TEACHER TRAINING AND INTERCULTURALITY: A LOOK AT AFRICAN-BASED RELIGIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to carry out an analysis regarding teacher training and interculturality, particularly regarding the recognition of ethnic-racial diversity, with the intention of developing a pedagogical practice that is simultaneously emancipatory and inclusive. It is crucial to highlight that racism brings with it oppressive consequences, such as religious

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intolerance, with special emphasis on African-based religions. In view of this problem, the following questions are formulated: how is the relationship between interculturality and teacher training established? How is it feasible to direct pedagogical practice towards intercultural education, considering religious intolerance? Based on the investigations of Candau, Campos and Rubert, Nóvoa, Munanga, Purificação, Rodrigues and Vasconcelos, this study aims to establish connections between teacher training, ethnic-racial relations, intercultural education and religious education, especially in the fight against religious intolerance. It is believed that this debate can contribute to the expansion of discussions on these topics, to address racial inequalities and promote progress towards a just and inclusive society.

Keywords: Teacher training, Interculturality, Ethnic-racial diversity, Religious intolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Discussing teacher training in the current context is a political act, as it raises reflections that reverberate in various scenarios of society. In this article, we value the dialogue between teacher training and interculturality, since it is not possible to detach the intercultural tensions and interfaces that are reflected in pedagogical practice. This is due to the fact that school and university spaces, according to Vasconcelos (2016), are places of cultural production, where parts of cultural identities are formed and shaped, considering that these identities are in a constant process of construction and reconstruction. In this way, these processes are directly affected by the tensions and conflicts arising from the encounter of different cultural groups in contemporary society. This reality leads to evidence of acts of extreme violence, oppression and exclusion, caused by racism, discrimination and epistemicide, which despise the other and do not recognize difference as a positive form. Thus, there is an indifference to what is considered different.

In this context, racism remains a devastating force in society, leaving deep marks of oppression that, in addition to generating inequalities and segregation, affect a significant portion of the population, especially the black population, which represents the majority in Brazil. We point out the lack of representation of "black knowledge",[9] which can help minimize the racial issue and strengthen the narrative about racial equality in Brazil, in addition to perpetuating the practices and consequences of racism (PURIFICAÇÃO, 2023). This situation places this part of society in a place of subordination, depriving it of rights and human dignity. Unfortunately, currently, racism is "naturalized", manifesting itself in hegemonic speeches that defend that "we are all human", "all equal" and have "the same rights". This simplistic, and often intentional, view ignores and conceals the complexities of the structural inequalities generated by racism, thus reaffirming oppression.

In this sense, when discussing racism, one cannot fail to emphasize the appreciation of ethnic-racial diversity and religious diversity, which is considered an instinctive behavior and a mystical belief, being part of human characteristics. Religion is responsible for bringing meaning to the lives of its believers, serving as a real source of information and reference to guide actions and actively participate in the vital issues of human existence. In this way, religion provides answers to its adherents around the concepts of suffering, ignorance and injustice, incorporating elements of cultural heritage (RODRIGUES, 2015).

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[9] We refer to the knowledge generated by groups that recognize themselves as black (quilombola communities, black militant movements, followers of Umbanda, Candomblé, etc.

However, the problem of ethnic-racial diversity has been addressed in academia in a still timid way throughout history, through articles, dissertations and theses. These studies, even if hesitantly, have generated spaces for the inclusion of Afro-descendants, mestizos and different sociocultural groups. This movement can also be observed at the international level, in different countries of the Latin American continent. However, prejudice, tensions, exclusion and conflicts still persist, making it difficult to value ethnic-racial diversity. The presence and struggle of social movements play an important role in raising issues related to injustices, inequalities and discrimination, with the aim of claiming equal access to all, regardless of their differences, seeking inclusion in services and also political and cultural recognition (CANDAU, 2011).

