"SKIN-COLORED PENCIL": DIVERSITY OR EXCLUSION?

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SUMMARY: This study examines the representation of artistic materials used in early childhood education, focusing on "skin-colored pencils" during the literacy process. The research, based on direct and participatory observation with children in school contexts, highlights the importance of working on diversity from childhood. Materials that consider different skin tones can positively influence the development of identity, self-esteem and social interaction in children, in addition to fostering a broader understanding of ethnic diversity. The research is justified by the need to build an inclusive society from the early school years. The results highlight the urgency of mobilizing the school community to adopt and disseminate materials that represent ethnic plurality in classrooms. To understand more about the subject, we will talk to authors such as CRUZ (2018), GOMES (2017), GUIMARÃES (2009), LINDEN (2018) and OLIVEIRA (2017), who served as the basis for the studies on the topic addressed. The discussion focuses on the importance of promoting discussion/dialogue to enable the development of literacy activities that awaken students' interest in investigating ethnic varieties from the early grades. Promoting activities that awaken children's interest in ethnic diversity from the early grades is essential, and for this, the continuous engagement of educators, managers, parents and policy makers is necessary, in order to minimize the impacts of racism in the school environment and ensure a more inclusive and equitable early childhood education.

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the representation of artistic materials used in early childhood education, focusing on "skin-colored pencils" during the literacy process. The research, based on direct and participatory observation with children in school contexts, highlights the importance of working on diversity from childhood. Materials that consider different skin tones can positively influence the development of identity, self-esteem and social interaction in children, in addition to fostering a broader understanding of ethnic diversity. The research is justified by the need to build an inclusive society from the early school years. The results highlight the urgency of mobilizing the school community to adopt and disseminate materials that represent ethnic plurality in classrooms. To understand more about the subject, we will talk to authors such as CRUZ (2018), GOMES (2017), GUIMARÃES (2009), LINDEN (2018) and OLIVEIRA (2017), who served as the basis for the studies on the topic addressed. The discussion focuses on the importance of promoting discussion/dialogue to enable the development of literacy activities that awaken students' interest in investigating ethnic varieties from the early grades. Promoting activities that awaken children's interest in ethnic diversity from the early grades is essential, and for this, the continuous engagement of educators, managers, parents and policy makers is necessary, in order to minimize the impacts of racism in the school environment and ensure a more inclusive and equitable early childhood education.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a study on ethnic-racial representation in artistic materials used in early childhood education, with an emphasis on "skin-colored pencils". This expression, traditionally associated with a pale color, disregards the wide diversity of hues present in Brazilian society. Such invisibility can negatively impact the formation of identity, self-esteem and understanding of ethnic diversity in children both inside and outside the school context.

With the publication of Law No. 10.639/03, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture mandatory in basic education, several curricular changes occurred. However, works by Afro-descendant authors and materials that address African issues still face exclusion or are consumed in smaller quantities, often written by people with Eurocentric characteristics, disconnected from the public that uses these works.

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Representation in school materials can strengthen children's recognition as valued and celebrated beings. This practice helps to repair the damage caused by institutional and structural racism, in addition to promoting respect for cultural diversity. By recognizing ourselves in audiovisual productions and everyday products, we build a positive relationship with our identity.

The actions carried out in this study include the development of workshops with children and activities that encouraged reflections on ethnic-racial diversity, the identification of students' emotions and the strengthening of the role of the school community in creating an inclusive environment. Three main moments were carried out: Discussion on the relationship between literacy and ethnic-racial diversity; critical exploration of the topic "Paint with skin-colored pencils! But whose skin color?" and a workshop where students reflected on their own experiences, involving themes such as racism, through storytelling.

In this context, this study seeks to examine the influence of "skin-colored pencils" on children's social and cognitive development, proposing pedagogical practices that mobilize educators, managers, parents and public policies for an inclusive and equitable education from childhood. This study investigates the perceptions of children aged 6 to 7 years about ethnic-racial representation through pedagogical activities with "skin-colored pencils", promoting conversation circles about diversity.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of "skin-colored pencil" reflects a social and historical construction of racialization of colors and identity. Historically, school and art materials have been standardized to represent white people's skin as the "natural" color of human beings. This standardization not only reinforces racial stereotypes, but also excludes racial diversity, contributing to processes of invisibility and devaluation of black people and other ethnicities. This theoretical framework seeks support from studies on racialization, identity and education to understand the impact of this standardization on children's development and racial awareness.

