



Valuing afro dance in the classroom: Afrocentricity and education

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ABSTRACT

Dance, as a form of human expression, brings with it a rich history dating back to the most ancient times. Although it is often framed as art, its versatility goes further, being used not only for artistic purposes but also as a means of communication between human beings and, in some cultures, as a form of connection with deities. In this way, dance not only enriches the artistic sphere, but also intertwines with the human experience, becoming intrinsic to our being and existing in the world.

Keywords: Dance, Artistic purposes, Human experience.

1 INTRODUCTION

Dance, as a form of human expression, brings with it a rich history dating back to the most ancient times. Although it is often framed as art, its versatility goes further, being used not only for artistic purposes but also as a means of communication between human beings and, in some cultures, as a form of connection with deities. In this way, dance not only enriches the artistic sphere, but also intertwines with the human experience, becoming intrinsic to our being and existing in the world.

In addition, dance plays a key role in celebrating cultural rituals and social events, reflecting the diversity and identity of communities around the globe. Through graceful movements and meticulously crafted choreography, ancestral traditions are preserved and passed down from generation to generation. In this context, dance not only perpetuates cultural narratives, but also provides a dynamic medium to express joy, sadness, resistance, and solidarity, cementing itself as a universal language that transcends borders and connects individuals in a global tapestry of human experiences.

On the African continent, dance plays a central role in diverse cultures, consolidating itself as one of the art forms that unifies the entire region, reaffirming identities even in contexts of African diaspora. This artistic manifestation transcends geographical borders, connecting peoples both within the continent and descendants around the world, consolidating dance as an expression that identifies Africanity.

Therefore, dance in Africa is not just an artistic expression, but a pillar that supports cultural roots and social cohesion. It is a powerful tool of resistance and resilience, highlighting the richness and diversity



of African traditions. Over the centuries, the African diaspora has carried rhythms and movements with it, transforming dance into a palpable link that keeps the connection with the origins alive.

In events and celebrations, whether on the continent or in Afro-descendant communities, dance continues to be a means of celebrating Africanity, promoting understanding and appreciation of a deep-rooted cultural heritage. Thus, dance transcends its performative nature and becomes a symbol of resistance, preservation, and celebration of Africa's rich cultural heritage.

For Africans and people of African descent, dance goes beyond physical movement; It reveals conceptions of an ancestral wisdom, establishing a deep connection between the consciousness and the body. In this context, dance becomes a complex means of communication, in which the transmission of knowledge and experiences is not limited to the written word, but emerges from the experience of the being in the world.

In this way, dance takes on a holistic and sacred role in understanding the world for Africans and people of African descent. Not only does it reflect cultural diversity and artistic expression, but it also serves as a conduit for the preservation of collective memory and the continuity of ancestral traditions.

The movements, rhythms, and gestures encapsulate narratives that have stood the test of time, conveying values, myths, and the history of a people. By integrating dance into their lives, these communities cultivate a deep connection between past, present, and future, building bridges between generations and strengthening a cultural identity that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. Thus, dance emerges as a living legacy, rooted in the essence of the African experience, weaving a web of meanings that goes beyond the ephemeral, connecting hearts, minds, and spirits.

In celebration of Black Awareness Day and Month, we carried out a significant activity in the classroom, focused on the exploration of African dance with the school's students. This engaging experience was based on the development of a choreography inspired by the traditional African rhythm known as Kuduro, providing not only an artistic expression, but also an immersion in the cultural and historical richness of this style of dance.

In this context, dance was not only an aesthetic manifestation, but a journey to explore the cultural and historical richness of the African continent. During the learning process, the students not only mastered the steps of Kuduro¹, but also absorbed the essence of dance as a means of communication and celebration. By exploring the energetic movements and pulsating rhythms, they not only connected with artistic expressiveness but immersed themselves in an experience that transcended the boundaries of time and space.

This initiative, held in honor of Black Awareness Day and Month, not only fostered appreciation of cultural diversity but also highlighted the importance of recognizing and celebrating the African

¹ Kuduro emerged in the late 1980s, initially as a dance, and over time evolved into a musical genre, an African house style that mixes electronic elements with traditional folklore. It was developed by the people of Luanda.



community's significant contributions to the global tapestry of humanity. By the end of this experience, we not only celebrate dance, but also strengthen the bonds of mutual understanding and respect, contributing to building a broader and more inclusive awareness in our educational community.

2 OBJECTIVE

Present the results of an African dance workshop held at the school.