It is in this conflicting universe of tensions that intercultural education is inserted. As pointed out by Vasconcelos (2016, p. 134-135), "[...] we believe that intercultural education, as a theoretical and practical field, is a political and social project capable of contesting a model of education and teacher training anchored in monocultural and Eurocentric discourses and practices". From the author's perspective, the school and the exercise of teaching cannot be dissociated from issues related to their work, their training and the sociocultural context in which they are inserted. Intercultural education breaks with the homogeneous model, promoting transformations ranging from the school curriculum to teaching practice, aiming at the resignification of the understanding of difference and the appreciation of the various cultures present in Brazilian society, which, in turn, are reflected in the school environment.

However, this article is based on a bibliographic research with the objective of discussing teacher training and interculturality in relation to teaching practice, as well as the commitment to quality education that values ethnic-racial diversity, considering religious education. This discussion aims to promote a dialogue on these themes, moving towards an emancipatory and inclusive pedagogical practice. The following questions will be addressed: how is the relationship between interculturality and teacher training established? Considering that we belong to a racist country, where religious intolerance prevails, how can we conduct pedagogical practice towards intercultural education?

It seeks to answer these questions, articulating teacher training, interculturality and pedagogical practice, through the study of the authors Candau (2008, 2011, 2014), Nóvoa (1992) and Vasconcelos (2016). It is hoped that this discussion will contribute to new debates on teacher training, interculturality and religions of African origin, treading paths for

intercultural education. It is essential to address racial inequalities in order to contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE CONTEXT OF TEACHER TRAINING

Teaching was considered, for a long time, a socially valued profession, prestigious and recognized for its humanizing potential and commitment to citizenship education. However, along with the precarious working conditions faced by the vast majority of teachers, there is a growing malaise among education professionals. Insecurity, stress and anguish seem to increasingly accompany the daily lives of teachers. Their intellectual authority and professional preparation are often questioned. Being a teacher today becomes an activity that challenges resistance, health and emotional balance, in addition to the ability to face conflicts and build, on a daily basis, significant pedagogical experiences (CANDAU, 2014).

The school, immersed in a generalized crisis, requires, according to Candau (2014), a resignification, that is, a new look that makes it open to include all subjects. In times when new challenges challenge the school environment, the answers already defined and tried are no longer enough to solve problems and mobilize values and knowledge. An educational practice must promote the construction of subjectivities and identities capable of meeting the complexity of the multicultural societies we live in today. Recognizing the importance of the teaching role in this process is to consider the training of educators, since they are sociocultural agents who need to be recognized and valued as such.

This understanding emphasizes the need for teacher training aligned with the principles of interculturality, preparing educators to act in an inclusive manner and combat any form of discrimination. Agreeing with Candau (2014), "resignifying the school" is to understand that the new challenges that permeate educational institutions have been present in our society for centuries, causing an obfuscation of cultures considered inferior, while privileging a small portion of the population.

Thus, when considering teacher training, it is essential to highlight the concerns of teachers in relation to interculturality, especially in the light of the perspective of their own training, shaped by a Eurocentric formal education. Thus, they face the challenge of developing new pedagogical practices that dialogue with this reality. Therefore, it is urgent to promote a dialogue between cultures with a view to intercultural education. Like this

> All these issues also concern teachers who feel challenged to find new pedagogical practices to dialogue with this reality and work on this range of issues that are present on the school floor and it is necessary to face and address, not to punish and exclude, but to dialogue trying to build an intercultural education. (SACAVINO, p.3, 2020).

Nóvoa (1992) warns of the need to recognize the scientific deficiencies and poverty that persist in current teacher training programs. It is essential to reflect beyond the traditional cleavages, taking into account the scientific components, the theoretical and methodological disciplines, and thus bring new ways of thinking about the context of teacher education. This process is marked by several tensions and conflicts that, throughout history, have resulted in an appreciation and, paradoxically, in a degradation of the profession, disqualifying the figure of the teacher. Above all, these professionals have been increasingly losing their autonomy and voice.