The racialization of colors does not occur in a neutral manner, but within a historical and social context marked by the hegemony of whiteness. Studies by authors such as Fanon (1952) and Hall (1997) demonstrate how the construction of racial identity is linked to processes

historical periods of domination, where the color white was established as a universal reference. Fanon (1952, p. 116) argues that:

> The white man defines himself as a reference and superiority, while the black man sees himself through negation. Colonial society imposes a negative identity on the black man, linked to inferiority and subordination. He discovers himself not as an autonomous subject, but as a distorted reflection of the gaze of the other, of the white man, who defines and classifies him." (Fanon, 1952, p. 116)

This normativity is expressed in various cultural and material aspects, such as the use of the expression "skin-colored pencil", which presupposes a single possible representation of human skin color. Fanon raises a central discussion about the construction of black identity in a racialized society. He argues that, in the colonial and post-colonial context, whiteness is established as a universal reference for humanity, while blackness is constructed in opposition to it, often associated with inferiority and subordination. This process prevents black people from recognizing themselves autonomously, since their identity is mediated by the gaze of the other — the white person — who defines and classifies them within a hierarchical system of power.

From this discussion, we can understand how structural racism operates not only in society, but also in the subjective formation of individuals. In the educational context, for example, this dynamic can be observed in the lack of representation of black children in school materials, as in the case of "skin-colored pencils," which naturalize white skin as the standard. The absence of positive references to blackness can reinforce feelings of exclusion and low self-esteem, consolidating what Fanon describes as a negative identity imposed by colonial logic.

The theory of whiteness, developed by authors such as Frankenberg (1993), shows that white privilege is established through the invisibility of other racial identities. Frankenberg (1993, p. 1) defines whiteness as:

> A set of cultural positions that structure society and guarantee privileges to those who are part of it. Whiteness operates as an invisible standard of normality, where its supremacy is maintained by the denial and systematic exclusion of other racial groups." (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1)

The author describes whiteness as a system of structural privileges that is maintained through the invisibility of other racial identities. This concept helps to

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understand how school materials can develop racial inequalities: by considering only one skin tone as "normal", schools implicitly contribute to the maintenance of white supremacy. The fight for anti-racist education therefore involves breaking this structure and ensuring representation for all children, enabling a positive racial identity.

In this sense, when black children do not find representation in standardized colors, a process of symbolic and psychological exclusion is reinforced. Child development psychology, notably in the work of Vygotsky (1989), suggests that identity is formed from social interactions and internalized cultural meanings. Vygotsky (1989, p. 64) emphasizes that:

> The development of consciousness occurs through social interactions, being influenced by the environment and the cultural tools available. Children internalize concepts, meanings and values that shape their identity and their perception of the world, according to the stimuli offered by society." (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 64)

For black children, the lack of materials that represent their skin color can lead to a feeling of exclusion and devaluation of their racial identity. Vygotsky's perspective reinforces the importance of school materials in the formation of a child's identity. If the cultural instruments available—such as textbooks, toys, and crayons—do not reflect racial diversity, black children may internalize the idea that their identity is less valid or even nonexistent. This demonstrates the need to remunerate educational resources so that they are representative and inclusive, allowing all children to build a positive racial identity.

Bell Hooks (1992) argues that the construction of racial identity should be strengthened through representation and anti-racist education. Hooks (1992, p. 34) emphasizes that:

> Positive racial representation is one way to break cycles of inferiority and strengthen the self-esteem of black children. The absence of images and narratives that affirm the beauty and dignity of blackness results in an internalization of inferiority and inadequacy." (Hooks, 1992, p. 34)

The author emphasizes that building a healthy racial identity requires positive representation since childhood. In the case of the "skin-colored" pencil, the standardization of a single tone as a reference can reinforce the inferiorization of black children, while the introduction of diverse materials contributes to a broader perception of

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humanity. Thus, education plays a crucial role in deconstructing racism by offering models that value all racial identities. This includes reformulating school materials and the educational discourse itself, so that a positive recognition of racial differences is possible.

