

Friendship and childhood education <sup>1 2 3 4</sup>

*Amizade e Educação Infantil*

*Amistad y educación infantil*

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**Abstract**

This article aims to contribute to the studies related to Early Childhood Education, exploring the friendships marked by race, gender, class, and age, in a Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education that attends 5-year-old children. It is an ethnography carried out in the city of São Paulo for seven months, using field notes. Based on the analyses, we highlight that the relationships between children and the perception they have on their ethnical-racial and gender identities are established by the contact with the differences. In their daily experience, children built meanings with reality and transformed the proposed meanings every time they played together practicing friendship.

**Keywords:** friendship, intersectionality, children, pre-school

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## **Resumo**

*O artigo tem como objetivo contribuir com os estudos da Educação Infantil, explorando as amizades entre as crianças, marcadas por raça, gênero, classe e idade, num Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil que atende crianças com 5 anos. Trata-se de uma etnografia realizada na cidade de São Paulo, ao longo de sete meses, fazendo uso do registro em caderno de campo. Com base nas análises, pode-se destacar que as relações entre as crianças e a percepção que elas têm sobre suas identidades étnico-raciais e de gênero se constituem no contato com as diferenças. Na convivência cotidiana, as crianças constroem sentidos com a realidade, transformam os sentidos propostos a cada momento em que brincam juntas praticando a amizade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *amizade, interseccionalidade, crianças, pré-escola*

## **Resumen**

*El artículo tiene como objetivo contribuir a los estudios de educación de la primera infancia, explorando las amistades entre los niños marcados por raza, género, clase y edad, en un Centro Municipal de Educación temprana que atiende a niños de 5 años. Es una etnografía realizada en la ciudad de São Paulo, durante más de siete meses, que utiliza el registro en el cuaderno de campo. Con base en los análisis, se puede resaltar que las relaciones entre los niños y la percepción que tienen bajo sus identidades étnico-raciales y de género están constituidas en contacto con las diferencias. En la convivencia cotidiana, los niños construyen significados con la realidad, transformando los significados propuestos en cada momento cuando juegan juntos practicando la amistad.*

**Palabras clave:** *amistad, interseccionalidad, niños, preescolar.*

## **Introduction**

This article aims to contribute to the studies of Childhood Education, analyzing the friendship among children marked by race, gender, class, and age, in a Municipal Center for Childhood Education that attends 5-year-old children in the city of São Paulo, Brazil.

It is no simple task to perceive which concept of friendship is used in studies, as it encompasses a theoretical challenge – to define what is and what are the necessary aspects to enable it –, as well as methodological – how to access a type of relationship between people. Among the data pointed out by the studies analyzed here, a predominant aspect of friendship in childhood is the way children play, as well as the contextual demands of the social space they

are (Almeida, 2016; Borba, 2005; Delgado et al., 2017; Gomes, 2012; Müller, 2008; Nunes, 2017; Prado, 2006; Santiago, 2019).

All the data of these studies create a set of works that refer to the social differentiation of childhood cultures, related to race, gender, class, age, and the perception of “us”, or a group identity. Dialoguing with the works found, I highlighted among their perspectives, possible points of view, evidences, and clues that could help me think the construction of friendship among children in Childhood Education. I called *practices of friendship* the actions enacted by children to keep the different contacts between them, considering the everyday situations they experience in the educational space. Though understanding the complexity of the theme, I searched for aspects that could help me think about friendship practices in an articulated and contextualized way, considering their macro and micro aspects.

In this research, I conceptualize friendship as the action of playing together. When they play together, children share ideas, things that only they know, they build ways of being, of relating, and living. These configurations, these multiple entanglement, promote their friendship practices within childhood cultures, which every moment have very particular characteristics, constantly produced by children.

## **The theoretical-methodological approach and the insertion of the researcher in the field**

In the spaces of kindergarten and preschools, children’s protagonism can be promoted or erased depending on the relationships they establish with adults and the creation of moments in which children can collectively make decisions. As social actors, through playing and interacting with each other, and between them and adults, children are protagonists of their lives, as well as creators of childhood cultures. In collective actions, they take decisions, solve problems, act as the main characters of their own histories, though they do not always have their wishes and points of view recognized by adults.

According to Quinteiro (2002), through play, children are able to build meanings to their action and this is important for cultural activities because through play they build friendships, express themselves, solve concerns and fears, share ideas and discoveries, challenge adult

authority or, even, through confrontation and social differentiation, they articulate and create new ways to interpret the world. In this sense, playing is one of the ways to express children's protagonism, mainly in the context of childhood cultures, i.e., the legitimate children exercise to reproduce, transform, and create society (Corsaro, 2011; Fernandes, 2004).