The degradation of the teaching profession is evident from initial training, as explained by Lamego and Santos (2019). There is a distance between theory and practice that becomes noticeable already in the undergraduate course, when many students are forced to comply with a rigid curriculum specific to the Teaching Degree course, without being able to articulate this knowledge with the daily reality of the school. This results in a superficial experience of the school reality, in which the closest contact is limited to the disciplines of supervised internship, which are basic requirements for the completion of the course. The authors show that the teacher training model is still marked by this distance between training institutions and basic education, where theoretical studies predominate without proper articulation with pedagogical practice.

In this context, as Nóvoa (1992) points out, the subordination of the teacher is accentuated in the face of prolonged state tutelage, which reduces the professional to a body incapable of autonomously generating knowledge, reflections and criticisms. This subordination of the teaching profession originates from externally imposed principles, directly reflecting on the professional identity and pedagogical practice of these educators. It is urgent to break with the homogeneous model that remains rooted in institutions, which sees all students from the same Eurocentric perspective, without valuing the cultural richness present in Brazilian society, which is multicultural.

In this line of thought, Vasconcelos (2016) clarifies that:

> Critical intercultural education recognizes what is different, promotes dialogue between different cultural knowledges and constitutes a space for cultural negotiation, confrontation and conflicts arising from the asymmetry of power

existing between groups in the process of construction of cultural and social identities. By aiming at the construction of an eminently human society, it seeks to deconstruct the relations of oppression and domination by acting on power structures. (VASCONCELOS, p. 138, 2016).

When one seeks an education that aims to form citizens, it is inevitable to promote human development. In contexts that foster oppression, this formation is not achieved; on the contrary, such situations only restrict and neglect rights, resulting in the homogenization and standardization of culture. It is critical that teacher training includes both recognition of and discussions of cultural diversity. In this way, it is possible for teachers to promote enriching learning through the exchange of significant knowledge from these cultures. By valuing the contributions and singularities of each group or community, the school becomes a space that stimulates appreciation and dialogue between different cultural practices and experiences (CANDAU, 2014).

According to Vasconcelos (2016), the spaces intended for teacher training are not ideologically neutral; on the contrary, they are arenas of struggles and conflicts. In these environments, dominant and subordinate groups establish relationships of interest in the search for answers to the social, historical and cultural conditions present in educational institutions. This struggle aims to demystify the discourse of objectivity and neutrality that opposes political, cultural and social issues. From this perspective, the teacher acts as a public intellectual, endowed with a strong sense of social justice, articulating, in a practical way, theory with practice. Thus, he is able to implement projects that promote democracy and social justice.

Vasconcelos emphasizes that this professional should be concerned with integrating teaching practice with social and political aspects, incorporating them into the pedagogical routine, without distancing themselves from struggles and conflicts. The author also highlights the importance of promoting public debates, allowing discussions and decisions based on democratic principles to take place in the school environment. In this way, teacher training must be based on interculturality, since intercultural practice aims to prepare the teacher to deconstruct monocultural practices and subvert actions linked to hegemonic culture, breaking with a single model of teaching, knowing, being and living (VASCONCELOS, 2016).

If we aim for intercultural education, it is necessary to rethink an approach in which diverse cultures are interconnected, promoting dialogue between them. This interaction between knowledge, experiences and experiences provides tools to rethink pedagogical

practice. Because differences transcend the school environment and are part of interpersonal relationships. The school has a fundamental role in this process and must reflect on its pedagogical actions and the position of teachers (NASCIMENTO AND ANDRÉ, 2021).

Dialogue between different cultures implies recognizing and valuing the resistance that makes up cultural identities, without hiding any of these cultures. According to Munanga (2003), it is from the awareness of these cultures of resistance that cultural identities are formed, seen as continuous processes and not as finished products. Plural identities favor discussions about national identity and multiculturalism, which are essential for an education that promotes citizenship. When considering the regional variety of Brazilian cultures, it is clear that the country is home to diverse cultures, which go far beyond white culture and a single black culture.

