



## The Playing of the Child *Performer* with Orixás: artistic and afro-referenced experimentations

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**ABSTRACT – The Playing of the Child *Performer* with Orixás: artistic and afro-referenced experimentations** – This article presents excerpts from a master’s dissertation in Performing Arts about performances of children’s playing bodies, in Early Childhood Education, based on the Orixás universe. It initially reveals the participating children (NEI/Cap/UFRN), dialoguing with author(s) such as Marina Marcondes Machado (2010a; 2010b; 2015). It develops intersections between performance and childhoods, articulating an afro-playful methodology with the children’s protagonism. The artistic, afro-referenced and performative narratives of the authors raise contemporary considerations, providing findings for this discussion.

Keywords: **Experience. Art. Child-Performer. ‘Orixás’. Early Childhood Education.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Le Jeu de l’Enfant *Performer* avec des Orishas: expérimentations artistiques et afro-référencées** – Cet article présente des extraits d’un mémoire de Master en Arts scéniques sur les performances de corps d’enfants jouant, en Éducation des enfants, de l’univers des orishas. Il révèle au début des enfants participants (NEI/Cap/UFRN) qui dialoguent avec les auteur(e)s tel(le)s que Marina Marcondes Machado (2010a; 2010b; 2015). Il développe des croisements entre performance et enfances, articulant une méthodologie afro-ludique avec les protagonismes des enfants. Des narrations artistiques aux références afro dont les performances suscitent des réflexions contemporaines qui constituent des trouvailles pour cette discussion.

Mots-clés: **Expérience. Art. Enfant *Performer*. Orishas. Education des Enfants.**

**RESUMO – O Brincar da Criança *Performer* com Orixás: experiências artísticas e afro-referenciadas** – Este artigo apresenta recortes de uma dissertação de mestrado em Artes Cênicas sobre performances dos corpos brincantes de crianças, na Educação Infantil, a partir do universo de orixás. Revela inicialmente as crianças participantes (NEI/Cap/UFRN), dialogando com autoras(es) como Marina Marcondes Machado (2010a; 2010b; 2015). Desenvolvem-se cruzamentos entre performance e infâncias, articulando uma metodologia afrobrincante com os protagonismos das crianças. Suas narrativas artísticas, afroreferenciadas e performáticas suscitam reflexões contemporâneas, constituindo achados para esta discussão.

Palavras-chave: **Experiência. Arte. Criança *Performer*. Orixás. Educação Infantil.**

## Introduction

In this article, we establish dialogues with some experiences in the fields of art and education with children, mainly based on research developed by one of its authors, under the guidance of the co-author, during her master's degree in Performing Arts at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) (2018/2019).

The empirical research had as its object of study performances of children's playing bodies in dialogue with elements from African culture – the universe of the Yorubá<sup>1</sup> nation's Orixás, in Early Childhood Education – and took place at a *Núcleo de Educação da Infância* (Center for Childhood Education) (NEI/Cap/UFRN), between April and June 2019.

Starting from the research, we revisit some theoretical reflections and artistic and methodological paths that were developed to show, in this article, the concept of 'child *performer*', created by Marina Marcondes Machado (2010a; 2010b; 2015). As such, we relate this concept to some experimentation undertaken in that context, beginning with a key question: how to potentiate the encounter of the child *performer* with the universe of Orixás?

To this end, we present excerpts from one of the dissertation chapters, focused on the development of the field research, in which a group of 12 children between 5 and 6 years old participated, two of whom were children with disabilities: one with Down Syndrome and the other with mild Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Also participating directly in the process, along with the children, were two teachers responsible for the class.

In that context, workshops anchored in the artistic languages of dance, theater and music were proposed, involving the development of an afro-playing methodology: with the playful resources of afro-narration of stories (a term to be explained later) and body games/playing.

During the research process, to articulate relationships embedded in the Afro-referenced thoughts, circular units were created that conveyed in their essence the main relationships experienced: *Artist Child*, *Nature Child*, *Orixás Child*, and *Negritude Child*. For each one of them, reflections oc-

curred from their specific characteristics and the most instigating themes that emerged during the process.

In this article, we highlight some afro-playing experiences related to the first three units: *Artist Child*, which expresses the children's experimentation with creative processes based on playful and artistic elements; *Nature Child*, which shows the children's experimentation with elements and characteristics linked to nature, such as air, earth, fire, water, and others; *Orixás Child*, which refers to the children's experimentation with African goddesses and gods, through orality and corporeality, seeking to establish links with African ancestry.