From this notion of children's play, present in childhood culture, this study considers play as a human social activity that, for children, has a leading and indispensable role to construct friendship practices, as well as ways to understand the world. As pointed out by Kishimoto (2011), it is through play that children express what they know and what they like to do; therefore, to see children freely acting and seeing how they play is a way to understand them – to recognize the senses they give to things in a creative process to produce cultures, as well as understand childhoods.

On its turn, breaking away from an idea of single childhood necessarily implies the analysis of racial, gender, class, and age relations that trespass children's social experiences. As affirmed by Arroyo (2018), "childhood and postcolonial studies advance when recognizing that racial, gender, and class relations are key to understanding childhood" (p. 44). In this sense, to see the social processes, I start from the intersectional analysis proposed by Crenshaw (2002), which allows us to understand the dynamics of interaction among the different mechanisms of oppression.

As a process of discovery, Davis (2016) highlights that the intersectional analysis warns us to understand that the world around is more complicated and contradictory than we might have anticipated. It is an approach that broadens the understanding that oppressions do not act in isolation, but are multiplied and create other situations- they do not only add up, not only intensify with pre-existing others, but are reinforced (Akotirene, 2019). In this perspective, I use intersectionality as a theoretical-methodological concept, as a living and changeable kaleidoscope, which allows an analysis of the complexities imposed by the systems of capitalist, racist, sexist, and adult-centric domination,

From these contributions, the article brings the urgency to develop studies with children, black and white, active social actors in the Brazilian context marked by racial, gender, class, and age difference. The studies built from the intersectional perspectives can, thus, help studies with children, because, as shown by other works (Nunes, 2017; Santiago, 2019), in the relationships established in kindergarten, preschools, and schools emerge questions about not only

adultcentrism, but also racism, sexism, and class oppression. Therefore, it is not enough to analyze the situations experiences in these spaces only through one of these facets.

Thus, observing and playing with the children I conducted an ethnography, connecting this situation of fieldwork and the practices of friendship. To the anthropologist Peirano (2008), the individual qualities of the researcher, connected with the context of the researched group, and the researcher's theoretical background allow different researchers to create different studies when dealing with a problem. However, according to the author, this does not lead to a lack of result credibility, as the effect of idiosyncrasies tend to amplify the knowledge field.

Regarding the discussion on the swinging movement between Anthropology and Ethnography creating different points of view among researchers, Ingold (2011) makes a criticism that points to a possible answer: "Of course, ethnography has its methods, but it is not a method. It is not, in other words, a formal set of processual means conceived to satisfy the ends of an anthropological investigation. It is a practice in its own right" (pp. 20-21). According to Charlon (2010), grounded by anthropologist Grootaers (2001): "We also know that the ethnographic description is, in a way, the result of many factors: researchers' personalities, the meeting with the 'other', their strategic choices in presenting the details, the construction of the text, etc." (p. 86).

Entering the research field was not easy, I did not know what it would show me, I was anxious, and had no idea what would happen. The girls and boys in the class looked at me and, when I looked at them, they would smile and I would answer their smiles. They showed me their toys and activities done in the class. In other moments, they wanted to sit on my lap. They made me move among them, involving me in their games. As pointed out by Santos and Santiago (2016), The challenges that emerge while conducting a research with children led us to constantly (re)think the methodology, exactly because "studies with children should subvert the closed and systemic idea of a rigid methodology, because childhood cultures are acts of creation that unfold as flows of experience" (p. 740). Children made me flexibilize my adult position with play, as well as constantly reflect on my methodological choices.

In this interaction with the children, there were some adjustments to be made; for example, my initial choice to stay quiet, sitting down in the classroom, frenetically writing what the children did, as a type of "typing machine", did not work because the children incited me to talk and, mainly, play with them. This mismatch worked, mainly, as explained by Beaud and

Weber (2007), as an aid to transform the obstacles into tools of knowledge. Then, with such reflexivity, I tried to keep a posture open to the possibilities of meeting with young children, to know their practices of friendship in the everyday life of preschool.

In several moments I was with the children and the teacher, moments of distress and euphoria alternated, and I tried to understand what they did, knew, spoke, and how they routinely practiced their friendships. As I had no idea what would happen in the field, I was afraid I would not have any data. This sensation of fear in the research field was strong and striking, this varied depending on the time of production. There were moments in which I thought I was getting closer to the class. Children would play with me, declared themselves to be my friends, told me about their preferences, and showed me how and with whom they played. On the other hand, I thought about the avalanche of notes I would have to register in the field notes. This concerned me. I thought I would never be able to analyze them.

On the sensation of fear when we are immersed in the field, though the anthropologist Zaluar (1985) did not work with childhoods, her reflection based on her ethnographic experience with urban underprivileged people in Rio de Janeiro, in the 1980s, contribute for this understanding: “Looking back, I perceive that together with an unexplainable fear, there was a certain ambiguity in my attitude whose roots I could not explain at the time” (p. 12).

