

RAP AS A TRANSFORMATIVE MEANS IN EDUCATION: THEMATIZING RAP IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO

O RAP COMO MEIO TRANSFORMADOR NA EDUCAÇÃO: TEMATIZANDO RAP EM UMA ESCOLA PÚBLICA DO MUNICÍPIO DO RIO DE JANEIRO

EL RAP COMO MEDIO TRANSFORMADOR EN LA EDUCACIÓN: TEMÁTICAMENTE DEL RAP EN UNA ESCUELA PÚBLICA DEL MUNICIPIO DE RIO DE JANEIRO



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ABSTRACT: This article presents the results of a study conducted at a school in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, located in the northern zone in the Irajá neighborhood. The study was developed by members of a *Programa de Educação Tutorial* (PET) and researchers within the scope of the Laboratory for Research on Social Movements, Inequalities, and Diversity of Body, Race, and Gender (LADECORGEN-UFRJ). The action research, conducted through workshops, aimed to promote antiracist education. The researchers employed a dynamic approach, interpreting emerging themes that intersect with rap, one of the elements of hip-hop culture. The workshops were held in 2023 with 3rd and 4th-grade elementary school students. It can be concluded that the use of music, particularly lyrics that facilitated discussions on respect, diversity, race, community, and related values, served as a powerful tool for antiracist education within the school setting.

KEYWORDS: RAP. Anti-racist education. Poetry. Basic Education.

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa realizada em uma escola do município do Rio de Janeiro, localizada na zona norte no bairro de Irajá, ela foi desenvolvida pelos integrantes de um Programa de Educação Tutorial (PET) e pesquisadores, ela ocorre no âmbito do laboratório de Pesquisa em Movimentos Sociais, Desigualdades e Diversidade de Corpo, Raça e Gênero (LADECORGEN-UFRJ). A pesquisa-ação, utilizando oficinas, visou o desenvolvimento da educação antirracista. A dinâmica usada pelos pesquisadores foi a interpretação de temas emergentes que dialogam com o Rap, uma das vertentes que se inserem no meio da cultura Hip-Hop. As oficinas foram realizadas em 2023, com alunos do 3º e 4º Ensino Fundamental. Podemos concluir que a utilização da música, especialmente por meio de suas letras, proporcionou um debate com grande potencial para promover valores como respeito, diversidade, raça e comunidade, servindo, assim, como uma atividade de viés escolar antirracista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: RAP. Educação antirracista. Poesia. Educação Básica.

RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación realizada en una escuela de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, ubicada en la zona norte del barrio de Irajá, fue desarrollada por integrantes de un Programa de Educação Tutorial (PET), se lleva a cabo en el ámbito del Laboratorio de Investigación sobre Movimientos Sociales, Desigualdades y Diversidad de Cuerpo, Raza y Género (LADECORGEN-UFRJ). La investigación-acción, mediante talleres, tenía como objetivo desarrollar la educación antirracista. La dinámica utilizada por los investigadores fue la interpretación de temas emergentes que dialogan con el rap, uno de los aspectos que forman parte de la cultura hip-hop. Los talleres se realizaron en 2023, con alumnos de 3º y 4º de Primaria. Podemos concluir que el uso de la música, especialmente, brindó un debate con gran potencial para los valores de respeto, diversidad, raza, comunidad, entre otros, sirviendo como una actividad con un sesgo escolar antirracista.

PALABRAS CLAVE: RAP. Educación antirracista. Poesía. Educación Básica.

Introdução: A way out of silencing

"I didn't read, I didn't see, I lived, I suffered, I am the *negro drama*" (Racionais MC's, 1997). To start the conversation, we need an excerpt from the song that was worked on during the 4th bimester of 2023, when we were at the school. This particular section reveals the marginal identity of the song's protagonist, who will narrate his life through his eyes. The anaphora at the beginning of the clipped verse, marked by "I", is precisely the starting point for the studies of the trainee teachers and other researchers who are in the business of socializing this study. It is from the synthesis of the aforementioned verse that it is possible to understand the central theme of this study, a vindication of the pen that tells the story, or in this case, the hand that writes on the board. Seeking ways for Afro-diasporic culture, more specifically Rap, to open the classroom door and be recognized as a holder of knowledge and a builder of knowledge is one of the reasons that led the teachers in training on the school floor. Whether in the 3rd year of the first segment, where it was possible to give rhythm to the poem, making it easier to read, or in the 4th year of the same segment, with the staging of "*Negro Drama*", by *Racionais MC's*.