In the composition of this article, the reflections are based on authors such as Jorge Larrosa (2015), when using the concept of experience, Carolina Andrade and Kathya Godoy (2018), when exploring methodological possibilities in dance with children, Kiusam de Oliveira (2009; 2010), when addressing ancestry and Black childhoods, among others.

Let's start, therefore, with some provocations: is it possible to consider childhoods in the plural when most of the Brazilian society and western educational models exclude differences? How do we adults deal with children that present social, cultural, financial, physical, and psychological characteristics different from those considered as a normative standard? Are we open to the children's sayings, doings, and cultures? To what extent do we respect, value, and highlight the children's protagonism?

In this light, it is important to highlight that the childhoods' cultures come from studies of the sociology of childhood, which established the term *childhood cultures*. This refers to what is produced for children (toys, movies, cartoons, books, etc.), as well as what children themselves create and produce from their sayings, doings and experimentations (playing, games, etc.) in interactions with their peers (Sarmiento, 2003).

The sociology of childhood sees children as social actors who have their own ways of life, their own cultures and who establish knowledge based on their own protagonism (Machado, 2015). Hence, this field of knowledge breaks with previous pejorative views about children.

In this article we use the term childhoods' cultures as an updating of *childhood cultures* to reflect a plural demarcation of the various children and

their cultural expressions, according to their distinct social, racial, financial, and other realities. Thus, to enable a move towards theories and practices that define the child being, considering his or her pluralities and protagonism, is to seek to break away from an adult-centric thinking and posture that stifles the artistic and creative process for and with children.

In this sharing of knowledges, the children in focus here are those who create and produce their cultures and are the protagonists of their experiences, based on aspects of the *Yorubá* African culture, highlighting the afro-playful experimentations of these children with the Orixá deities. So let the fun begin!

### **Playful approximations of the child *performer***

To get to the core of this article's theme, it is important to underline certain aspects related to the term performance, since its definitions are diverse and even divergent. Within the perspectives that we believe relate to what we propose in this article, we initially draw on Leda Maria Martins (2021) when reflecting that performance studies present themselves as a multidisciplinary field. Based on a dialogue with other scholars, the author explains that, "[...] the term performance is inclusive and encompasses a wide range of actions and events that require the living presence of the subject for its realization and/or fruition [...]" (Martins, 2021, p. 39).

From the contributions of Eleonora Fabião (2009), we consider that the attempt to define what performance is or its origin can reduce its potential for artistic, social and political intervention. For Fabião, the interdisciplinarity present in performance, "[...] is not a fad, but a contemporary path of political and poetic potentialization" (Fabião, 2009, p. 71) and that "[...] the performer does not exactly intend to communicate a certain content to the spectator, but, above all, to promote an experience through which contents will be developed [...]" (Fabião, 2009, p. 71).

In this contextualization, the same author also proposes a reflection on performance by enhancing dialogues with a few thematic interests of this article,

[...] It is a form of expression so hybrid and flexible that it dribbles rigid definitions of 'art', 'artist', 'spectator' or 'scene'. In this sense, I propose, rather than an investigation into what performance *means*, a reflection on *what*

*moves performance and what performance is capable of moving [...] (Fabião, 2009, p. 63).*

In that sense, stimuli, provocations, methodologies, artistic and afro-referenced epistemologies, proposed and experienced in the master's research in Performing Arts (Braga, 2019), showed children's playful and performative experiences. From the theme and the proposed universe, as the children moved and became protagonists of their own experiences, there was an approximation and identification with this sense of performance.

Machado (2010a; 2015) invites us to perceive the child as a *performer*, since he conceives that they assume their presence and state in the world from their own experiences. Thus, the child expresses being a character or his/her body is the dance and rhythm itself. They do not fake it; they are, in their own ways of creating, acting and assuming their own childhoods' cultures.

Children's performativity can offer us, adults, ranges of possibilities for intervention and interaction with them, sometimes not preset. This *destructuring* of adult-centric ways – that often prevail in teaching relationships – can generate and drive other experiences and affective exchanges, triggering discovery, innovation, experimentation, improvisation, creation and construction of powers, towards the assumption of the child as a *performer*.

In this key it is possible to affirm that children's lives are full of moments of theatricality and drama; situations that involve them in such a way that their bodies adhere to the situations: the experience is lived with vigor and intensity, as proposed by the *performers* of various artistic languages. The following question arises: would the child be able to imitate performance art, or is it the artist who seeks the child's way of being and *playing with the body, acting out of intrinsic motivation?* [...] (Machado, 2010a, p. 121-122).