2.1 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Disseminate didactic strategies for the approach to Afro culture in the classroom;
- Promote debates on Afrocentricity;
- Valuing the richness of Afro culture.

3 METHODOLOGY

The approach chosen to investigate the theme included an in-depth research into the resources offered by Google Scholar. Initially, we used the descriptors "Afro dance", "Law No. 10.639/03", "Afrocentricity" and "Education" as a starting point to identify relevant studies and information. This strategy allowed for a comprehensive and reasoned exploration, using the academic platform to access sources that address specific aspects of Afro dance, the legal implications of Law No. 10,639/03, the perspective of Afrocentricity and its intersection with the educational field.

After the initial analysis, we identified 10 (ten) documents, opting for the selection of those most closely related to our theme. The refined choice was further enhanced by giving priority to papers that established a direct connection with our research objectives, as outlined in the subsequent table. This meticulous process ensured the relevance and pertinence of the sources chosen to deepen our understanding of the theme in question in 02 (two) works. See the following table:

Table 01

STUDIES FOUND IN THE LITERATURE REVIEW	
RÉGIS & BASÍLIO, 2018.	Curriculum and Ethnic-Racial Relations: the State of the Art. Educar em Revista, Curitiba, Brazil, v. 34, n. 69, p. 33-60, May/June 2018.
OLIVEIRA, 2022.	WHERE IS THE DANCE OF PRETAGOGY?: Anti-racist methodology for creating and teaching dance.- VOLUME 2, CIDADE NUVENS MAGAZINE, CENTRO DE ARTES-URCA, ISSN 2675 - 6420. 2022.

Source: Google Scholar, 2023.

By provoking reflection on "what is considered valuable to integrate school curricula and what is disregarded?", Régis & Basílio (2018) offer crucial insights into this question. At the heart of their analysis,



the authors explore the complex dynamics of curriculum content selection, highlighting not only what is embedded, but also what is often neglected.

From this perspective, Régis & Basílio's contribution transcends the simple interpellation, providing an in-depth view of the implications and criteria underlying the process of determining the value attributed to curricular elements. This critical approach instigates a deeper reflection on educational choices and their impact on students' education, inviting us to carefully consider the pedagogical and social implications of this selection.

The knowledge embodied in curricula has been predominantly Eurocentric. In Brazil, criticism of the Eurocentric curriculum was boosted after the enactment of Law No. 10,639/2003, which made the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian History and Culture mandatory. (RÉGIS & BASÍLIO, 2018, p. 34).

We corroborate the fact that the struggle of the Black Social Movements has achieved significant advances since the establishment of Law No. 10.639/03. This law was signed by President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and affirms the mandatory teaching of African and Afro-descendant History and Culture in the classroom. In this way, this Law modified the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education – LDB and is a historical milestone in the struggle of blacks in Brazil.

Still observing the works resulting from the systematic review adopted, Oliveira (2022), with the objective of pointing out how Pretagogy can be inserted in the field of knowledge of Dance as an anti-racist methodology of teaching and creation. Oliveira (2022) points out the following,

This disobedient path is also necessary because it aims to combat techniques of control of subjectivities, even in an artistic field that proposes to question social violence, but within it reproduces logics of subordination and exclusion of bodies. (OLIVEIRA, 2022, p.57).

The author highlights the importance of systematizing and recording studies like this as a fundamental strategy in combating another facet of structural racism, as emphasized by Oliveira (2022, p. 57). This premise highlights the need to document and organize analyses that address specific aspects of structural racism, with the purpose of creating a collection that not only highlights its manifestations, but also provides subsidies for the implementation of effective and transformative actions.

By suggesting the systematization of these studies, the author instigates a more comprehensive and articulated approach to the response to racism, highlighting the importance of not only recognizing, but also structuring knowledge that can serve as a basis for interventions and public policies that address the deep roots of this social problem.

Thus, dance in Africa transcends mere artistic expression, consolidating itself as a pillar that sustains cultural roots and promotes social cohesion. It reveals itself as a powerful tool of resistance and resilience,



highlighting the richness and diversity of African traditions. Over the centuries, the African diaspora has carried with it rhythms and movements, giving dance a tangible role that preserves and nurtures the living connection with origins. After approaching the theme, we create relationships with our process of analyzing the work developed in the classroom.