During my socialization with the young children, I was afraid I could not have their trust because I was an outsider. I wondered if I could deal with the research or if I would be tangled up in what I was doing. I thought this would become a future chaos. There was also another factor: if, at first, the culture present in the field was enigmatic, in other moments it gradually presented itself to me. However, the methodology allowed me to conduct this research with the children, whose main intention was not to expose them, but to bring to the stage different meetings I had with them in the researched preschool.

I wrote the observations during the field activities and registered my impressions in a field notebook. I also described the actions of the children among themselves, with children from other classes, and with the adults in the research context. Most field notes were written *in loco*, but there were moments I had to stop writing to listen and follow the children, especially when they wanted me to play. Children would grab my arms so we could walk together. Personally, I loved that close contact, they had an incredible energy, we played tag, turned in the merry-go-round, and played on the swings.

So I left the notebook on a classroom table and got involved in the games. To be able to play with the kids, I left a blue pen in my pocket and some small pieces of paper to use as quick reminders. In them, I write comments of the children and adults. I did this standing up, sat on the grass of the park, supported on the walls of the bathroom, on the cafeteria table. Children loved to see me writing those notes. They laughed about the scene. Sometimes, the girls and boys helped me stuck those notes in the pockets of my jeans. We should highlight that, in the Pedagogy of Childhood, children are taken as social actors; as creative and demanding investigators- we, adults- need to decolonize our thoughts and perception on them and their productions (Santos et al., 2017). I did this to recover the events from my memory, when registering them in the field notebook. These records were placed in a paper attached, besides the *in loco* observations. I called them “notes of the field notebook”, assembling, together with the “reports of field notebook”, in a single field notebook.

Regarding the written process of the field notebook, though not researching with children, Wacquant (2002), during his ethnography in a boxing gym in an African-American community in Chicago, after facing innumerable preliminary circumstances decided to train boxing in a gym. For the sociologist, an ethnographic experience built among boxing, observing, and writing was a challenge. I dare affirm that playing, observing, and writing with young children was an even harder challenge. The children from the class were caring and creative, they wanted my attention and I could not refuse their requests. I also was getting closer to them.

In April 24, 2019, I met Olga<sup>5</sup>, a white woman, the main teacher of the class, who received me in the teachers’ lounge. During our talk she told me she was very tired because of the municipal strike that lasted 32 days, the school year would be very difficult, and the people in this educational unity would be exhausted. Olga handed me a copy of the student list of “*Infantil IP*”<sup>6</sup>, composed by 23 children with 5 years old: 13 girls, among them 4 black ones and 9 white ones; and 10 white boys, as seen on the table below:

<sup>5</sup> All names of children and adults in the research are fictional, except my own.

<sup>6</sup> I use the name given by the school to the class, in italics and between quotation marks.



**Table 1: The participant class**

Girls		Boys	
Name	Race	Name	Race
Andréia	white	Arnaldo	white
Bianca	white	Bruno	white
Bruna	white	Guilherme	white
Carla	white	Igor	white
Claudia	white	Jacson	white
Eduarda	black	Jonathan	white
Tamires	black	Murilo	white
Manuela	black	Nicolau	white
Mariana	white	Otávio	white
Núbia	black	Renato	white
Patrícia	white		
Paula	white		
Roberta	white		
13		10	
Total: 23 children			

Source: List of the class and the Political-Pedagogical Program. Table created by the author (2019)

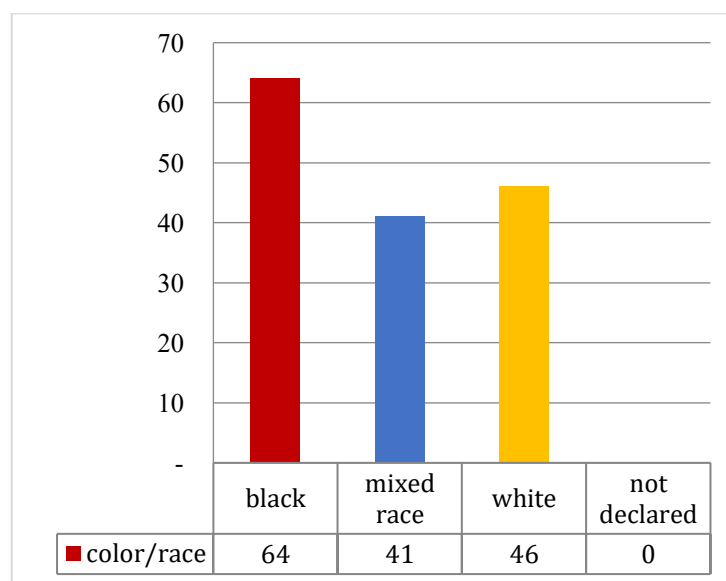
The class “*Infantil II*” only had 4 black girls and no black boy. To seek the data on the racial profile of people from the Municipal Center of Childhood Education, I searched its Political-Pedagogical Project. The data was collected through sociocultural questionnaires applied by the pedagogical coordination, which followed the category of color (race) indicated by *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE- Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). The workers of the unit and the children’s parents were self-identified, while the children were heteroidentified by their families.