Based on this stimulus, we reflect that children are not worried about imitating performance art, because they already live it intensely in their realities. We believe that, in the child-adult relationship, everyone benefits when we open ourselves to learn and share with the children and, thus, experience times, rhythms, playful and performative states.

Seeking other approximations to the concept of child *performer*, we can also relate to and experience the comprehension of adult *performer* because:

The child *performer* is his/her total body, his/her corporality; he/she is mobile, plastic, moldable: polymorphic; his/her repertoire is rich in theatricality and musicality, in the contemporary sense of the terms: he/she improvises, he/she embodies emotions in his/her body, he/she is capable of making a score while enjoying the soundscape of the places where he/she is [...] In the field of art and education, it corresponds to the child *performer*: the adult *performer* – a pair that complements a new way of working with children, in which the focus is the child and the role of the adult will be that of a proposer and observer of situations and settings, on behalf of the child's discovery of his/her potentialities, in contact with the artistic-existential scopes (Machado, 2015, p. 59).

During the development of her master's research, the author of this article experienced moments in which she made herself available to play with her body-voice and to play with the children by dancing, theatricalizing and performing with them, and also by showing their childhoods' protagonisms.

For example, in the body game *Dancing with the Orixás*, experienced in the context of the *Orixás Child* circular unit, six dances were introduced: Iemanjá, Ogum, Oxum, Oxóssi, Oiá-Iansã and Xangô. And, before explaining some of these dynamics, we will highlight expressions that go along with the understanding that the child is a performer when assuming/being/living his/her own character.

Initially, during the dynamic, the children were asked about who those Orixás were, based on the afro-narrations of stories previously told. There were some curious expressions, such as from the *Cachoeira* (Waterfall) girl<sup>2</sup>, by identifying herself as Oxum – queen and goddess of sweet waters, rivers, the waterfall, beauty, love and the protector of children –: “I am her!”. Upon being reinforced about the goddess' origin from sweet waters, the boy Ocean Tiger Shark said to the boy Fire Lion, “So, now I'm Oxum, okay?”

This introduction was important for the involvement of the children with the subsequent corporal experimentation, in which first the dances of the deities were shown, highlighting some of their elements and symbols. In tandem, fun songs accompanied each Orixá.<sup>3</sup>, and the children were encouraged to play and dance to the songs or as a certain deity.

Based on examples mediated by the author/researcher, the children imitated certain movements, such as when they looked in the imaginary

mirror of Oxum and spun around. They were also encouraged to feel at ease to experiment and recreate their own ways of playing with dance, as when the element of the horse animal was introduced<sup>4</sup> for the Orixá Ogum – brave warrior, blacksmith, and lord of iron, technology and pathways.

At that moment, the boy Fire Lion made a riding motion, and then Ocean Tiger Shark sat on top of his friend. The two played through the space from that interaction, as if the first boy was the horse and the second was a rider. In other moments of this Orixá, they and other children played by dancing and representing this warrior, from his vigorous dance, with jumps, leaps, and slashing hands that referred to an imaginary machete. As they ran, the children demonstrated a kind of fight, not among themselves, but with imaginary enemies, and while Fire Lion let out loud sounds, Ocean Tiger Shark, at the end, spun a little.

In the Oiá-Iansã and Xangô dances, when there was a narration and demonstration of their dances and some symbols, the children experienced that moment naturally. For example, in the Oiá-Iansã dance, the author/researcher said: “She is the girl of the winds, of lightning rays... and also, she transforms herself into the buffalo... Look how she dances, she dances very fast, with her hands as if they were the winds, look here... There comes Iansã so strong... and she spins in the wind, very beautiful!”

The author/researcher, at the time of Xangô, demonstrated this dance by raising her hands in the air, as if she were holding imaginary objects – the deity’s axes. Then, she crossed her arms in front of her chest, and urged the boy Fire Lion to also perform this movement, expressing: “He dances like this, see, around the fire, spinning with his little axes [she spun and the children spun around her], he uses his axe to attack and defend”.

For a more playful visualization, Figure 1 shows moments experienced and reported here from the body game *Dancing with the Orixás* and, respectively, the dances of Oxum, Ogum, Oiá-Iansã and Xangô:



Figure 1 – Dancing with the Orixás.

Source: Research archive.