The search begins with the realization of a void, a kind of non-locality to which the *I/Egos* like me are destined. Hence, there was a movement to reclaim the pen that tells the story so that there is a sense of belonging and recognition of the knowledge of the black subject. After all, we are full of wanting to be. This composition of our ancestral wisdom through positive signs also requires questioning and pointing the finger at the current modus operandi, which tends to be white and European. If we leave our stories in these pale hands, they will only glance at us. I'm no longer interested in this stereotyped look. My fellow human beings have a lot to contribute to a new meaning. That's why there's an urgent need to give a voice to the "mute":

It is only when power structures are reconfigured that many marginalized identities can also finally reconfigure the notion of knowledge: Who knows? Who knows? Know what? And whose knowledge? (Kilomba, 2019, p. 7, our translation).

It can be seen, then, that one of the essential characteristics of research is to break with silencing. This rupture subjectively manifests itself, by showing that there is a lot of speech and knowledge in the school group that is not properly heard, and in an objective way, by working with the song, i.e. there's going to be noise.

These group characteristics align with action research, a methodological approach that combines research and practice. This approach is widely used in contexts that seek to understand and improve specific practices or situations through a continuous cycle of observation, reflection, planning, and action. Action research not only aims to understand a specific reality, but also to transform it in a collaborative and participatory way, promoting a cyclical and integrated process of action and reflection. The *Programa de Educação Tutorial* (PET)⁸, located in the *Laboratório de Diversidade, Corpo, Raça e Gênero* (LADECORGEN)⁹, provides its members, the students, with complete autonomy to develop knowledge that best fits the demands of the classroom.

One of the debates present in the analysis of Rap is certainly related to racial prejudice. In this way, this activity should also be reviewed as an activity inserted within a proposal for anti-racist education, as an affirmative micro-action in a significant way in the school context (Ferreira; Vieira, 2021).

From this perspective, Law 10.639/03 presupposes anti-racist education. However, according to Pereira Mota and Santos Cruz (2023), implementing this law in schools has encountered four major difficulties: textbooks, continuing teacher training, the curriculum, and the current political context.

In order to overcome these obstacles, a new epistemology is needed, based on a decolonial vision in all areas of schooling (Milagres; Peixoto; Vieira, 2023). The absence of a differentiated reference point, coupled with the difficulties in implementing the law, contributes to triggering a negative subjectivity in black students, marked by derogatory views of blackness. Faced with this diversity of subjectivities, managers and teachers must adopt a critical and anti-racist stance (Costa; Queiroz; Muniz, 2024).

The choice of this methodology was crucial for *Ritmo e Poesia*¹⁰ to take on an interpretative and staging character, integrating an education that thinks beyond pen and paper and dialogues with the school. This school, located in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, developed the project “*Corpo, Poesia e Movimento*”¹¹ during the two-month period, with the theme of *designing a future without bullying, prejudice, and racism*. Learning in our eyes is the vibration of the body, understanding what the mirror reflects, and rescuing what the elders know

⁸ Tutorial Education Program (PET).

⁹ Laboratory of Diversity, Body, Race and Gender (LADECORGEN).

¹⁰ Rhythm and Poetry.

¹¹ Body, Poetry and Movement.

in order to learn and build in the present. Education cannot be limited to chalk and spit, nor to the domestication of the most diverse subjects.

Data collection and analysis methods

Three main data collection instruments were used to evaluate the methodological development:

- **Classroom observations:** The teachers recorded the students' reactions and participation during the activities. We noticed how the combination of rap and poetry influenced the students' engagement and interaction.
- **Records using forms:** The teachers' impressions and the results of the activities were systematized in digital forms. This information was analyzed qualitatively, looking for evidence of the approach's impact on the development of reading, writing, and interpreting skills.
- **Informal conversations with students:** During the project, the students shared their perceptions of the use of Rap as a teaching tool. These reports provided insights into how music and poetry contributed to a greater understanding of the themes worked on.

The data collected was analyzed qualitatively, with a focus on identifying patterns of engagement and perceptible changes in students' understanding of the issues addressed. The analysis highlighted how the integration of culturally relevant practices, such as Rap, transformed the learning experience.