4 DEVELOPMENT

4.1 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SCHOOL

Before introducing the highlighted activities, we believe it is crucial to situate the essential characteristics of the educational institution in focus. The Albenice Maria da Silva Municipal School (photo 01) is located at Rua Vitória Régia, 744 - Dois Carneiros, Jaboatão dos Guararapes - PE, 54270-060. This contextualization provides a more comprehensive understanding of the environment in which the activities were implemented, highlighting the importance of the physical and geographical context of the Albenice Maria da Silva Municipal School.

Photo 01: Albenice Maria da Silva Municipal School.



Source: Edmilton Hora, 2023

The target audience of the educational institution covers Elementary School II, distributed from the 6th to the 9th grade, with students in the age group of 11 to 14 years. In the neighborhood of Dois Carneiros, Jaboatão dos Guararapes, there is a predominance of women in relation to men, reflecting the local demographics, where the population is composed of 51.49% women and 48.51% men, according to IBGE (2010). This demographic characteristic is also manifested in the School, resulting in a lower total number of students enrolled than the number of female students.

The institution's students belong not only to their own neighborhood, Dois Carneiros, but also to the surrounding communities. The Dois Carneiros neighborhood borders the neighborhoods of Santana,



Sucupira, Socorro and Pacheco in Jaboatão-PE, and the neighborhoods of Barro and Cohab in Recife-PE. In this context, the predominance of students from the neighborhood itself is highlighted, reflecting the strong presence of the local community in the school's total enrollment.

When talking about the structure of the School, we address the physical (space, facilities, materials) and organizational elements. We can talk about a large school with two blocks of non-wooded built area and a large sports court. The facilities are very satisfactory with ten classrooms, library, laboratory, a covered living area and bathrooms. We consider that this structure is above the standard of most municipal schools in Jaboatão dos Guararapes. In the organizational structure, the School has elementary school II, distributed in the morning and afternoon. It also has Youth and Adult Education – EJA in the evening.

The realization of this activity reinforces the imperative of urgently incorporating Afro-descendant knowledge in the educational environment. This urgency is evident in the Brazilian, state, municipal, local community and school contexts, highlighting the urgent need to combat discrimination, prejudice and, above all, address structural racism (ALMEIDA, 2019). The latter is the result of decades of absence of school practices that recognize and embrace the rich ethnic plurality that characterizes Brazil. Engaging in this activity not only underscores the importance of this confrontation, but also represents a significant step towards a more inclusive and diversity-aware education.

The conclusion of this activity emphatically highlights the imperative importance of integrating Afro-descendant knowledge into the educational scenario. This urgency becomes undeniable when we observe that, at different scales, in Brazil, in states, municipalities, local communities, and schools, it is crucial to confront discrimination, prejudice, and, especially, deep-rooted structural racism, as addressed by Almeida (2019). Engaging in this reflection underscores not only the need, but the urgency of transforming educational paradigms to promote a more inclusive, equitable, and sensitive approach to Brazilian cultural diversity.

The persistence of this challenge reflects years of neglect in educational practices that failed to recognize the richness of Brazil's ethnic diversity. By recognizing the importance of these learnings, we not only open doors to mutual understanding and respect, but we also lay the groundwork for social transformation. This transformation aims to promote equity and inclusion in all spheres of our society, cultivating a fairer and more welcoming environment for all.

4.2 AFROCENTRICITY

The theory of Afrocentricity emerges as a vital epistemological field, offering a rich and innovative perspective for researchers and intellectuals, both Black and non-Black, who seek a non-hegemonic approach. She stands out for promoting dialogue and collaboration, challenging the imposition of single and absolute narratives. By acknowledging the diversity of experiences and knowledge, Afrocentricity provides



fertile ground for building more inclusive and representative understandings, thus contributing to an enrichment of academic and social discourse (LIMA, 2020).

Afrocentricity Theory also emphasizes the importance of reexamining the history, culture, and contributions of Black people, highlighting the need to decolonize knowledge and overcome Eurocentric narratives that have historically marginalized and devalued Afrocentric experiences. This approach seeks to empower communities of color by fostering a sense of positive cultural identity and encouraging social and political activism aimed at promoting equality and justice. Afrocentricity Theory has influenced diverse fields, including African American studies, African studies, and social justice issues, playing a significant role in the quest for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of history and society (LIMA, 2019).

Afrocentricity and its categories represent a significant response to the social, historical, and cultural experiences of black people, who have been systematically displaced and marginalized by Eurocentric hegemony. This epistemological approach not only reclaims the cultural and historical heritage of Black people, but also sparks a movement of self-worth and empowerment. As Asante (2013) observes, the Afrocentricity Theory promotes a blackening, a comprehensive awareness that encompasses personal, social, cultural, political, and intellectual dimensions. In doing so, it empowers Black people to become active agents in constructing their own historical narratives and combating systemic racism, positively influencing their lives and communities (LIMA, 2018).