During the fieldwork, I could see that it was the standard procedure to use heteroidentification for the data on children’s color (race); their families accepted this when filling the enrollment form and the sociocultural questionnaire. They did not demand any changes in these documents. As pointed out by Rosemberg (1996) and Rocha and Rosemberg (2007), this builds, among other issues, a naturalization that children should be “protected” from the problems involving racial in the country. I point this out because, as stated by Nunes (2016), “children live in a society that, even if not wishing to see itself as racialized, maintains a series of actions and activities that show that this type of markers is used to define places and space” (p. 408).



Here, we need to understand the classification model used by the school and accepted by the families, as indicated by Nogueira (1985): color (or race) comes not only from a self-declaration or a self-identification, but also the heteroclassification, i.e., the classification attributed by an exterior aspect. The heteroclassification, as some researchers – among them Petruccelli (2000, 2007) – suggest, also connects class and race, and it is constantly enacted by the State- or the dimensions of the State. Alves (2014) and Gomes (2017) also point this out in their different contexts. Black movements state: when in doubt if someone is black, ask the police.

Color (or race) of children’s parents, 151 people in total, distributed into: 64 blacks, 41 mixed race, and 46 white, as shown in graphic 1:

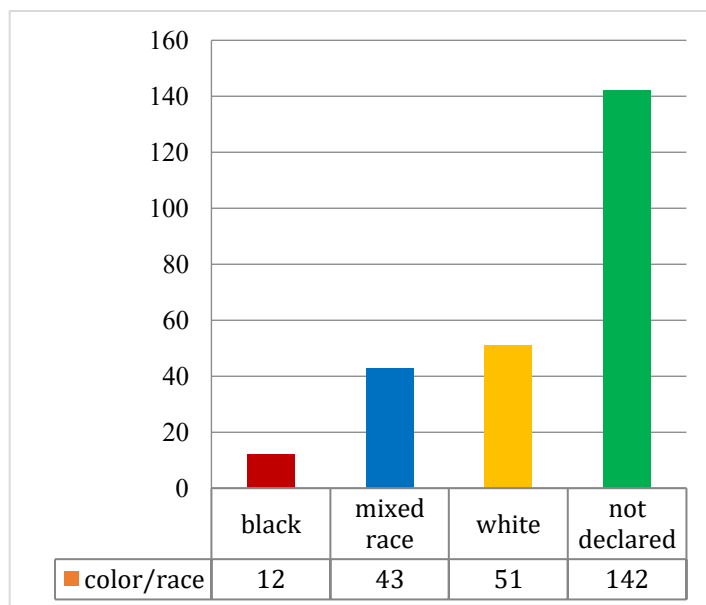


Total = 151 adults

**Graphic 1: Race of mothers and fathers**

Source: Political-Pedagogical Project – Graphic done by the author (2019)

Girls and boys were heteroidentified by the parents, 248 children in total: 12 black, 43 mixed race, 51 white and 142 not declared, as can be seen in graphic 2:



Total = 248 children

**Graphic 2: Race of boys and girls**

Source: Political-Pedagogical Project – Graphic done by the author (2019)

Most parents did not declare the color (race) of their children. According to the pedagogical coordination, families did not fill part of the sociocultural questionnaires in the beginning of the 2019 school year.

Regarding the 142 “not-declared” children, I raised the hypothesis that, in Brazil, we live under great inequalities left by the legacy of slavery and which, in fact, establish hierarchies in the social structure. Often, when children’s parents declared a black-skinned child as mixed race or white, they are not only reproducing a logic based on whiteness (Fanon, 2008) but also, in a way, these families can seek strategies to protect their children in the Brazilian context “that carries a complex relationship between races, racism, prejudice, and racial discrimination” (Munanga & Gomes, 2006, p. 175).

In April 26, I introduced myself to the families as a teacher of children and researcher of childhood; I explained what the research was about and that there were not predictable risks to the children, their privacy and anonymity would be kept, as well as the conditions to store

and use the collected material, and the fulfillment of ethical issues<sup>7</sup>. Families were aware of my explanations. The children sometimes paid attention in our conversation, other times played with their toys. Carmen, a white woman who identified herself as Carla's grandmother, a white girl, asked:

- But... teacher Artur, I wonder if my granddaughter is prejudiced. We teach at home that we should respect everyone!