In this context, it is worth mentioning Oliveira (2010), when the author weaves intervention possibilities with children based on afro-referenced elements and pedagogies,

The Mythical Dance of the *Orixás* carries, at its core, the history of female and Black protagonism in the creation and maintenance of planet Earth, the wars won, the conquests of lands, the nobility of Black women and men. One must be aware that, before becoming *Orixás* on African soil, they had a social history beyond the mythological one, which became better known. In this sense, bringing a teacher to school [...] with this specific knowledge [...] capable of showing the dance movement [...] performed by *Oxum* in the river waters, looking at herself in the mirror while combing her curly hair; or the movement of King *Ogum* when, with a machete in his hand, he opened clearings in the forests, can be a very interesting game: the teacher performs the movements and the others repeat them. Besides explaining the movements and their meanings associated with the elements of nature, the teacher can tell some stories, Afro-Brazilian myths to illustrate the dance workshop [...]. It will be an unforgettable pedagogical moment. (Oliveira, 2010, p. 63).

This, as well as other moments experienced in the research, and some that will still be explained during this article, presented themselves as rich afro-affective and poetic exchanges, enabling the author/researcher to be constantly aware of childhoods' cultures and the protagonisms of those children.

When we, teachers, educators and researchers, understand that children manifest a potential of experimentation and playful creation, we can reflect and intervene in order to mediate/facilitate their discovery processes. Thus, presenting them with artistic and aesthetic paths that mobilize their performative states, through languages such as theater, dance, among others, "In the field of theatrical language, we can say that to recognize the



child as a ‘performer’ and give him/her opportunities of different materials and compositions is the way to initiate him/her in artistic endeavor and aesthetic appreciation [...]” (Machado, 2010b, p. 03).

Therefore, artistic endeavor and aesthetic appreciation can encompass plural worlds that will enter into dialogue with the diverse realities of children. A more democratic, inclusive process that is open to dialogues and practices with and for children who are playful and *performers*, pioneers of their own adventures and potential for fun.

### **Potentializing the performances of children with afro-playing methodology**

The author of this article started her trajectory with children during her undergraduate studies and in more depth during her monograph research, proposing studies on children’s playing bodies in Early Childhood Education, based on the possibility of the body becoming a game, in a context of playful mediation (corporal games, interlacing theater and dance) and the children’s own experiences (Braga, 2017).

From that moment on, she came closer to the author Larrosa (2015), who brings up the experience/meaning relation, which is very pertinent when considering the sayings, doings, creations, and experimentations of a certain group. When it comes to research in the humanities and with children, a more sensitive look, and a posture that pays attention to these specificities, become necessary.

For Larrosa, the experience/meaning relation seems to be a fertile field for instigating experiences. In its etymology, the word *experience* means *traversal* and *danger*, requiring time/space for it to occur and, as such, for us to allow ourselves to be affected by it. The meaning is focused through the subject of experience, considering the openness to its transformation and to the unknown: “Experience is that which ‘passes through’ us, or touches us, or happens to us and, by passing through us, forms and transforms us. Only the subject of experience is, therefore, open to its own transformation” (Larrosa, 2015, p. 28). In the meantime, we revisit:

Let the player’s playful intention flow [...] according to each child’s time and in his or her space of understanding, identification, or will. Allow the child to be sensitized, to be affected, to be touched by his or her own interruption. Let them let go of their unwillingness, without forcing it, without

dictating the moment, or much less how they should do it. Let the boat (body games/playing) follow the flow of the waters (experimentations), and let its sailors (children) glimpse a horizon (creations), a fertile “land ahoy” for their playful explorations (Braga, 2017, p. 93).

The transformations, which may occur throughout research, point us to possibilities that are sometimes subtle or intense, flexible, porous, sensitive, and instigating. Studies, research and experiences involving children may awaken in us, adults, a need for constant adaptation, because unpredictability is often present. We can hardly carry out a plan as we had imagined it without giving it a new meaning or changing even a single detail. It is a challenge that takes us out of our comfort zone and invites us to play performatively starting from the challenges proposed by the children and their often unusual protagonisms.

[...] insofar as the students are an intrinsic part of each and every *performance* lived and/or proposed by their teacher: moments of conviviality and continuity of the processes of knowledge, in which the teacher makes and communicates something to the students, be it through different kinds of narratives or theatrical games to be experienced by the children [ ...]; the child who creates his or her make-believe and organizes it during a theater class, does not demand from himself or from his or her partner a formal logic; whether in terms of time or space, the child modifies, almost all the time, his or her improvisational scripts, and recurrently brings his or her theatrical narratives closer to his or her everyday life (Machado, 2010a, p. 117-118).

With the desire to continue creating productions that aim to involve plural and performative childhoods, from 2016 the first author of this article began to develop the artistic-educational project *Brincando com Africanidades* (Playing with Africanities). In this project, based on the hybridization of the artistic languages of theater, dance and music, the relationship between playing bodies and Africanities is worked, focusing on the universe of Orixás from the *Yorubá* nation, mainly for and with children, but also in dialogues with the adult audience. Since then she has participated or performed with workshops, afro-narration of stories and stage shows, in cultural and educational spaces. In 2018, she created the artistic collective *Lia e os Erês*, and, in 2020, her YouTube channel and professional profile on Instagram, of the same name<sup>5</sup>.

