from the Southeast region; six from the city of São Paulo and two from Rio de Janeiro. There was only one study each from the Central West and North regions; from Mato Grosso and one in Rondônia, respectively. The predominance of research in these Brazilian regions may be related to the mass migration of Haitians to these states, and the consequent impacts on the social, ethnic-racial, and cultural dynamics of those regions. After the enactment of the Migration Law No. 13.445/2017, interest in the theme grew. The largest

number of studies on the theme were published in 2019 and 2021. The implementation of the law may have served as a catalyst for these studies, bringing the theme of migration to the forefront of academic and political discussions, and encouraging research on its impacts and developments.

On the BdtD Platform, two dissertations were found with descriptor 1, and two with descriptors 2 and 3; a total of four studies. These studies analyze the processes of welcoming Haitian children into public Early Childhood Education institutions, and the processes of identity representation based on interculturality. In general, the theoretical framework discusses authors from the Sociology of Childhood but establishes few connections with ethnic-racial studies. The first study with these descriptors dates back to 2019 and is a thesis, defended at Ufscar, by Alexandre (2019), which analyzed the integration of Haitian children in public schools in Mato Grosso. The research points out that Haitian children are perceived by their peers and teachers as different, and these differences are attributed to skin color and hair. It is these differences that racialize migrant children, establishing a hierarchy among them and relegating Haitian children to the margins.

According to the author, schools never review their racist practices and discourses. By understanding and analyzing the racial issues that permeate Haitian, Black, and poor children, who come with their families in search of a better life, it is possible to establish profound differences with migrant children from countries in the Global North (United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Canada) as opposed to those from the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America).

Appolon (2019) analyzed the social representations about school shared by Haitian children enrolled in Brazilian schools, seeking to examine aspects of their social integration in the context of public schools in Cuiabá, with a group of Haitian children aged from seven to ten. The methodology, inspired by a qualitative ethnographic approach, was organized into two stages: documentary analysis of the school's pedagogical project and semi-structured interviews with Haitian children. Regarding education from the perspective of interculturality, the author states that the proposal can be found in the school's pedagogical project, but intercultural actions do not appear in the children's narratives. In his study, the author affirms that migrant children do not receive the same pedagogical treatment as Brazilian children. The school seems to struggle with these differences because it perceives and treats everyone as equals, ignoring the specificities and subjectivities of each individual or social group within it.

We did not find any research published in the BdtD database in 2020. We identified two studies published in 2021; a dissertation by Lorzing (2021), defended at Ufscar, which carried out a mapping of migrant children to assess the educational scenario in the city regarding the enrollment of foreign children, with an emphasis on Haitian nationality, and a work by Nobre (2021) which analyzes the Augmentative and Alternative Communication, book developed for children who use Haitian Creole and Brazilian Portuguese, focusing on the concepts of the language of reception and familiar language. In the Capes Catalog, there was almost the same thematic frequency. For descriptors 1, 2, and 3, we found six studies, four of which were defended in 2021.

Considering all Haitian children as equal does not allow space for their differences to be respected and valued, or for the school curriculum to be built around the diversity to avoid perpetuating a hegemonic education that disregards other forms of knowledge. When compared to the previous descriptors, which were more focused on racial issues, we observe a greater concentration of research dedicated to examining the intersections between childhood migration processes and early childhood education from a racial perspective, with only three studies that use the descriptor "whiteness".

This signal limited theoretical advancements in research on whiteness. For example, in the studies analyzed by Santiago (2019), we observe that in Early Childhood Education, the walls of classrooms, corridors, murals, books, toy chests, gestures, and speech are laden with meanings that stimulate children's imaginations and enable the creation of social models and ways of experiencing the world. In other words, the school space has both explicit and implicit pedagogical potential. According to Santiago, whiteness permeates educational-pedagogical actions in Early Childhood Education, symbolically influencing the relationships between individuals and the materialities that constitute these institutional spaces.

In a bibliographic study aimed at presenting a cartography of childhood studies in Brazil in the 1930s, Francchini (2020) mapped out the ways in which children and childhood were portrayed, specifically analyzing age, ethnic, racial, and gender relations in the work of Arthur Ramos. Meanwhile, Pereira (2021) analyzed the representations of Afro-Brazilian religions in the Political-Pedagogical Projects of Early Childhood Education schools, known as "Naves Mães," (Mother Ships) in Campinas. The study sought to explore the various dimensions of racism to discuss its relationship with the formulation of public policies, especially those aimed at education, to address the historical injustices linked to the enslavement of Africans and Afro-Brazilians in early childhood education.