Education plays a fundamental role in deconstructing patterns racialized. Studies such as those by Cavalleiro (2001) point out that anti-racist education requires not only the inclusion of content on racial diversity in curricula, but also the review of the pedagogical materials used. Cavalleiro (2001, p. 48) emphasizes that:

> The silencing of racial issues in the school environment contributes to the perpetuation of racial inequalities. School cannot be a space where black children feel deprived of identity or marginalized. The reformulation of teaching materials and the presence of teachers prepared to deal with diversity are fundamental steps towards building a truly inclusive education." (Cavalleiro, 2001, p. 48)

The lack of debate about racism in schools contributes to the reproduction of practices that make black children invisible and deny their identity. The use of "skin-colored" pencils as a standard is an example of this silencing, as it ignores diversity and reinforces inequalities. To address this problem, it is necessary not only to modify teaching materials, but also to train teachers to work critically on racial diversity, promoting a more inclusive school environment.

Since Law 10.639/2003, which establishes the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools, initiatives have emerged aimed at increasing black representation in early childhood education. The inclusion of materials with a wide range of colors to represent skin is one such strategy, allowing black children to recognize themselves in a positive way.

The discussion about ethnic-racial representation in teaching materials is intrinsically linked to the construction of a more just and inclusive society. According to Gomes (2017), "schools play a central role in reproducing or overcoming racial stereotypes", and it is essential that the materials used in the educational process reflect the diversity that exists in society.

The use of materials that consider different skin tones, such as different sets of colored pencils, promotes the construction of positive identities and strengthens the self-esteem of Afro-descendant children. For Oliveira (2017), "the representation of diversity in

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artistic materials are a powerful tool in deconstructing prejudices", as they allow children to recognize and value themselves.

Therefore, the problematization of the "skin color" pencil is not just a symbolic issue, but a reflection of the racial structures rooted in society. To advance the anti-racist struggle, it is essential that education acts to deconstruct these standards, promoting diversity and ensuring that all children can recognize themselves positively in the school environment.

2.1WHow can we discuss literacy and ethnic-racial relations in early childhood education?

Brazil is a country historically marked by the system of slavery. The people who were brought from Africa and the indigenous people who already lived here had their rights as human beings violated, as they were mistreated, enslaved and killed by an economic system of oppression and violence against women and men of African descent. In the last 2010 Census, conducted by the IBGE, we had 81 million people who had not completed elementary school, or were semi-literate or functionally illiterate.

In this sense, the goal is for everyone to be able to advance in education, not just one group, right? Given this number, the largest number was among self-declared black people (around 39 million brown people and 7 million black people). Thus, it had a negative impact on all educational-political-economic-social spheres, and became a central theme for the demands, debates and struggles regarding access to schooling, from the initial grades, literacy to higher education for students in Brazilian schools.

We start from the idea that literacy can be defined as a process of developing skills to learn to read and write for the author Colello:

> Understanding the intricate dimensions of written language (linguistic, sociocultural, cognitive and pedagogical) seems especially timely because it supports: bringing the world into the classroom, making the school an instance articulated with the context of life, dealing with different possibilities of interpretation. (Colello, 2012, p.1).

In this process of decoding the alphabet, we use cognitive and motor skills that are shared by the Portuguese language in Brazil. Changes in teacher training paradigms and the construction of new curricula are frequently the focus of debate in the educational scenario, in order to improve the quality of basic education offered.

the less favored populations, however, this debate extends beyond the confines of schools and universities.

Historically, the country went through a long period in which it used different conceptions, stages and modalities of teaching literacy and thinking about literacy as we know it today. We point out as a milestone of this process, in the 1960s, the studies of the teacher/researcher/writer Paulo Freire (1921-1997), which contributed greatly to the realization of this very important stage in the lives not only of students, but of literacy teachers.

In this scenario, the world-renowned experience and disseminated by Paulo Freire teaching adults to read and write in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, known as "The 40 hours of Angicos". Later, Emília Ferreiro (1937-2023), inspired/supervised by the studies of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), became a reference when it comes to literacy. In this sense, all the constructions marked/mark what we know today as literacy or the act of teaching to read and write.