- Carmen, stay calm. When we conduct studies, we don't know what children can show us or say about a certain topic. I believe that the education your family is given to your granddaughter is the best possible. I think that is the way, respecting people regardless of origin, race, gender, financial conditions, etc. Isn't it?

- Oh, my dear, I'm relieved to know that you also think like that, you will meet my granddaughter and you'll see she's a sweetheart!

(Field notes, April 26, 2019).

Carla came to her grandmother Carmem and hugged her, looked at me, and smiled. I winked at both. The families agreed with our positions. When we reflect on the concerns highlighted by Carla's grandmother and the other families, we must remember that, as pointed out by Santiago (2019), since childhood the social relationships built by children are marked by adultcentric points of view, based on lenses that almost always racially classify them. These aspects, also connected to friendship practices, lead to the understanding that friendships can determine how people see their relationships, as well as the way they relate with each other and with society.

Besides this, the meeting with the children's families also led me to reflect on the concern of not seeming prejudiced or to show that they do not have prejudice is an issue that distresses some, if not all, people. I believe that Carmen was, in fact, worried with the possible attitudes of her granddaughter regarding the other children in the class and that this could be seen in the research. Then, she, in a way, tried to legitimize the education provided to Carla within her family.

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<sup>7</sup> The Research Ethics Committee, on April 23, 2019, which supports the ethics of the research methodological procedures, approved the research (Report number 3.278.019).

Seeing this situation through in the broader context, as affirmed by Carneiro (2011), we could reflect that discrimination and prejudice in Brazil result from a position of historical rejection, as Brazilian society has always tried to hide these problems. A mechanism that disguises reality only aggravates the problems, as it builds a culture of impunity towards criminal practices of racism, violence against women, homophobia, and other issues. The researcher points out that Brazilian society needs guidelines and affirmative actions of awareness against this position she categorizes as “hypocritical”, to recognize that the problem has always existed and that we need to act according to its needs, that is, to face it.

## **We’re special friends: the black girls**

Watchful on how these children perceived their group belonging, I noticed that the four black girls were always together in the playground. Among them, Eduarda interacted more with the other children in other spaces, mainly with her friend Carla. Núbia, Tamires, and Manuela interacted little in the other spaces. These observations led me to some questions: Why did they keep to themselves in the park? How did they perceive themselves in the class? Were they “silenced” in their relations? Did they perceive something from my presence as a black adult?

The four black girls in a class of mostly white children considered themselves “special friends”. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, we were in the five-meter-diameter sandbox with a wooden slide. Eduarda was going up and down the slider; Nubia would open her arms so that when Eduarda reached the bottom they could hug. Both would laugh with this game. As they got tired, they decided that we would sit down. When they saw us, Tamires and Manuela ran to use. So, we kept there, sunbathing. I took the time to talk, to know more about their practices of friendship and understand why they were always together in the playground:

- Girls, you seem to really like each other, right?
- Yes, we do! – answered Núbia.
- Yes...yes...yes – confirmed Eduarda, Tamires, and Manuela.
- Eduarda, it's different to play with Carla. She's also your friend, right? - I asked
- Yes...but she's not like us.
- I like to have snacks with Núbia! – says Tamires.
- And I like your snacks, but you already know mine has to have pepper! – I confirmed

Minutes later, Manuela added:

- Artur, we're special friends.

(Field notes. September 13, 2019).

On the labeling of friendships assigned by children themselves, Borba (2005) pointed out that in her research young children considered their best friends those they admired when playing their favorite games. In this direction, the four black girls showed that to be “special friends” is also to play together, considering their perception of group, affection, notions of race, gender, and body.

The friendship of the black girls was not fragile, weakening with time. On the contrary, there was a dynamic that got stronger each time they played together. We can connect this construction of friendship between the four black girls (which can also take place among adults) to the understanding of “house of difference”, conceptualized by Lorde (1982): “Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being black together was not enough. We were different. Being black women together was not enough. We were different.” (p. 226).

This understanding of the “house of difference”, which was the base for a great part of the feminist theory on gender in the United States in the end of the 1980s, allows us to perceive that the “special friendship” among the black girls Núbia, Eduarda, Tamires, and Manuela

allows other points of view to understand the friendships between children, especially when we articulate this dimension of friendship in the scope of ethnical-racial and gender issues.

Though Lorde (1988) does not deal directly with friendship, she recognizes that the differences between women (and also girls) are broad and varied, she discusses the notions of black body, fight and resistance, and brings an important reflection on how the fight for survival is daily, a political battle carried with perceptions on the body, social relations, and self-care. According to her reflections, some people were not destined to survive. Having a body, belonging to a certain social group, being a subject, can be a death sentence. The notions of how you are, where you are, with whom you are, show that surviving is a radical action; a denial to the non-existence until the end; a denial to the non-existence until you no longer exist.