Anti-racist education with rhythm and poetry

"In a racist society, it's not enough not to be racist, you have to be anti-racist." The phrase comes from the American philosopher, writer, teacher, and activist Angela Davis. This initial thought is crucial if we are to reflect on Brazil and its society. The entire Brazilian structure, since the colonial invasion, was built on racist foundations against the black

community, marked by prohibitions, enslavement, annihilation, sexual violence, and humiliation.

As such, the black Brazilian people are haunted by the trauma of the invasion, making it difficult for them to look at their roots with self-esteem. There is also a powerful racist external force that consequently marginalizes the black community, making them victims of embarrassing situations, discrimination, and physical aggression because of their race and religion. The school, as a social institution, is not exempt from being a breeding ground for racism. In this way, a truly healthy school must also be an anti-racist school.

Anti-racism is a set of actions that help to confront and combat racism. One of these anti-racism actions is the conception of the most different cultures present in the classroom. Recognizing that black culture is knowledge requires painful reflection on how the school, as a power structure, often denies black subjects access to knowledge because of their origin.

The study in question seeks to socialize rhythm and poetry (Rap), often marginalized by the hegemonic white gaze, which associates them with a place of cultural deficit or defines them based on negative stereotypes. This view reinforces the need to problematize what is meant by knowledge, since academic and scientific readings often ignore or inferiorize the "black ego", perpetuating racist stigmas and stereotypes.

For this reason, in order for pedagogical practices to embrace black culture in such a way as to invert this *modus operandi* towards a mirror that contemplates the black subject in a dignified manner, reframing is what is needed, but understand that:

Reinventing is not denying what has already been built. Reinventing means dialoguing what has already been done with the new questions and perspectives that challenge education. Reinventing means recognizing different ways of constructing knowledge. Reinventing challenges us, educators, to propose new pedagogical approaches that enable us to provide meaningful responses to the challenges of education in contemporary times (Candau, 2020. p 22, our translation).

It was believed that schools, like the laws (equal to all citizens), should homogenize children's thinking. This problem, explained by Ferreiro, is identifiable when analyzing Brazilian school curricula in the 21st century. In Brazil, schools tend to attribute value only to authors from Europe, who are the so-called canons, generating the effect of erasing the culture of enslaved Africans who, with skilled labor, were responsible for building "everything" in Brazil.

It is important to note that standardization is not restricted to the curriculum, but permeates the entire school system. In a violent way, the system tends to treat all subjects as homogeneous by standardizing the organization of spaces and times, assessment processes, class dynamics, teaching strategies, and, above all, what is conceived as scientific knowledge. Monoculturalism makes the plurality of subjects invisible and, by considering their knowledge to be different from the canon, labels them as having a "*cultural deficit*".

Conceiving the black subject in a position of authority to talk about the complexities that surround them, and especially to be able to understand that there are different ways of arriving at scientific knowledge, is not in the interest of those who hold power. In short, the majority of those responsible for drawing up school menus are men and white, which results in school studies and procedures that are distanced in many ways from black subjects.

Because this curriculum contemplates a single culture, it devalues the different ways of arriving at knowledge and stigmatizes them. From these reflections comes the need to conceive of differences as a pedagogical advantage for the black school community, based on a curriculum that also includes and belongs to black students.

Rhythm and black poetry

The rhythm and poetry of the favela are black. This research does not intend to go into all the details and trajectories of Brazilian Rap but rather to understand how its characteristics, social aspects, identity, and denunciation were organically present when the teachers in training were present at the school.

Rap proves to be an excellent teacher because, through his knowledge, it is possible to reach different levels of knowledge and educate his listeners socially and politically. Taking the blindfolds off those who are excluded from the city and fed up with violence, poverty, and prejudice is not in the interests of those responsible for such architecture. Poetry and rhythm from the periphery open up the possibility of restoring self-esteem and creating a space where the fight against prejudice and the affirmation of blackness can be heard.

Rap and education

What "They bring me is Me" is also one of the guiding threads of all the actions of the teachers in training and the researchers, which, in a way, resembles the concept of spiral time. Understand that in order to understand what spiral time is all about, you need to distance yourself from what you believe time to be based on Western concepts. The past is not over because it has passed. As an example of this, we can look at the story of our arrival at the school with the pedagogical practice focused on Rap.