The advances/regressions of the Organic Laws of Education, Law 5.639/71, dictated a technical air to education, distributing the poor population to the job market and the elite to higher education (Shiroma; Morais; Evangelista, 2002). The school is the spokesperson for the organization of knowledge that the individual brings in early childhood from the family and the environments that surround him. On this subject, Ferreiro (2011):

> The literacy process is not a school product, but rather a cultural object, the result of the collective effort of humanity. As a cultural object, reading and writing fulfill several social functions and have concrete means of existence (especially in urban areas). Writing appears to children as an object with specific properties and as a support for social actions and exchanges. There are countless examples of inscriptions in the most varied contexts (signs, packaging, TV, clothing, periodicals, etc.). Adults take notes, read letters, comment on periodicals and look up a telephone number, etc. In other words, they produce and interpret writing in various contexts. (Ferreiro, 2011, p. 44)

As long as we live in a society marked by unequal access to basic issues, such as health, education, security, etc., issues reflect that we are facing a scenario of changes based on goals and ideals, finding solutions to improve basic education and effective conditions important for their implementation.

As already mentioned, the above situation invites us to reflect on the importance of thinking critically and reflexively in relation to the curriculum, assessment, and management of schools.

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and training and continuing education bodies, which guarantee access to literacy, recognizing needs and particularities, in order to consider equity in the education systems that generate and regulate education in Brazil. In this sense, Colello (2021):

> [...] We live in a literate society, as communication technologies After all, as we live in a literate society, as communication technologies presuppose a transit in the linguistic universe, as dignified survival depends on the productive insertion of people in the job market, teaching the written language seems to be a primary obligation of the school, constituting itself, simultaneously, as a goal (the objective of learning to read and write) and a means (the objective of learning to read and write so that, simultaneously and subsequently, one can learn other content provided for by the education systems or unpredictable in the course of life). (Colello, 2012, p.17).

In another aspect, according to the national plans on education, it is a right guaranteed by the Constitution (1988), however, according to Colello (2021 p.10), "the gap between typical school literacy and the literacy necessary for civic life is evident". In this context, we ask: what programs at the federal/state and municipal level are currently offered in schools that teach literacy in Teresina? To whom is it offered? What has changed with the pandemic context? What means were used during this period?

Policies aimed at education were marked by changes that accompanied the political groups in power until then, through the Ministry of Education. The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) is a government program, within the scope of the Ministry of Education in which the federal, Federal District, state and municipal governments, federated entities, establish a cooperation so that students in public systems are literate by the age of eight, in Portuguese and Mathematics, at the end of the 3rd year of elementary school.

Another national program in force at the time, represented by the Secretariat of Literacy (SEALF), which is in force under the National Literacy Policy (PNA), which seeks to improve the quality of literacy in the country and combat illiteracy, emphasizing social and educational performance, still differentiated and controlled by some ethnic groups, historically disadvantaged in Brazilian society.

Do the schools in which they operate have: Pedagogical Project? Are they familiar with the Piauí Curriculum (2019) for Elementary Education? This program has partnerships with schools and universities throughout the country, such as the National Institute of Studies and Educational Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE), focusing on

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of public policies. And as a policy for groups that did not complete or did not become literate at the established age, constitutionally we have the modality of Youth and Adult Education.

Among the other programs that are part of this panorama, there is PRO Literacy, this as a continuous activity of teacher training entitled 1st Training Course of the PRO Literacy Program, the meeting was entitled: "Regional Seminar of Good Practices of the Piauí Literacy Program at the Right Age (PPAIC)", bringing into vogue the theme "Evaluate to Teach". The event was promoted by SEMEC, which consisted of training for literacy teachers, a public policy that unites state and municipal initiatives for education.

These literacy programs and initiatives were organized according to the political governments in power at the time. On the other hand, they did not include discussions on racial and gender issues in their curricula. They also did not have initiatives in teacher training or ongoing training. This shows the gaps in these training contents. In this sense, Mortatti confirms:

> We understand that today there is more room for relevant debates about literacy methods, mainly due to subsequent studies that have been undertaken in the Brazilian educational field – it seems certain to us that some time ago it was found that the discussion about analytical and synthetic methods does not account for all the contingencies related to language teaching and learning in schools. (Mortatti, 2000, p. 78)

These initiatives were inherited from the Literacy Policy Management Program (GAL), in partnership between SEMEC and the Ayrton Senna Institute (the partnership with IAS came to an end with the inauguration of the last administration 2020-2024, which aimed to organize the management and literacy teachers of schools and ensure the literacy of all students in the 2nd and 3rd grade classes of elementary school, through assessments and effective monitoring of literacy actions in Teresina (SEMEC, 2023).