The black feminist perspective brings to its agenda of fights the importance to discuss these issues I raise to deconstruct and erode socially naturalized standards, which segregate black people and, consequently, makes them suffer through silences – so subtle that are mostly unrecognized. As stated by Carneiro (2003), revealing the processes to silence and the mechanisms of oppression, the fight of black women has been blackening society: “the fight of black women against the oppression of gender and race has been drawing new contours to the feminist and antiracist political action, enriching the discussion on the racial and gender issues in Brazilian society” (p. 3).

In a class of young children, amongst which black girls were in a small number, would they recognize themselves as a specific ethnical-race and gender group? If there were black boys in the class, would that happen? If it were another context of research, how would black children perceive themselves?

The effects of discriminatory and segregationist processes make each person– and notably very young black children, as seen in the Master’s study of Santiago (2014) in a kindergarten – realize that society establishes certain places and opportunities, certain rights to some, and excludes others. Children from an early age perceive racism and sexism in kindergarten and preschools, showing themselves through different languages, attitudes, postures, and even their friendships.

We are in a socially and racially unequal society, whose cultural pattern is grounded on values determined by a white, patriarchal, heteronormative, Euro-Christian, elitist culture;

anything that distances itself from this standard is classified, discriminated, and segregated. In this context, Collins (2000) points out that the interpersonal dimension encompasses everyday racism and sexism, the daily experiences of discrimination, and the opposition and resistance reactions to these acts.

In this case, could Eduarda, Núbia, Manuela, and Tamires be reacting against the opposition and resisting in the arena of life as “fighter” who play together? Gender is not always a marker to analyze certain forms of violence, the fact of being a girl or woman was not always considered in some situations. Violences that affect a certain ethnical group, for example, can hide problems that are specific and then cannot be debated in the correct measure. Crenshaw (2002) called this situation sub-inclusion, i.e., in these cases the questions related to black women (and girls) are not considered as related to genre because they do not affect white women (and girls); or, because they do not affect black men (and boys) they are not perceived as a racist issue. In this phenomenon, the racial dimension of the problem makes it invisible to the question of gender, and vice versa, though the experiences lived by people who are victims of only one category and privileged by the others are considered social group problems, even when they did not directly affect black women (and girls).

This is the importance of an intersectional approach, even regarding the construction of friendships, to avoid certain issues to become invisible, compromising not only the analysis of a problem, but also the actions to certain confrontations. “Intersectional discrimination is particularly difficult to be identified in contexts which economic, cultural, and social forces silently shape the background” (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 176).

That is how racism and gender violence takes place in Brazil: completely rooted in our society, part of the structures of power, to the point that they become invisible. Considering the historical, social, and cultural impositions that hinder the “feminine condition”, I understand that the construction of an identity connected to blackness and ancestry is a great challenge for black women and girls (also for black boys and men). Other factors are also equally challenging, for example, to establish friendships and affective connections, recognize their own experiences, write their story, and disseminate the voices that define them (Silva, 1998).

In the discussions of black movement connected to feminism, we can assert that the way black girls Eduarda, Manuela, Núbia, and Tamires gather in the park to play together, practicing their friendships, even with me an atypical black adult who played and talked with



them, can be understood as a way of organization, a principle that permeates the relationships between African-descendants built in the diaspora flows. I am referring to what Silva (1995) defines as *africanidades* (Africanities); that is, the inheritance that African women and men have left us, teaching “an inevitable capacity of resistance, a strong and hopeful belief in people...a creating action able to face the continuous attempts to exterminate black people” (p. 29).

Black girls and boys and women and men, as they are exactly bodies who fight against oppressions are seen more presently in spaces of debate, conflict, and confrontations; thus, commonly, we end up leaving behind the need to talk about how these bodies affect each other, by themselves and through the bodies of others, regarding the establishment of friendship practices.

In this scope, for the young black girls in the class, playing with their special friends was as important as the other educational activities. From this angle, as shown by hooks (2000), on affection: “From the moment I know my feelings; I can also know and define those needs that will only be filled in communion or in contact with other people” (p. 196). Based on Lorde (1998), she also warns: “We should engage ourselves in a process of visionary thought that transcends the ways of privileged knowledge by the oppressive power if we are enacting really revolutionary changes” (hooks, 1992, p. 78). From this form of significance and (re)existence of black young girls, Eduarda, Tamires, Manuela, and Núbia, who with their games and powers practiced their friendships, constantly expressed and re-created them, we need to be open to the differences and diversity.

## **Do not be afraid, I’ll protect you: urban legends**

During the fieldwork, I noticed that the children built their friendships, protecting one another. They tried to provoke fear in each other, from an urban internet legend that was in evidence at that time.

On August 9, 2019, the class was at the playground, and I observed the games between girls and boys, girls and girls, and boys and boys. Some children ran, other were on the swing, while others played in the sandbox. The girls ran their hands over the faces of some boys and

the boys laughed. Then Eduarda, Murilo, Nicolau, and Otávio, who were playing together, stopped, and asked me a question:

- Artur, do you know who Momo is?