From the research developed in the master's degree, we came to understand that the experiences and systematization of the aforementioned project indicated the creation and development of a methodology that the first author names *afrobrincante* (afro-playing). It proposes a dialogue with playful and afro-referenced perspectives and is in the process of construction. It is characterized as a socio-educational and cultural action in the school environment and in other spaces, thus following a path that aims to approach Negritudes and Africanities not merely in isolation, out of context or only on commemorative dates. Accordingly, forms of intervention are built from playful and Black epistemes, making Art evident as fertile ground for desensitization and change. It is, above all, a decolonial, antiracist action<sup>6</sup>, which aims to exalt our Black heritage and the protagonism of childhoods. With this methodology, children and adults will be able to broaden their outlooks, listening, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of these themes.

It is worth noting that the afro-playing methodology is based on the mandala of Afro-Brazilian civilizing values, authored by Azoilda Loretto da Trindade, present in the material *Modos de Brincar* (Modes of Playing) (Brandão; Trindade, 2010), which are: circularity, religiosity, corporeality, musicality, cooperativism/communitarianism, ancestrality, memory, playfulness, vital energy (*axe*) and orality.

From the experimentations in the master's research, we identified that this methodology intensified and highlighted the protagonism processes of the child *performers*, as they also corroborated with the design of this methodological proposal. The expressions, restlessness, desires, involvement, enchantment and creations of the children who participated in the research were important in making the methodology really open, alive, pulsating, circular, and not merely a fixed and closed method.

For example, we revisited some of the findings in the body game/play *Dancing with the Orixás*, where the soft and simultaneously intense movements of the children were highlighted when, in the dance of Oxum, the girl, Waterfall, seemed to swim in the sweet waters, and the boys, Ocean Tiger Shark and Fire Lion, embellished themselves in their spins with imaginary mirrors. The boy Ocean Tiger Shark opened his own paths with the imaginary machete of his warrior Ogum, and even rode his little horse, per-

formed by the boy, Fire Lion. The girl, Fox, looked like a windmill, with her quick hand movements, *whipping* the air, performing intense spins and jumps in the dance of Oiá-Iansã (the “wind girl”, in the words of the Fox herself). Fire Lion, on the other hand, imaginatively cast fire from Xangô through his mouth, and stones and lightning through his hands, sometimes even claiming that he was fire itself; moreover, he majestically warred as the swift and intemperate king of Oyó-ancient African city.

In another body game/playing, *Walking with different sensations*, experienced in the context of the *Nature Child* circular unit, there was the experience of embodying elements of nature. The children walked to a song that was sung by the author/researcher and responded corporally to various stimuli; for example, when it was proposed that the sun was very hot, and that they were very warm: “How does it feel to be hot being the sun?” Most of them, when approaching the author/researcher, trembled and vibrated their hands, and some made sounds (so much so that the author even exclaimed “Whoa!”).

Continuing, “Now... you are very, very hot and you have turned into fire!”, and they ran, screamed, some jumped, and the boys, Fire Ninja Cat, Fire Lion and Black Jaguar simulated a fight, in which the first boy fell to the ground – implying that he had been defeated – and yet, before he fell, he threw the fire energy up with his arms and hands. Black Jaguar crouched down to look at the boy, as did Fire Lion. The latter touched the lying boy and said, “My friend!”, and then stood up, expressed something, and concluded with fighting sounds and movements.

The boys’ experimentations referred to the Orixá Xangô, not only because this deity manages and controls the element of fire, from nature, but also because of the children’s proposition that they fought with each other. By tossing up this energy, the boy, Fire Ninja Cat drew closer to the image of the king, and it is worth noting that Xangô is also considered a great warrior.

Based on the experiences of the body games/playing previously explained, we dialogue with Andrade and Godoy (2018), when considering the importance of a methodological construction as an approach to the language of dance with and for children. This construction dialogues with a fun proposition, such as games and playfulness, among other resources, for dance experiences in childhoods. The authors point out that “Playfulness is

an instrument for the development of dance language and the imaginary, and through the balance between reality and fantasy, the child can learn concepts in a significant manner [...]” (Andrade; Godoy, 2018, p. 62). They continue:

The rescue of the imagination facilitates the creative process, and, through it, the child experiences and experiments with many movements that may change and acquire characteristics of dance language. This means that they can be transformed into dance depending on the teacher’s guidance. Games, toys and other supporting materials can also help in this learning process, because the child discovers other ways to move the body, by imitating characters and animals with their gestures, postures and expressions (Andrade; Godoy, 2018, p. 63)

As the children experienced the afro-playing methodology, they performed, theatricalized and danced with the universe of the Orixás. These small *performers* armed themselves with warrior shields, embellished themselves with princess and prince mirrors, and crowned themselves as kings and queens, taking part in playful journeys of Black heroes and heroines of their own destinies.