Munanga (2003) highlights the singularity that exists between Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Minas Gerais, Afro-Maranhenses and blacks from Rio de Janeiro, evidenced in various areas such as cooking, religiosity, music, dance and visual arts. These particularities contribute to a broad and inclusive understanding of cultural identity in Brazil. According to Purificação (2023), intercultural education, especially in the relations between terreiros and schools, should occur through a dynamic process of relationship, communication, and learning between cultures, in conditions of respect, mutual legitimacy, and equality. It is an exchange between individuals with culturally distinct skills, knowledge and practices, seeking to develop new meanings in the midst of diversity. This view is corroborated by the thoughts of Candau and Oliveira (2010), who highlight the school as a space for negotiation and translation, where social, economic and political inequalities, power relations and conflicts in society should not be hidden, but recognized and faced. This social and political mission requires concrete and conscious social practices and actions, aiming at the creation of paths of responsibility and solidarity.

In this sense, agreeing with the aforementioned authors, education should be aligned with the concept of intercultural education. The school has a social commitment to society, and cultural and racial issues must be debated in this space. Ethnic-racial themes should be incorporated into the school curriculum throughout the school year. This approach should permeate not only the way knowledge is taught, but also the identity of teachers and the school organization as a whole, extending to teacher training in

universities. This social commitment of the school is fundamental for the construction of a more just, democratic and plural society.

It is understood that the training of teachers for intercultural education should have as its central focus the overcoming of differences between different cultures in the school environment, promoting a democratic and fair education. Intercultural education cannot be restricted to isolated activities or to specific situations that generate discussions only among a certain social group. Rather, it should emphasize all cultures, seeking a concrete transformation in this educational space (NASCIMENTO AND ANDRÉ).

It is crucial to consider the initial and continuing training of teachers aimed at the development of intercultural education, which should also be present in educational institutions. Intercultural education should be seen not as an additional component, but as an integral part of school daily life and pedagogical practices. Respect for cultural diversity and ethnic-racial relations is cultivated in every dialogue, every look and every welcome.

By valuing ethnic-racial diversity, it contributes to breaking the unification imposed by the dominant ideology. Considering teacher training and interculturality implies engaging all cultures in a committed and open dialogue, legitimizing them and ensuring that Afro-Brazilian culture, among others, is not silenced or marginalized. This process is essential for the construction of an inclusive educational environment, aimed at the formation of conscious and respectful citizens, whose rights are legitimized.

The teacher is a subject in constant construction, both professional and personal, who needs to find a space of interaction between these dimensions in order to appropriate their formative processes, giving meaning to their life stories. Training goes beyond the mere accumulation of courses, knowledge and techniques; it requires a reflective and critical work on the practice, in addition to the continuous (re)construction of their personal identity (NÓVOA, 1992).

AFRICAN-BASED RELIGIONS: INTERFACES BETWEEN RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

The Catholic religion has exerted a marked influence in Brazil since the colonial period, largely due to Western culture, which not only implanted the Catholic faith, but also modified indigenous religions and some of African origin. In 1830, the enactment of a criminal code had a direct impact on these populations, prohibiting blacks, whether slaves or freedmen, from practicing their religious beliefs.

Campos and Rubert (2014) explain that this legislation resulted in the destruction of references to African culture. Despite the resistance of the black population, which managed to maintain its cultural manifestations in different ways, contact with other cultures forced this community to adapt to different social contexts. This culminated in a process of religious syncretism with other traditions. Only in 1891 was the concept of religion formally abolished, allowing freedom for any type of religious belief.

However, this change did not significantly alter the panorama of religious intolerance. The Catholic Church remained the main religious reference in Brazil, without suffering repression. On the other hand, the different religions existing in the country continued to face persecution, discrimination and even attacks on their practices and temples. According to Campos and Rubert (2014), these attacks did not only come from the public space, but also occurred on the part of state authorities and the police, especially against traditions such as spiritism, umbanda, batuque and candomblé.