- Hi, Eduarda! So so. Who is she?

- She's a doll from the internet that does evil!

- Hum... how come?

- We enter on the internet and she appears. Do you know that she tells us things so we can kill ourselves? My mom told me that if she appears to me I have to call her!

At this moment, Murilo, Nicolas, and Otávio seemed a bit scared with what Eduarda was saying. So, I asked:

- And you, Eduarda, are you afraid of *Momo*? Are you boys also afraid?

Eduarda, quickly answered:

- No, I'm not afraid of her!

The boys were quiet, shrugging. Eduarda, paying attention to all, looked at the boys and emphatically said:

- Do not be afraid, I'll protect you.

(Field notes, August 9, 2019).

When building friendships within childhood cultures, the children create their logic, stories, and, then, produce meaning with reality. This happens when they play together, in the collective experience articulated by imagination, by the use of the body, and children's different languages. During the games of approximation-avoidance among children, according to Corsaro (2011), they articulate a threatening agent – in this case, *Momo*<sup>8</sup> – recognized by them through

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<sup>8</sup> The *Momo* doll is associated with the *Ubume* legend from Japanese folklore about the spirit of a woman who died during pregnancy or during labor. Some stories say that *Ubume* buys sweets and other food for children that are still alive, with coins that later turn into dry leaves. In other stories, *Ubume* attracts the attention of a living human and takes him/her to the place where her son is hidden. Sometimes, *Ubume* kidnaps children (Omnyo-za Brasil, n.d.).

naming and reactions of fear and protection, so that they end up potentializing their friendships from the accumulation of tension, excitement of threat, relieve, and the joy of escaping. Collectively, the children of the class dealt with fear, protected each other, faced danger, inserting these aspects to their friendship practices, which they produced and controlled. Eduarda, Carla, Arnaldo, and Guilherme always returned to the topic of *Momo* with the other children from the class. Arnaldo said: “Artur, it’s so cool! Do you know I like horror movies?” (Field notes, August 20, 2019). This took place when we were in the classroom, in the cafeteria, or at the playground, which created a tense atmosphere among the children. Nicolau, one of the boys who got closer to me since the beginning, asked me: “Have you seen the *Momo* doll in your mobile? I’m afraid of that ugly doll” (Field notes, August 20, 2019). Other preschool children called *Momo* the “ugly doll” (Field notes, August 20, 2019).

In modern life, several threats permeate everyday life. We can observe that, in a way, all subjects can feel unprotected in some moments, and this happens for different reasons. It is common the perception that we live in a culture of fear, marked by the anxiety of not feeling protected by the institutions and security networks that seem to provide the sensation, if not of a complete safety, at least some safety. In this context, through the social-anthropological perspective of Teixeira and Porto (1998) “the insecurity of the modern world is increasingly more connected to the increase of violence that, on its turn, creates a base and strengthens an imaginary of fear” (p. 51).

The urban legend of *Momo* was discussed among the children of the class day after day, by the girls and the boys, they explained how the doll appeared in the video and that they could not do what she asked. As pointed out by Corsaro (2011), when producing these actions, “the children understood and dealt more strongly with the social representations of evil and with the unknown in the safety of their cultures” (p. 81), intertwined in the society. This character, known as the doll *Momo* in many places of the world, appeared in 2018 as an urban legend, probably on *Facebook*<sup>9</sup>, as a supposedly chain letter spread by *Whatsapp*<sup>10</sup>, in which the image of a female face, with an extremely disturbing appearance, was followed by messages instructing children to self-mutilate and hurt other children. The chain letter became known as the *Momo* Challenge. We do

<sup>9</sup> *Facebook* is a social media and virtual social network released on February 4, 2004, operated by Facebook Inc. and its private property. American programmers and executives Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes created and found it.

<sup>10</sup> *WhatsApp* is a smartphone multiplatform of instant messages and voice calls.

not know who created *Momo* as it is a character built in the space of data banks and virtual messages.

In this narrative genre, broadly circulated in contemporary societies, especially virtual environments, there are different definitions of legend proposed in different fields of investigation. Lopes (2017), in his doctoral thesis, discusses the legend as a symbolic form of the following terms: “It is a mark, trace, or symptom that, through discourse, points out to the desire to conjure chance, to give meaning to the vague and generalized perception of insecurity and the lack of control on the ‘risks’ [original highlight] we face” (p. 203).

To help reflect on the imaginary that shape visions of the world and model conducts and lifestyles, in continuous and discontinuous movements to preserve the current order and introduce changes, Martins (1993), analyzing the appearance of a demon figure in a big factory in the city of São Paulo, in 1956. He points out that, in Western culture – influenced by European, African, Asian, and Eastern cultures–, in the great mythical and archetypal conceptions of human, the denial of men’s humanity; the demon appears, among other issues connected to the rationality of work, as a threat to this humanity.