### **Afro-narrations of stories and playful performances with children**

In 2021, the author of this article became aware of the term “*afronarração de histórias*” (Afro-narration of stories) when she attended a course taught by the multi-artist and writer Kiusam de Oliveira. In general terms, it is a way of telling stories anchored in afro-referenced principles, such as: considering Africa as the cradle of humanity; breaking with the ‘once upon a time’ idea; using musicality and corporeality; afro-narrating stories and valuing Black protagonism; approaching Black aesthetics in the scenery, costumes, and stage props, among others. Despite not having had contact with the term at the time of the dissertation research, we realized that something similar was already being developed in storytelling from this perspective.

Another source of inspiration, also allied to the perspective of afro-narrations, is the figure of the African griots. It is worth pointing out that this is a term that comes from the French colonization process in certain territories of the African continent. For some ethnic groups, these excellent storytellers are called *diéli*, for the Mali, and *gewalos*, for the Bambara.

They also mediate conflicts, go through and replenish a whole tradition of stories from their dynasties and peoples, highlighting their own cultures, worldviews, and expressions, by preserving their legacies. They are artists who sing, dance, and play musical instruments. They have a sacred and deep relationship with words, full of strength, ancestry and spirituality. (Lima; Hernandez, 2010)

We believe that, when narrating the chosen myths, in this afro-playful pulsation, there is a movement toward the remembrance of what is inscribed in the individual and collective body stories, opening us up to imaginative and creative possibilities. Hence, as storytellers, we can create or possibly shape the invisible, by blowing or drawing words in the air, to make the stories we want to tell believable. In this sense, we revisit aspects of the master's dissertation:

In the frenetic moment in which I discovered myself as a storyteller, I went on swallowing and being swallowed by the stories. I have the need to devour the words and let them become part of my body, to paint and adorn it in a versatile way. For me, the body-word is like the current of a river or the waves of the sea since, undulating, it creates movements, sometimes subtle, sometimes intense, an internal and external plunge of multiple words and sensations. When I embody the word, it is not only me who recreates the stories: my African ancestors also speak, play and dance with me, through me (Braga, 2019, p. 124).

From this context, we will highlight some moments based on the afro-narrations of stories and also from a process of approximation, experimentation, enchantment and identification of the children with some Orixás.

In one of the workshops, during the story "*Os Ibejis são transformados numa estatueta*" (The Ibejis are transformed into a statuette) (Prandi, 2001), presented in the context of the *Artist Child* circular unit, one of the twin Ibejis fell into a waterfall, was taken by the current and died; there was a demonstration of the scene with the movement of one of the two puppets that was used to represent this Orixá.

The girl, Leaf Kitty, slowly approached and, determined, picked up the puppet that was on the floor, took it behind a straw bag – which was part of the materials and the set – and, when she returned said: "It's buried there!" One of the teachers responsible for the class was monitoring the research that day and called the girl's attention so that she could go back to

her seat; Leaf Kitty ran to check if the puppet was in the same place she had left it, and only then did she return to the other children.

By checking that the puppet was safe behind the bag, it is possible to establish a link between the situation of the puppet's burial, performed by the girl, and Machado's reflection (2010a) on children's "adherence to situations", which prevents them from representing the world, and leads them, consequently, to experience it in its entirety and totality.

In another workshop, the author/researcher used body experimentation within the context of afro-narration of the stories *Iemanjá e o poder da criação do mundo* (Iemanjá and the power of world creation) (Oliveira, 2009), presented in the context of the circular unit *Nature Child*. In short, this story shows the challenges that Iemanjá – queen of the seas, considered the mother of all – as a child faced and experienced, including some feelings such as loneliness. She found the power to overcome within herself, and also the power to create and give life to elements of nature and other Orixás with the help of the creator god for the Yorubá people.

At a certain point in the story, Olodumare/Olorum – supreme god and creator –, seeing the girl's sadness, puts his hands on her belly, which grows a lot, and tells her not to say anything, just to open her mouth. And "from the enchanted mouth of the girl Iemanjá...came forth many little stars [...]"