The teachers in training and the researchers, responsible for the action recorded here, enter this space with the literacy given by Rap. In the present, by contributing to the student's education at the school in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, it is Rap that also plays a leading role since it was they who brought elements of Hip-Hop culture that were already widespread among them. The desire to be a holder of knowledge, and not just a mere receiver, is present at both undergraduate and basic education level, which allows us to see the possibility of Rap's leading role in this attempt to "be".

Rap thematization at school

The workshops were held in the second semester of 2023, in the last two terms of school. The methodology adopted was that of workshops, aimed at the active participation of the participants, promoting the exchange of knowledge and the development of specific skills through planned and structured activities. Our first workshop was to introduce Hip-Hop and talk to the students about their musical tastes, as well as mapping these preferences. We also presented our project and the songs we wanted to share with them.

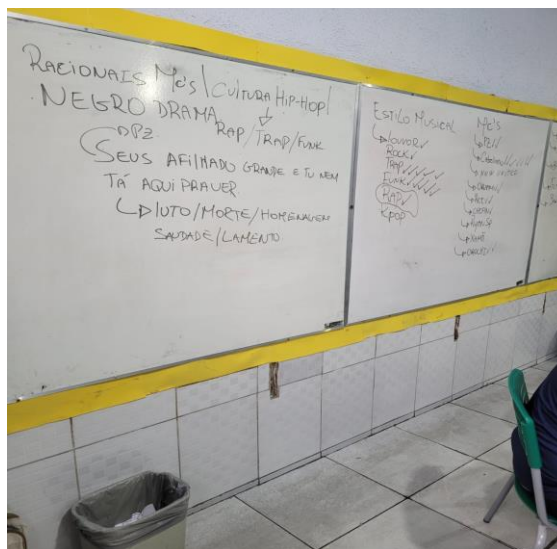
Secondly, we created a list of MCs who are the students' references for their musical tastes (Rap, Funk and Trap). Finally, we, the teachers in training, presented our tastes and Mc's, with an emphasis on the *Racionais MC's*. After making this mental map of the class, we gave them a brief explanation of the elements of Hip-Hop culture. We made a circle in the room and started listening to the songs that were of interest to the class. At this point, the students were encouraged to stop being listeners and become interlocutors, which led to the analysis of two songs: "*Mundo Covarde*" by *MC Poze do Rodo* and "*Negro Drama*" by *Racionais MC's*. The students' familiarity with these songs gave them the authority and self-esteem to carry out the analysis.

Image 01- First workshop with 4th-grade students



Source: Research Collection.

Image 02 - Records on the board of the first workshop with 4th-graders



Source: Research Collection.

In the second workshop, we performed "pique *break*", an activity whose aim was to put the children in touch with the movements of *break dance*, using the playfulness of playing with pique. The dynamic consisted of a "catcher", whose job was to "catch" his colleagues, making them stand still, "stuck". In order to move again, the students who hadn't been "glued" had to "unglue" their friends. However, for this to happen, the students (facing each other) had to dance an *break* step, allowing the pique to continue.