The Afrocentric paradigm is a scientific theory developed by Molefi Kete Asante in the 1970s. Afrocentricity works on the representativeness of African people and Afro-descendants. Asante's work has to do with the use of African and Afro-descendant references to deal with issues that concern the cultural legacy of Africans themselves and their descendants, as well as that people of African origin can treat, write and debate their social and historical relations. Therefore, we understand that

(...) that of African culture must begin, once and for all, with the discarding of the notion that, in all respects, Europe is the teacher and Africa the disciple. This is the central point of our argument: the imperialism of the intellectual tradition and its work - which exterminates knowledge and technologies - seeking to affirm an African "speech", contrary to theorists in general, who often tend to generalize from a Eurocentric basis. (LOPES; SIMAS, 2021, p. 15 -16.) comprehension epistemicida

Due to several factors, it is observed that this type of thinking at a time when Africans and their descendants do not perceive the artistic, political and historical basis of their own people. Thus, they end up adopting European standards as a reference even to write about subjects that deal with their own identity and origin.

In his research in the late 1970s, Asante tackled crucial questions of identity in Africa, coming to the conclusion that there is a global normalization, including within the African continent itself, of a false superiority attributed to the European continent and the United States. The study underscores the persistence



of narratives that perpetuate this distorted view, highlighting the importance of challenging and deconstructing these thought patterns to promote a more authentic and just understanding of African cultural and historical diversity.

We know that, for a long time, part of Africa was colonized and exploited by the British, Spanish, Portuguese, among other peoples coming from Europe. In general, it is by little knowing the African continent that we end up building a limited vision. According to (2013), At the same time, Africa was impoverished in favor of Metropolitan European , therefore, the largest Asante (

The African continent is not poor, although African people are often in poverty. Africa has enough arable land to feed the entire land, but in some countries, people regularly struggle with hunger. This is what others have called "the paradox of Africa," the richest land with the poorest people. (ASANTE, 2013 p.2).

Because of this, Asante (2013) created the philosophical current that speaks of African representation, as well as the necessary acceptance of Africans and Afro-descendants to value their own culture. Thus, Afrocentric thought has occupied spaces in politics, and in social movements that cause interest to the Afro-descendant community. Defend

To adopt an Afrocentric approach to school activities is, essentially, to recognize and value the centrality of black culture in the economic, historical, political, and artistic spheres. This entails not only considering the richness and diversity of African contributions, but also fostering a deeper understanding of Afro-descendant influence in diverse areas of knowledge. This perspective transcends the mere inclusion of content about Africa, seeking, in a more significant way, to situate the African experience as a central point of reference, thus enriching the global understanding of social, historical, and cultural dynamics.

Therefore, by directing school activities in an Afrocentric way, we are not only redefining the educational canon; We are, in fact, actively addressing the historical challenges of exclusion and invisibility that have long permeated the educational environment. In this transformative process, it is not only a matter of adding information about Africa, but of reshaping the pedagogical foundations in order to recognize black culture as an intrinsic part of academic training.

In this way, we move towards a more inclusive education, which not only validates Afro-descendant experiences, but also contributes to the construction of a more equitable and respectful society with the diverse expressions of cultural identity. In doing so, we not only celebrate the richness of diversity but also pave the way for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the cultural complexities that enrich our society.



4.3 VALUING AFRO DANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

We developed this activity because we believe that the act of valuing goes beyond the construction of a positive representation of a certain point. Thus, valuing is usually understood as increasing the value or price of something can take on greater meanings. In this way, giving value is also adding and acknowledging worthiness. As synonyms, the term value also includes improving, enhancing, enriching, considering, prestigious. In this understanding, valuing Afro dance in the classroom means bringing moments of immersion in one's own culture.

According to the Afrocentric perspective (ASANTE, 2013), we work on the centrality of Afro culture through the theme that generates the activity, which is Afro Dance. In this theme, other themes can be dealt with in a transversal way, such as dance in African and Afro-descendant religiosity. In this way, we can problematize religious racism. Many accept samba, maracatu, afoxé and other traditional dances that have Afro culture as their matrix. However, there is still a lot of discrimination in relation to the origin of these dances that is directly linked to Candomblé and religions of African origins.