The situation began to change in 1988, when the Federal Constitution recognized Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations. Article 215 guaranteed everyone the full exercise of cultural rights and access to the sources of national culture, in addition to supporting the appreciation and dissemination of these manifestations. In addition, article 216 defined as Brazilian cultural heritage the material and immaterial assets that refer to the identity and memory of the different groups that make up Brazilian society, providing for punishments for damages and threats to cultural heritage and listing documents and historical sites related to quilombos (BRASIL, 1988).

This recognition is the result of the struggles of the black movement, which has achieved significant advances in the promotion of rights and in the recognition of Afro-Brazilian culture as an essential component of national culture. Racism, however, persists, manifesting itself in various forms of oppression, such as exclusion, discrimination and religious intolerance, especially in relation to religions of African origin. Historically, despite the aspirations for equality, there is evidence of a favoring of the dominant culture, predominantly Catholic.

As Campos and Rubert (2014) argue, since the establishment of the Brazilian republic, which brought the principle of secularism – the separation between the State and the Church – the State has not shown itself to be impartial in regulating religious diversity, especially in relation to non-Catholic traditions. Regulations began to have rational and

sanitarian motivations, resulting in norms that disqualified African religions, treating them as "low spiritism", and legitimizing repressive actions by the State and the police.

Munanga (2003) highlights that cultural identity is built from the awareness of differences, which emerge from historical, cultural, religious, social and regional particularities. In Brazil, several processes of cultural identity coexist, reflecting the pluralism of its various ethnic groups. Thus, everyone is recognized as historical and cultural subjects, contradicting the purely biological or racial view.

In view of this analysis, it is pertinent to ask: how does this scenario present itself today? Like this

> Despite the discourse of cultural diversity, beliefs and identities, we are still faced with religious intolerance strongly veiled in our society. The prejudice and violence that the children and members of Umbanda suffer today are the result of a historical heritage that comes from the 1930s, known as the "Vargas era", a context in which Afro-Brazilian beliefs are labeled as "cultural backwardness"; Since then, the persecution of Afro cults has never ceased. (PURIFICAÇÃO, 2022, p. 104).

We can see that negative stereotypes place the black population in a position of subordination, depreciating their culture and religion. This situation is the result of a historical heritage marked by a homogeneous vision, in which racism and prejudice manifest themselves as responses to what is considered different. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that, throughout the twentieth century, social relations have been translated in different ways, from the physical elimination of the other and forms of violence to coercion through the regulation of customs and moralities, adopting a binary and dichotomous view of those who are seen as different (VASCONCELOS, 2016, p. 155).

When discussing the affirmation of equality, it is crucial to pay attention to the difference between the concepts of equality and difference. In this sense, "[...] It is not a question of denying difference in order to affirm equality, nor of an absolute differentialist vision that relativizes equality. The question is how to work equality in difference" (CANDAU, 2008, p. 49). In this context of prejudice and racism, racial intolerance is often addressed in several reports from different Brazilian states, in which these acts are often portrayed as isolated cases. This situation highlights religious attacks and prejudices that not only destroy sacred spaces, such as terreiros, but also concretely reinforce a deep-rooted racism.

In addition, a survey carried out by the Ministry of Human Rights reveals, through data, the seriousness of cases of complaints related to religious intolerance. The study