While the author/researcher represented Iemanjá, the girl character interacted with the children, asking who liked to spin; several answered "me", and the boy Black Jaguar spun on his own axis, on top of a cushion, and then fell on top of it saying "Spin, spin, spin!" The character then invited the children to go somewhere else in the room, on account of the space. When she asked if the children could play with her (the character), they all said yes, and she proceeded to explain to them how the game would proceed: the character would sing a song, and when she said the words "Twinkle, twinkle", the children would spin, slowly, so that no one would get hurt. "And... twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star. Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star. Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star just like a ray of sunshine [slow pace]. And... twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star. Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star. Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, little star...and stop! [fast pace]"

The character and the children spun, some slower, some faster, in a very fun way; most of them on their own axis, but the boy Fire Lion went a little off center spinning with his arms open and sideways, as well as the boy Black Jaguar, who spun very fast when the music increased the speed. At the end, all the children promptly stopped and stood firmly in their places; the boys Black Jaguar and Fire Lion continued to spin for a while and indicated that they were dizzy, so they were asked to sit down.

In another workshop, after a first moment with music, the story *Oxum e seu mistério* (Oxum and his mystery) (Oliveira, 2009) was presented in the context of the circular unit *Orixá Child*. At that moment, the book was followed, introducing first the story's main characters, Oxum and Ogum.

During the workshops, the children at various times asked to act out the characters in the stories. On this day, it was agreed that they would do this and, while the narration was going on, they would perform. After an initial moment of indecision from the children about who would represent the goddess Oxum, seeing as Waterfall from the beginning had enthusiastically expressed that she wanted to be the goddess, she was called on.

In the beginning, when Waterfall entered into action, the author/researcher held her hand, to center her, and the girl did a little bit of the character's voice and finger wiggling actions. At the time of the narration and indication of the actions to the girl – “Oxum wore a skirt with five hanging and perfumed scarves that fluttered in the wind, took off her head-dress, her crown, let down her beautiful black and curly hair and put her feet in contact with the earth [...]” (Oliveira, 2009, p. 20) –, she proposed a dance.

She let out a howl that sounded like the wind, as she pushed off with her feet and legs, which first touched the ground, and caused her legs to flex and then one of them to go up, while the other gave her support as she touched the ground, a moment that can be seen in Figure 2:





Figure 2 – Waterfall girl dances with Oxum.  
Source: Research archive.

Her hair fluttered and she spun, several times, from the pulses that were repeated, and demonstrated a dance with free and circular movements, around herself and also moving through space, with arms to the side and sometimes upwards, in a round design.

Continuing the story, at another moment Oxum sees Ogum's hut and, pretending not to see him, starts to dance. The girl named Waterfall proposed a movement close to her first dance, with the difference that she danced more to the side; and, as the text itself proposes, "she began to dance with the grace of calm waters, delicate... smooth... in a slight back and forth" (Oliveira, 2009, p. 21). Then she made softer and slower movements, and sometimes her arms went up and grabbed her belly, waist and legs, and her feet followed the inclination of her body, to one side and then the other.

With the stimuli of the afro-narrations of stories and methodological contextualization with dancing games for children, especially in the experience of the girl, Waterfall, with the dance of Oxum, we revisit the considerations of Andrade and Godoy (2018, p. 56), who explain that "Playing as a pedagogical resource in dance allows the child to be producer and protagonist of different forms of movement executions with the function of experiencing, creating and tracing artistic and aesthetic relationships with the world".

When we analyze some of the characteristics of Oxum's dance, we can see that the girl, Waterfall, improvised, experienced and created a dance with some characteristic elements of that Orixá's dance. With the grace and beauty of spins and circular movements, among others, Waterfall danced freely as in a soft swing of the sweet waters of waterfalls or rivers. Therefore, she performed aquatic states of the deity Oxum, the girl herself being, at

that moment, a body-river-waterfall-nature in a state of enchantment and harmony with the goddess.

Based on these experienced and described moments, we cite Machado (2010b), when he suggests adult steps towards the child *performer*:

[...] I clarify that ‘performative acts’ are any action of the child that is full of expressiveness: whether it is a scream, a jump, a saying, a drawing, a yawn...Third step: Positivize the performative acts. It is up to the adult to ‘read’ the child’s corporality in a sensitive, intelligent, and “total” way. This reading positivizes their ways of being, that is, it endorses and acknowledges the child’s communication in this language, and does not look for what is not there (a behavior that negates the child’s way of being by expecting something else from them). Fourth step: Take inventory of the children’s ways of being and acting. To take an inventory means to perceive, to list, and to register in words. This inventory enables the adult to collect attitudes, behaviors, reactions, and performances of the child in order to enrich the meaning given by the adult to each way of being (Machado, 2010b, p. 03).