Unlike the Bdt, we found a greater number of studies using descriptor 4 in the Capes catalog, with seven studies. Cardoso (2018) was the first researcher to address expressions of whiteness in Brazilian Early Childhood Education, inviting us to reflect on the articulations between the Sociology of Childhood and Studies of Racial Relations, questioning the non-racialization of white children in the Sociology of Childhood. The author considers that the field of Sociology of Childhood, predominantly of European origin, "when addressing the racial issue, refers to the Black, indigenous, among others. But it does not racialize the white population and disregards the fact that White children also live in a racialized society and benefit from it" (Cardoso, 2021, p. 29).

The author points out that in Early Childhood Education institutions, there are many material and symbolic privileges that benefit White children, at the expense of Black and other ethnic minority children, and White children are not racialized; on the contrary, they are considered the standard of beauty and acceptability. This directly and subjectively reflects on the formation of racial identities of migrant children and Black Brazilian children. Confronting expressions of whiteness permeates through the materialities present in the classroom, as discussed by Jesus (2019) when addressing Afro-Brazilian children's literature as racial literacy and empowerment of black identities. Jesus narrates her personal experience regarding racial literacy and the empowerment of Black identities, focusing on the influence of Afro-Brazilian children's literature.

Under the same theme, Schlickmann (2019), mapping books recommended by the Ministry of Education through the National Education Plan for young children in preschool, sought to identify the graphical and written representations and the phenotypic differences presented in children's books. The author found a predominance of white characters and the almost non-existence of Black and indigenous characters. Of the Black characters, the majority appear mostly as supporting or background characters, without direct relevance to the plot of the story. Andrade (2021) analyzed the process through which whiteness is revealed and materialized in educational-pedagogical relationships, in the context of a Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education in Curitiba. In qualitative research focusing on a class of children between 1 year and 1 year and 11 months old, it was found that space is an important element in the materialization of normative whiteness.

The "space" category emerged during the analysis of empirical materials, indicating that whiteness is present in the organization of spaces. The author emphasizes the importance of a critical reflection on how these spaces are structured, down to the smallest details. It was observed that visual materials such as posters and informational signs, commonly displayed on bulletin boards, corridors, doors, and bathrooms of institutions, tended to predominantly represent figures of white people, both adults and children. This representation, often unintentional and rarely addressed in teacher training, highlights the influence of whiteness on the conception of these environments.

Silva (2021) analyzed 13 academic works on school relations in Early Childhood Education. The results indicated that racial equality is still an objective to be achieved, and that whiteness and racism permeate relationships in the school environment, whether in pedagogical practices or in the imagination of students and teachers, even if indirectly. Finally, Santos (2023) reveals the possibility of reversing the colonizing perspective towards an anti-racist education in Early Childhood Education. The study reflected on the curriculum as a space of encounter, based on the potential of anti-racist affections. Through Oral History, sixteen teachers were interviewed, contributing to the reflection on the curriculum as a potential for anti-racist affections. The researcher narrates the commitment of teachers to aligning themselves with anti-racist culture, rooted in Afro-Brazilian and indigenous values. The dynamics of daily interactions in early childhood education proved effective in promoting anti-racist initiatives through debates, recommendations, visual and bodily styles, representativeness, literature, cinema, and an atmosphere of care and welcome.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we argue the urgency of integrating studies on racial relations and childhoods to understand the multiple school experiences of Haitian children in contexts with a strong presence of racism, prejudice, discrimination, and xenophobia. The studies analyzed here indicate that one reason for the lack of interest and knowledge about ethnic-racial diversity issues in schools is the existing gap in this theme in both initial and continuing teacher education. The findings showed that in childcare institutions, Haitian children are perceived and received by teachers as different, and this difference is based on skin color and other phenotypic traits, braided hair, and the language they speak (Creole). Black and migrant children, like Brazilian children, are victims of the discourse of equality, also present in schools, which silences the situations of racism, prejudice, discrimination, or xenophobia experienced in these spaces.

The results indicate that the practices of the teachers continue to be grounded in traditional concepts of teaching the mother tongue, disregarding the social practices mediated by language, as well as the intercultural nature of the context in which they operate, with the presence of immigrants who do not master Portuguese.

We highlight the importance of teachers overcoming their ethnocentric views and understanding that language barriers do not prevent the welcoming, interaction, and learning from and with migrant children. Schools and early childhood education institutions that receive children from other nationalities, especially those from countries of the Global South, should be attentive and sensitive to create strategies that minimize the impacts of these children's presence in the educational system. The initial step involves initial and continuing education. The fight against racism and discrimination should also be understood as an educational action that guides both white and non-white individuals towards recognizing the school as a pluricultural place, composed of different identities and social groups with equal rights.

For future research on the theme of migrant children, both in the field of Childhood Sociology and in ethnic-racial studies, we recommend incorporating other analytical categories, such as gender, class, and generation. Another recommendation would be to expand the search to other databases such as national and international journals in indexed magazines.

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