shows that, between January 2015 and the first half of 2017, there were complaints every 15 hours, evidencing the urgency of addressing this problem in a comprehensive and effective way.
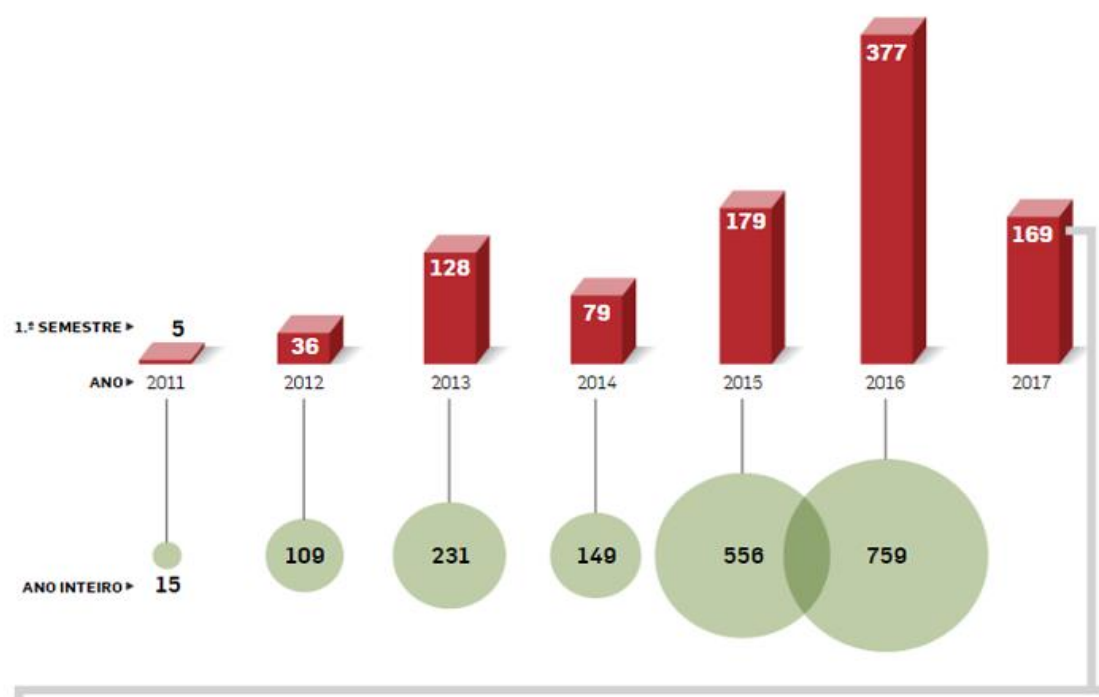

Figure 2 Number of cases of religious intolerance complaints, Brazil, 2020.

Religião das vítimas
NÚMERO DE CASOS (2017)

Umbanda	26	Universal do Reino de Deus	1
Candomblé	22	Testemunha de Jeová	1
Matrizes africanas	18	Presbiteriana	1
Católica	17	Muçulmana	1
Evangélica	14	Maranata pentecostal	1
Espírita	8	Kardecista	1
Judaísmo	6	Igreja adventista	1
Ateu	2	Cristã maranata	1
Assembléia de Deus	2	Não informada	44
Adventista do Sétimo Dia	2		

It is noted that although religious intolerance is considered a crime in Brazil, the data reveal that there is still a high rate of cases of religious intolerance directed at religions of African origin. This situation becomes more evident when these rates are compared with those of victims of other religions. Such a reality leads us to think about the numbers of people who suffer from this violence in a silenced and often hidden way. As well as about

the difficulty of Brazilian society in recognizing African culture as an integral and fundamental part of the history and culture of the Brazilian people.

Based on these surveys, Nascimento and André (2020) emphasize the urgency of rethinking the way of doing differentiated education, promoting a truly intercultural education. For this, it is necessary to invest in professional teacher training, many of whom are not yet prepared to work on this theme in the classroom. An example of this occurs when a student of a different ethnicity takes a text from his or her mother tongue to school and this text is not valued by the school or by the teachers due to lack of knowledge or understanding, being considered inappropriate according to the current regulations. This behavior ends up moving away from the objectives of intercultural education, which aims to integrate cultural diversity and dialogue between different cultures in the educational environment.

For Candau (2008), the intercultural perspective goes beyond the perception of the other, it aims at the construction of a just, humane and plural society. In this context:

> The intercultural perspective that I defend wants to promote an education for the recognition of the "other", for dialogue between different social and cultural groups. An education for cultural negotiation, which confronts the conflicts caused by the asymmetry of power between the different socio-cultural groups in our societies and is capable of favoring the construction of a common project, through which differences are dialectically integrated. The intercultural perspective is oriented towards the construction of a democratic, plural, humane society, which articulates equality policies with identity policies. (CANDAU, 2008, p. 52).