In this way, valuing Afro dance in the classroom encompasses a context that encompasses the significance of the representation of black culture as a whole. We understand valuing as the opposite of devaluing, depreciating, debasing, disdaining, belittling, deprecating, disregarding. In this understanding, by working on the value of dance, we also combat the prejudice against the traditions of African origins. Well, we can learn to value traditions of African origins as a whole.

In addition, it is crucial to highlight the need to reverse harmful stereotypes as we approach the African Continent. Too often, Africa is mistakenly reduced to a stereotype of hunger, misery and disease in the common sense. As we explore and celebrate the rich cultural diversity and vibrant artistic expression of African dance, we look away from entrenched prejudices. In this sense, positivizing Africa not only challenges simplistic and negative notions, but also offers an authentic and enriching perspective that highlights the vitality, resilience, and beauty that permeate the many facets of this extraordinary continent. By acknowledging Africa in all its complexity and cultural richness, we contribute to a more complete and equitable understanding, combating harmful stereotypes, and promoting a more inclusive and respectful view of human diversity.

4.4 THE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

We conducted a dynamic approach, allowing students to immerse themselves in the captivating rhythms of African dance in a practical and participatory way. This strategy not only enriched theoretical understanding, but also provided a sensory experience, connecting students more deeply with cultural roots. Through this interactive approach, we foster an inclusive and stimulating learning environment, where body



expression has become a powerful tool for unraveling the rich nuances of African and Afro-descendant rhythms.

We started the class by talking about the importance of dance and music for the African people of the Continent and in diaspora. We talked about a variety of cultures and countries of the African Continent and the relationship with dance. For these peoples, dance plays a central role within different cultures, reaffirming identities even in contexts of African diaspora.

By bridging the gap between communities within the African continent and diasporas of African descent globally, dance not only celebrates Africanity but also becomes a lasting link that strengthens cultural and historical ties. This artistic expression, by transcending borders, acts as a powerful instrument in the preservation and dissemination of traditions, contributing to the construction of a globalized Afro-descendant identity. Thus, dance emerges as a vehicle that not only connects but also underscores the richness and diversity of African cultural heritage in a global context.

We selected the song "Tweyagale" by Eddy Kenzo, performed by the group Masaka Kids Africana Dancing (Photo 02), as the basis for our activity. This content is available on YouTube, standing out for its engaging choreography to the rhythm of Kuduro. The choice of this material not only provided a dynamic musical experience but also enriched our approach, connecting participants to vibrant and authentic cultural expression.

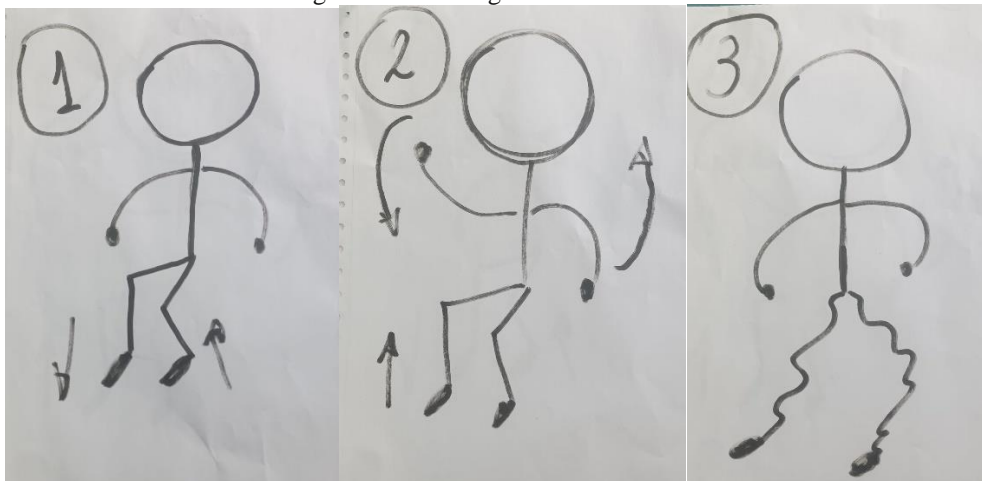
Foto 02: Masaka Kids Africana Dancing (Eddy Kenzo)



Fonte: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VDz9ois30k>

In this dynamic, the participants were encouraged to engage in dancing to the rhythm of the music, guided by predefined gestures. The choreographed movements were delineated through visual representations, presented by means of drawings on the whiteboard (as illustrated in Figure 01). This visual approach provided a clear and accessible basis for performing the movements, allowing participants to express themselves in a synchronized and engaging way in the dance experience.