Among the Federal Government programs that cover all cities and municipalities located in Brazil, we highlight the *National Commitment to Literate Children,* according to the official program document:

> Its purpose is to guarantee the right to literacy for Brazilian children by the end of the 2nd year of elementary school and focuses on recovering the learning of children in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades affected by the pandemic. The Commitment establishes, among its principles, the promotion of educational equity, considering regional, socioeconomic, ethnic-racial and gender aspects; collaboration between entities

federative; and the strengthening of forms of cooperation between states and municipalities. (MEC, 2025)

With this scope, the program seeks to diversify and cover topics such as regionality, ethnic-racial relations (Afro-descendants, indigenous people, students of other nationalities) as a way of collaborating towards literacy at the right age and adding skills and abilities to oral and written expressions, mathematical knowledge, textual production in early childhood and basic education.

Intersectionality is also a relevant concept for this discussion. Collins (2020) emphasizes that "the experience of racial oppression intersects with other forms of inequality", making it necessary to have a pedagogical approach that understands the multiple dimensions of children's identity. In this sense, the introduction of activities that encourage reflection on identity and ethnic-racial diversity is fundamental.

Law No. 10,639/03 reinforces the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture. Brazilian and African in schools, seeking to combat structural racism and promote a more equitable education (BRASIL, 2003). However, according to Carneiro (2005), "the construction of the other as a non-being still persists in various school practices", and it is essential that educators are prepared to deconstruct these exclusionary practices.

The adoption of inclusive pedagogical practices requires critical teacher training that is committed to diversity. Hooks (2013) argues that "education as a practice of freedom requires teachers to challenge traditional paradigms and incorporate new perspectives," including the appreciation of Afro-descendant stories and experiences.

One of the most insidious forms of racial discrimination is institutional racism, which permeates many of our institutions, from the justice system to access to education and health care. This results in glaring disparities across a range of areas of life, from unequal incarceration rates to health and economic disparities. It is critical to recognize and address these systemic disparities to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities.

According to Article 1 of the Racial Equality Statute, racial discrimination is "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin". The Statute also states that this exclusion violates human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. Even with the liberation of slaves in 1888, racial distinction and prejudice are still rooted in Brazilian society.

The lack of representation and underrepresentation of people of African descent in positions of power and visibility contributes to the perpetuation of racism. Promoting diversity in leadership positions is an important step towards creating an inclusive environment.

In short, the challenges in implementing anti-racist practices in Brazil are significant, but not insurmountable. Raising awareness, educating, combating cultural stereotypes, promoting effective public policies, seeking representation, and overcoming resistance to change are necessary steps to building a country that values   diversity and combats racism in all its forms. We need to face all these challenges collectively so that we can truly achieve the goals of an equitable society, free from prejudice and that does not perpetuate racist practices, especially in schools.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research adopted a qualitative approach, based on participant observation and direct interactions with children in school contexts. This methodology allowed for an in-depth understanding of children's experiences related to ethnic-racial representation through the use of "skin-colored pencils."
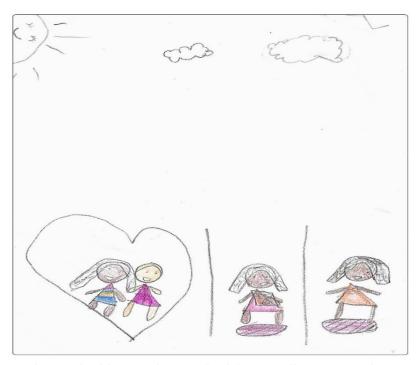
The research was carried out at a nursery school located in the Nazária-PI region. Eleven children aged between 6 and 7 years participated in the study.