Relating interculturality with African-based religion means promoting dialogue between different cultures and also religions. This perspective fosters integration and appreciation of differences, relating interculturality between them. Thus, we understand that by adopting this perspective, we contribute to an education that moves towards an anti-racist education and that fights religious intolerance. With this, recognizing and respecting ethnic-racial diversity, in favor of a democratic society, which values the richness of its plurality and can rescue its humanization.

Rodrigues (2015) highlights that religious interculturality is built from various realities and cultural aspects, in which educational content is contextualized in the time and space experienced by students, significantly valuing the topics addressed. This perspective of religious education in a teaching of religion proposes a curricular reorganization that prioritizes the discussion about cultural pluralism in society, integrating it as an essential component of learning. The objective is to enrich students' understanding of Brazil's

cultural and religious diversity, encouraging reflection on their own realities, to recognize themselves and others. The author emphasizes that the organization of the contents of Religious Education should facilitate the interaction between society and the school, between culture and socially significant learning, as well as between theory and practice, promoting an education that respects and values plurality.

Finally, the teacher assumes an essential role and through interculturality he will be able to have tools to promote an education that mobilizes knowledge for critical reflection of his reality, being able to resume history, to raise questions about the historical, social and political conditions lived in it. Thus, as discussed, religious intolerance, which is a problem that needs concrete and urgent actions.

From a mediation in the construction of intercultural relations and the taking of a critical position of this professional, students can think about the current society and mobilize perspectives that contribute to a better and fairer society for future generations. Thus, leading education to democracy and that gives rise to respect, the deconstruction of prejudices, stereotypes and the formation of citizens. Thus, "[...] it is central to the (re)construction of critical thinking, not based on Eurocentric legacies or modernity and, thirdly, because it has its origin in the South" (CANDAU, 2008, p.53).

CONSIDERATIONS

From the discussion of teacher training in relation to interculturality, especially focused on the religious intolerance faced by adherents of African-based religions, it highlights the urgency of overcoming the romanticized vision of an egalitarian and non-racist society. Through this view, it perpetuates a false sense of equality, in which it is assumed that all citizens, regardless of their culture or religious belief, have the same guaranteed rights.

In this way, far from resolving conflicts and tensions faced by peoples of African origin, it ends up hiding it, not contributing to the overcoming of racism and its damage to this population. On the contrary, it naturalizes and reinforces it, without recognizing the presence of Brazilian plural diversity. Cultural diversity is present in religiosity, not being configured in a single way, but in different cultural groups and in religious pluralism.

Teachers need to develop a critical understanding of this theme. The adoption of an education focused on interculturality characterizes the teaching practice that promotes critical reflection on sociocultural contexts. Leading to a rethinking of the historical context

and the struggles that were hidden by a homogeneous and standardized vision. According to Candau (2008), the intercultural teaching practice is committed to overcoming these practices on a homogeneous, standardized and monoccult basis, which do not contribute to the valorization of the rainbow of cultures and riches present in our Brazilian society and which also permeate school spaces.

Therefore, as discussed in this article, the importance of including interculturality in teacher training courses is emphasized. The formation of a cultural identity depends on discussions that stimulate reflection on social reality, which generate actions to combat social injustices. In this way, making it possible to overcome differences and prepare these teachers to respond to the challenges imposed by racism, prejudice and cultural differences.

The school has in turn the responsibility of recognizing and valuing all cultures, especially those of African origin. Thus, empowering subalternized sociocultural subjects, as the cultural dimension is present on the "school floor" and through an intercultural dialogue "[...] recognizes and values each of the subjects involved in them, combats all forms of silencing, invisibilization and/or inferiorization of certain sociocultural subjects, favoring the construction of cultural identities [...]" (CANDAU, 2011, p. 253).

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