Figure 01: Drawings of the movements



Source: Edmilton Hora, 2023.

The drawings arouse the curiosity of the participants, piquing their interest. After the reproduction of the previously established movements, the participants are encouraged to conceive their own movements, harmonizing them with the rhythm of the music. This stage of the activity promotes the exploration of individual creativity, allowing each participant to contribute their unique expression to the context of the dance, as evidenced in Photo 03. By stimulating the creation of original movements, the dynamics not only offer a richer participatory experience, but also highlight the dynamic interplay between individual expressiveness and the enveloping pulse of the rhythm worked.

Photo 03: Students dancing



Source: Edmilton Hora, 2023.

Next, we introduced another activity that consisted of creating spontaneous body movements in response to the rhythm of the music, as evidenced in Photo 04. During this step, we explain the concept of how we can generate rhythms using our own body. This practice encouraged participants to explore the



expressive freedom of their movements, encouraging a more intimate connection between sound pulse and individual bodily responses. Not only did the activity provide an engaging experience, but it also underscored each participant's unique ability to translate musicality into authentic body expressions.

Photo 04: Students Dancing



Source: Edmilton Hora, 2023.

In this way, we demonstrate how to create rhythms through simple clapping and beats, actively encouraging participants to explore a variety of rhythms and develop their own movements, as illustrated in Photo 05. This hands-on approach not only provided an interactive learning experience but also stimulated the creativity of the participants, encouraging them to express their individuality in creating movements synchronized with the rhythms explored.



Photo 05: Students creating movements



Source: Edmilton Hora, 2023.

On a deeper analysis, dance transcends not only geographical boundaries but also temporal boundaries, emerging as a vibrant testament to the resilience and vitality intrinsic to Africanity. This cultural link not only preserves the memory of ancestral traditions, but also acts as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for new forms of expression that adapt and evolve over time. By being celebrated as a central component of African cultural heritage in a global context, dance not only establishes deep connections, but also brilliantly highlights the unique and invaluable contribution that Afro-descendant communities make to the world's cultural mosaic.

By incorporating movements, rhythms, and gestures, dance transforms into a dynamic narrative that transcends language barriers, conveying stories of resistance, celebration, and innovation. In this sense, it not only connects present experiences with a rich past, but also paves the way for a future where diversity is celebrated as an enriching force. Thus, by recognizing the unique cultural contribution of Afro-descendant communities, dance not only unites cultures but also highlights the importance of honoring and preserving the roots that fuel the richness of the global cultural landscape.

5 FINAL THOUGHTS

As a result, by conducting the rhythmic models present in Afro Dance, the teacher encouraged the students to perform their own movements in a creative and contextualized way, thus forming new rhythms. We understand that by performing these rhythmic models, students have the opportunity to create their own patterns, thus identifying a stimulus to creativity.

In addition, we also consider the possibility of expanding the cultural legacy through the knowledge of other musical forms that are not necessarily directly linked to the daily life of students. By developing



Afro dance in the classroom, we work not only on the self-affirmation of black identity, but also contribute to the construction of knowledge.

The conclusion highlights the urgency of intensifying efforts in activities aligned with an Afrocentric proposal for education. Considering that Brazilian society has historically been shaped by a Eurocentric, white-centric and racist paradigm, it is imperative to break with these dominant patterns. The recognition of this deep-rooted social structure underscores the pressing need for action that not only confronts but also reconfigures the foundations of the education system, incorporating an Afrocentric perspective that values and includes the historical and cultural contributions of Afro-descendant communities. Therefore, in reinforcing this call for continuous efforts, we highlight not only the urgency but the responsibility to transform the educational landscape to build a more equitable and just society.

By carefully analyzing the scope of this study, which aims to investigate school pedagogical processes as instruments for strengthening Afrocentricity in the fight against racism in the school environment, we realized that the efforts undertaken by the project effectively approached and aligned with an Afrocentric proposal of education. This finding suggests not only a thematic correspondence, but also the effectiveness of the project in embedding and promoting values, practices, and knowledge that reflect a more inclusive and diverse approach in the educational context.

By centering pedagogical practices on strengthening Afrocentricity, the study not only contributes to the deconstruction of discriminatory practices, but also highlights the importance of education that recognizes and celebrates the diverse contributions of Afro-descendant communities. In this way, we highlight not only the convergence, but also the relevance of the project in the advancement of a more equitable and anti-discriminatory education.



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