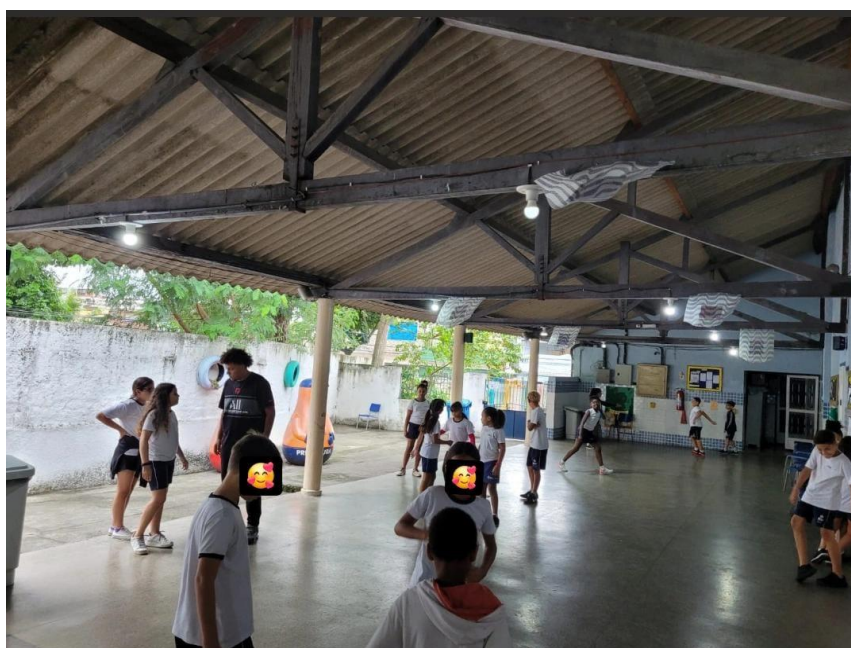
Image 03 -Second Workshop



Source: Research Collection.

In the third workshop, we used the image in action as a means of explaining the contents of Hip-Hop to the students. In this activity, the children were divided into groups and each group was given a song and/or elements of Hip-Hop for the other groups to guess what it was. In the fourth workshop, it was our turn to interpret the dance battles. This workshop aimed to get the students working on their dance moves. The groups were split up according to their affinity.

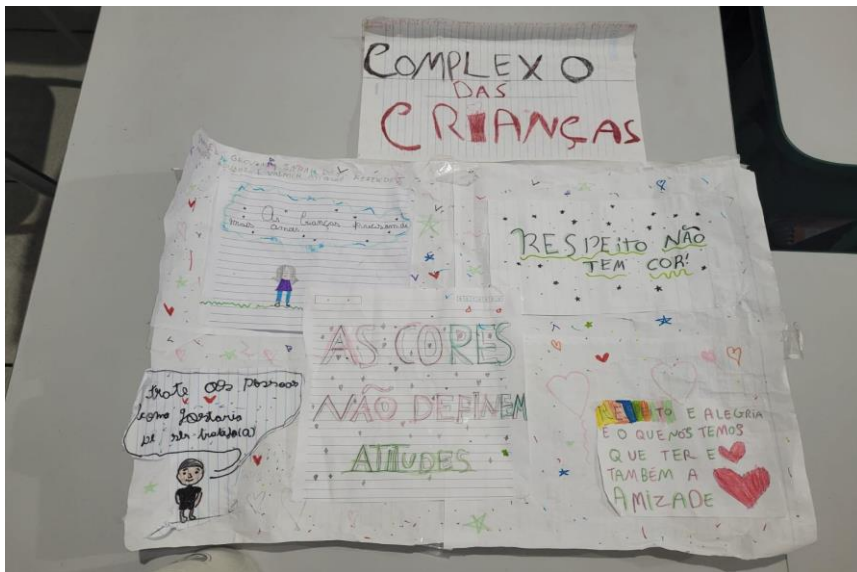
Image 04 - Fourth workshop



Source: Research Collection.

In the fifth and final workshop, graffiti took center stage. The aim was to introduce the students to this element of the Hip-Hop movement. We gave them paper and cardboard so that they could draw any pictures they wanted, with the only requirement being that the content worked on so far be present in the productions.

Image 05 - Fifth workshop



Source: Research Collection.

Image 06 - Record of the Graffiti Interpretation Exhibition



Source: Research Collection.

With this, we were able to reach one of the essential elements of black culture: hip-hop, more specifically, the song "*Negro Drama*" by the group *Racionais MC's*. Together, we achieved the initial proposal and, in line with the activities proposed by the groups, we achieved the planned objectives. However, the parents didn't welcome this Hip-Hop proposal, claiming that their children wouldn't interpret the music. In order for the children to take part in the final performance, it was suggested that the music be changed.

So, based on the demands and understanding that the parents' view was not the same as the students', we had to change the way the presentation was presented, but we understand that our objective was achieved, as we managed to include Hip-Hop content in the school curriculum. Despite the setback, in which some of the parents didn't share the same desire to see hip-hop at school, we saw an impasse. The resistance, for the most part, came from families in the community, and, listening to the students' accounts of what they hear where they live, we noticed that this resistance is deeply linked to an identity issue: a denial of one's reflection.