Data collection took place through systematic observations in the classroom, records in a field diary and application of directed activities. During the activities, children were invited to make drawings using different sets of colored pencils,

including different skin tones. In addition, discussion groups were held to explore children's perceptions of diversity.

Recording of the dynamics of activities with students (conversation circle) and the material used.

Drawing produced by student after debates and discussions on the topic.

The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis technique, as proposed by Bardin (2011). The information was organized into thematic categories that encompass: perception of identity, representation of diversity and impact of pedagogical activities.

The research followed ethical principles. All participants participated voluntarily, with the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) by their legal guardians.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research aimed to investigate the perceptions of children aged 6 to 7 years about ethnic-racial representation through the use of "skin-colored pencils" in drawing activities, promoting conversation circles to explore diversity. The analysis of the collected data revealed valuable information that can contribute to the understanding of the ways in which identity is constructed and the perception of diversity among children.

It was observed that, during the drawing activities, most children associated the light skin tone to the concept of "skin color", demonstrating a hegemonic understanding of skin color that does not encompass the various shades present in society. Some students, however, upon noticing the diversity in the pencils offered, began to associate other shades with the characters they drew, indicating an openness to racial diversity that still needs to be encouraged more intensively.

In the conversation circles, most children expressed positive perceptions about different skin colors, although some still limited themselves to simplified concepts of "light" and "dark" in relation to skin tones. Interaction with different colored pencils gradually allowed the children to broaden their representations, but there was a clear need for more structured pedagogical work to help them understand the racial inequalities present in their society.

Many children's reports revealed a certain degree of strangeness or doubt when using skin tones different from their own, which reinforces the need for ongoing work on diversity in pedagogical practices. The implementation of guided activities had a positive impact on children's engagement with the theme of diversity. Although the first drawings and initial observations showed a resistance to the use of colors

that did not correspond to their own skin tones, subsequent activities, especially conversation circles and discussions about representations of characters and public figures, showed a change in the children's behavior.

They began to show greater openness to using other tones in their designs. and identify racial diversity more naturally. The analysis also showed that children began to verbalize their perceptions of racial difference more, suggesting a change in their view of inclusion and representation. The research demonstrates the importance of pedagogical initiatives that encourage reflection on racial identity and diversity in the early stages of early childhood education. Although the activities led to a broader perception of diversity, the lack of constant pedagogical guidance aimed at the topic meant that the transformation in children's perceptions was gradual.

It is essential that educators introduce discussions about racial diversity in a systematic way and that they seek to offer pedagogical resources that address different cultures and ethnicities in an equitable manner. In addition, the use of resources such as "skin-colored pencils" must be contextualized so that children can understand that each skin tone has its value and its social and cultural representation.

This study also highlights the relevance of applying historical-cultural theory as a basis for understanding children's social and educational interactions, as it allows us to analyze how pedagogical practices can influence the social constructions of identity and racial diversity, promoting the transformation of social relations from childhood onwards.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study addressed the use of "skin-colored pencils" in the educational context of early childhood education, seeking to understand how children perceive and represent ethnic-racial diversity using this tool. The research involved drawing activities and discussion groups with children aged 6 to 7 years, highlighting both the limitations and potential of this pedagogical approach.

The results indicated that, initially, the children had a simplified view of racial diversity, with a strong association between "skin color" and light tones. However, the use of pencils of different tones provided a space for reflection and discovery, expanding the children's perception of the different skin tones and

recognition of its importance in representing diverse identities. The conversation circles played an important role in allowing children to verbalize their perceptions and questions about racial differences, promoting a more inclusive and reflective environment.

This work contributes to the reflection on how pedagogical practices can be adjusted to address the issue of racial diversity from childhood. The use of "skin-colored pencils", although seemingly simple, proves to be a tool that directs stereotypes and promotes exclusion, in addition to encouraging the construction of a limited racial identity among children. The results also indicate the need for a continuous and more in-depth approach to the topic of diversity, so that children can develop a more critical and comprehensive understanding of racial and social issues.

Thus, this study reinforces the importance of pedagogical strategies that promote inclusion and reflection on identity and diversity from the earliest years of schooling, using resources that encourage recognition and respect for differences. The contributions of this work are valuable not only for early childhood education, but also for building a more just and egalitarian society, where racial plurality is recognized and celebrated.

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