The apprehensions engendered in a capitalist society provide the material which compose the urban legends because, in a culture marked by media information permeated by scientific-technological advancements increasingly more replaceable, information are propagated and disseminated everywhere. By extension, who retells the story is also part of a group and shares with this group its discourse and rules of operation, as children and their potentialities create their own history, formulate, and re-elaborate them, giving different senses to the set of practices (Fernandes, 2004). This notion legitimates them as builders of childhood cultures.

## **We are friends because we like dinosaurs: the common interests**

On September 17, 2019, we were once again playing together in the park. I was with Guilherme, Igor, Jacson, and Arnaldo, who were making some tires go down the slide. The boys mentioned that the friends had common interests – for example, liking dinosaurs:

- Did you know that birds are dinosaurs that evolved? – asked Arnaldo.
- Really? Ow, that’s cool, I didn’t know! What’s your favorite dinosaur? – I asked
- I like all Pterodactyls!
- I like the *T. rex* – commented Guilherme.
- Wow, the *T. rex* fits you – I joked
- It also fits you, baby! – answered Guilherme.
- So, we’re friends because we like dinosaurs! – adds Arnaldo.

(Field notes, October 17, 2019).

This is a children’s strategy to define who is a friend and who is not, which even articulates someone’s permanence in the group, as there is an interaction and exchange of knowledge that need to be collectively kept, guaranteeing the continuity of friendships (Ferreira, 2004).

The knowledge of these children on dinosaurs established itself as a way to enter and continue in the group, depending on the situation that took place, be it of support or help. Girls and boys, on their turn, when using a strategy of support or help to start or maintain an interaction, possibly did it because they understood someone’s need or were open to help, capturing the friends’ perception – as previously mentioned - ; the class had a common disposition, daily built, that surrounded their friendships.

Dinosaurs were central in their friendship practices. When they were in the playroom, the class almost never played with dolls and little cars. Guilherme always imitated the T-rex roar: “Grrrrr!” (Field notes, October 21, 2019). He would run after the girls, who would escape from them, shouting around the playroom. Sometimes, there were conflicts among the children to see who would be a certain dinosaur, but they would solve it quickly. The most conflict was the exchange of dinosaurs.

In different moments of the activities, as part of their routine, children shared their experiences. Often, they talked about dinosaurs. I noticed they were attracted by the knowledge shared by Arnaldo. They knew the names, the abilities, the *habitat*, and other information.

Arnaldo was the most interested in dinosaurs. He often taught his friends about fossils – shapes, sizes, dietary habits, and the various species of dinosaurs. He says: “I’ll be a paleontologist” (Field notes, October 29, 2019).

Regarding the sharing of experiences among children who are friends when they are together, Camaioni (1997) affirms that “children friends are more advanced in the social game, in cooperation, and also on the capacity to socially interact, when confronted with children with the same age that have no friends” (p. 72).

Arnaldo showed his friends his magazines and, enthusiastically, told about the television programs he watched on the theme. Young children used affection, experience, imagination, their bodies, languages, and created their practices of friendship, playing with dinosaurs. Girls and boys produced meanings to their games, transforming the proposed senses every time they played together. In this sense, as highlighted by Camaioni (1997): “The expressions of affection, the interest on what your friend thinks or feels, the pleasure to be together, talking about common experiences, confessing secrets, memories, and fantasies, are all aspects of friendship that we can gather in the dimension of intimacy” (p. 72).

With this intimacy between children who are friends, as pointed out by Corsaro (2011), their plays/games can take place in different ways; inanimate objects can be treated as animated. Children can solve some uncertainties that emerge from their interactions with the adult world, sharing with their friends. According to Fernandes (2004), when playing children use the different aspects of the society to which they belong, producing culture, and an organization is established depending on the plays/games within the group.

## **Final remarks**

During the difficult task to understand the construction of friendships between children, as I have seen in the bibliographical review and the analysis of the studies that dialogue with this research, we need to see children through what they think, feel, say, act, trying to give meaning to the friendships between them. Thus, it is necessary to try to really see the girls and boys, get rid of stereotypes historically and culturally built around them– for instance, that they would

not know what they are looking for in their relationships. In fact, we need to get involved, to play, to have your heart open to understand with them their friendship practices.

Based on the events and as we have seen throughout the research, a key condition for the friendship among children is for them to play together. With their games, children fill their lives with doses of joy and create powers that break away with vertical relationships. From their joint actions, they practice their friendships articulated by affections, bonds, knowledge, common interests, by their perceptions on their bodies, race, gender, class, and age, and the uses they make of the preschool space.

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