Education and culture: Rap as a transformative tool in the school environment

The school, as a space for human formation, plays a crucial role in building critical and aware citizens, especially in a context where social problems such as racism, prejudice, and *bullying* are still prevalent. More than transmitting academic content, the school environment should promote practices that encourage dialog, mutual respect, and appreciation of cultural diversity. In this sense, the project "*Corpo, poesia e movimento*" emerges as a response to contemporary demands for a more inclusive and meaningful education, integrating cultural elements that are relevant to the students and providing a welcoming space for debates on sensitive topics.

The project uses Rap as a transformative pedagogical tool, addressing complex social issues through the analysis of the poem "*Diversidade*¹²", by Bráulio Bessa, specifically with the 3rd grade class. Rap was chosen strategically because, although it is often marginalized in formal contexts, it has a strong connection with young people and a history of resistance, making it an effective means of engagement and reflection. With its poetic and rhythmic structure, Rap facilitates literary comprehension and values the urban cultures that are part of many students' daily lives, strengthening their identity and sense of belonging.

However, implementing practices like these requires attention to possible challenges, such as resistance from the school community or limitations imposed by the traditional curriculum. To mitigate these obstacles, the project seeks to create strategies that promote integration between school, families and the community, fostering an environment of collaboration and support. The final events, where students present their productions, are an example of how the project tries to raise awareness and social involvement, ensuring that the approach achieves its objectives in an effective and impactful way.

By breaking with a traditional view of literature, the project proposes an interdisciplinary approach that brings together music, poetry, and social education. Rap, with its cultural appeal and critical potential, is not only a means of expression, but also a bridge to building more meaningful learning that is aligned with students' realities. With this, the project reaffirms the transformative role of education, valuing contemporary forms of cultural expression and contributing to the formation of a fairer and more diverse society.

¹² Diversity.

Analysis of poetry "*Diversidade*" by Bráulio Bessa

The project's methodology, with the 3rd grade class, centered on the analysis of the poem "*Diversidade*" by Bráulio Bessa, which was strategically chosen because it addresses themes such as respect, empathy and valuing differences in an accessible and culturally relevant way. Aimed at students in the third year of elementary school, the poem served as a basis for promoting reflection on social issues, such as racism and inequality, and encouraging students to express their perspectives.

The analysis was conducted through dialogic pedagogical practices, inspired by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy principles, allowing the students to interpret the poem's verses actively. This process included moments of shared reading, group discussions, and connecting with personal experiences, creating a safe space for students to explore their ideas and feelings. The approach also sought to incorporate Rap as a mediating tool. The musicality of Rap, when combined with the verses of the poem, helped the students to understand complex concepts, promoting meaningful and engaged learning.

In addition to the literary content, the students were encouraged to analyze the implicit and explicit messages of poetry, relating them to the reality in which they live. The introduction of Rap as a rhythm for reading and recitation came about spontaneously, but proved to be an effective strategy for facilitating memorization and understanding of the text, connecting the content with popular culture that is part of the children's universe.

Final considerations

This research highlights the importance of pedagogical practices that value different cultural and racial identities, challenging traditional teaching norms, and promoting a critical and transformative education. In this sense, we highlight the need to build an anti-racist curriculum that breaks with the predominant Eurocentric approach in schools, which often marginalizes and distorts the contributions and realities of non-European cultures. The "*empretecimento*"¹³ of the school environment" proposes a break with the European/bourgeois political-educational structure, demanding a space that reflects and values cultural plurality.

¹³ Means: To make black or darker.

The use of Rap and Hip-Hop as practical teaching tools is reinforced. With its rhythmic, poetic structure and deep roots in popular culture, Rap makes it possible to interpret narratives that dialogue directly with the student's experiences, creating identification and re-signifying content that is traditionally presented in a homogeneous and exclusionary way. Hip-Hop, on the other hand, when inserted into the school curriculum, promotes a shift away from the hegemonic model, creating an environment that welcomes and empowers voices that were previously silenced.

In this way, this action research reaffirms that the school must be a space for active listening and freedom for students to express themselves. This school environment favors an active exchange between teachers and students, allowing both to make a significant contribution to pedagogical projects and activities. Projects like these are essential for building a shared education that promotes students' autonomy and enables them to construct and argue their worldviews.

Thus, the school becomes a space where different cultures coexist and are valued, in accordance with Law 10.639/2003, which establishes that the school curriculum should cover diverse cultures. This environment strengthens students' critical sense, giving them the tools to understand and question the social and political structure that marginalizes them.

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