The afro-narrations of stories, as one of the playful resources used in the afro-playful methodology, proposed in the research, fostered hybrid processes of the child *performers* with their bodies immersed in the universe of the Orixá deities. This enchantment allowed the author/researcher and the children to be traversed by the research experience, based on different times of looking, observing, pausing, contemplating, feeling, pretending, playing, dancing, theatricalizing, performing, cultivating the art of the encounter and giving us time and space (Larrosa, 2015).

With the playful and corporal propositions, the children were immersed in smells and colors and in afro-ancestral forests, in which gods and goddesses dominate and control water, fire, and other elements of nature. In this environment, the little ones, like stars, shone in the sky, and smiled, ran, spun, and whirled, besides dancing and moving like sweet waters of enchantment.

### Final considerations

The themes contextualized in this article, based on revisiting experiences and research developed with and for children, sought to weave a plural, artistic, afro-referenced and decolonial horizon. This horizon deals with theoretical and methodological proposals and paths that highlight the con-

cept of the child *performer* intertwined with playful experiences from the enchantment of Orixás, in Early Childhood Education.

The propositions highlighted here value protagonisms and childhoods' cultures, moving in the direction of contemporary conceptions, such as the child *performer*, enhancing other forms of experiencing teaching and learning. These forms lead us to rethink our artistic-pedagogical work as teacher-*performers*. Hence, we propose, discover, construct, create, and let ourselves be traversed, besides stirring experiences with the children and, most of all, be provoked by them.

In the context of the master's research, the children, while playing, theatricalizing, dancing and performing, also created their own ways and dynamics of relating to Orixás, often claiming to be/performing a certain deity or personifying themselves as a certain animal from an Orixá.

A pulsating and latent imbrication between life, art and play drove the immersion in the children's experiences, from an afro-playful methodology. It was evident that artistic and afro-referenced epistemologies provide states of interaction, discovery and exchange between the child *performers* and the theme addressed in the research.

We therefore consider that this methodology potentiated the encounter of the child *performer* with the universe of the Orixás, highlighting in this article some of the experimentations of these little playful people. The hybridization between dance, theater and music, through body games and afro-narration of stories, stimulated playful discoveries and afro-playful performances, with the creation of the children's artistic repertoires with the Orixás and also with the researcher-*performer*.

In this sense, some imbricated findings were revealed from certain circular units created as a form of systematizing this study. The relationship between the experiences and the findings, through the richness experienced in the context of the circular units, provoke in us questions about an adult-centric thought and practice with children. As such, they provide us with openings for encounters that embrace experiences with plural childhoods, highlighting the protagonisms, sayings, doings and cultures of children.

The writing of this article made us relive the whole process of composing the master's dissertation and, at the same time, it was an opportunity to

add new knowledge and experiences, revisiting some authors and linking others. This movement makes us realize that the knowledge process is marked by comings and goings, interweaving theory and empirics based on joint openings and constructions.

Finally, following paths with children gives us the opportunity to learn with them and from their knowledge, sayings, doings, expressions, and cultures. Understanding that there are several childhoods in our society encourages us to take a critical and respectful look at the numerous processes of invisibilization and of themes that are still considered taboo subjects: plural childhoods linked to artistic performativities, ancestry, and African cultures.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ethno-linguistic group from the African continent. Culturally and religiously, they reverberated in Brazil with manifestations and cults linked to the Orixá deities, protector(s) of nature.
- <sup>2</sup> In the research, the children chose their fictitious names, with approximations/characteristics of nature or of the deities themselves.
- <sup>3</sup> Some of the songs can be found on the CD *Tempo de Brincar: Cirandados Orixás*. Sorocaba: Tratore, 2017. 1CD (51min.). Another song, Oiá, is by the group Palavra Cantada, and others, such as São João, Xangô Menino, are lyrics by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil.
- <sup>4</sup> In some religious groups, this animal is associated with the Orixá.
- <sup>5</sup> Professional *Facebook* and *Instagram*: Lia e os Erês and @liaeoseres. *YouTube*: Lia e os Erês - YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCneMMAoo-0XgM85Sv-Z0t8g>.
- <sup>6</sup> In summary, theoretical thinking and methodologies that aim to break with coloniality, which is set as the beautiful, the right, the historically, socially and culturally valued, in this case, the white European. It proposes to appreciate, make visible, and praise other peoples and epistemologies, marginalized throughout history, such as Blacks, Indians, women, among others.

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