

Intercultural education in Brazil: Between conservatism and radical transformations

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Abstract This article analyses the emergence of intercultural education in the Brazilian educational system. After summarizing the debate on international convergence in intercultural education, it traces the development of interethnic relations in Brazil, describing the heavy legacy of slavery and colonization. It then investigates recently adopted legislation that encourages the inclusion of cultural diversity in education. Finally, it explores intercultural approaches in the training and work of teachers. The Brazilian example is interesting because it reflects both an ongoing conservatism that resists the teaching of intercultural material in schools and a profound debate about cultural identities and the need for education to take into account all of the nation's historical inequalities.

Keywords Intercultural education · Ethnic and racial relations · Inequalities · Curriculum · Cultural identity · Cultural diversity · Colonialism · Teacher training · Education reform · Brazil · Teachers' work

In the first section of this article I analyze the ongoing international discussion on appropriate models to address cultural diversity. In the second section I discuss ethnic relations and how they have evolved in Brazil. Indeed, intercultural approaches seem to mirror the way in which these relations have structured themselves in the course of the country's history, penetrated the system of education, and defined the place that various groups occupy in the social fabric. I then describe how school legislation, especially rules on curriculum, introduce and produce interculturalism in the classroom. A significant legal and juridical component guides the way that interculturalism is implemented in Brazil. On paper at least, official instructions seem to be both constraining and innovative in the attention they pay to cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. Finally, I evaluate the real impact in the classroom of interculturally focused curricula, and examine recent changes in the Brazilian educational system that introduce intercultural approaches in the training and work of teachers.

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Competing models or international convergence

All observers of contemporary educational systems agree that the treatment of cultural diversity represents a challenge both for research and for educational policies. Many international organizations, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe, focus their programmes, projects, and actions on this issue. These organizations also contribute to the worldwide dissemination of intercultural or multicultural approaches in education.

Researchers have recently published several comparative studies that are relevant to this issue. The legitimacy of the comparative perspective has been reinforced by micro-analyses combining data gathered at the local, national, and international levels. The link between the discourse on diversity, reflected in national models for integrating ethnic minorities, and the logic at work within schools and classrooms, has also attracted attention from researchers (Banks 2009). More recently, researchers have been interested in capitalizing on national experiences to identify the factors that lead to cultural diversity being better recognized and appreciated in education. They have also explored the specific situation of indigenous peoples. It seems obvious that more comparative research on this issue is useful because it allows us to contrast the results of research on this topic, to compare our methodologies, and to identify innovative practices that can be transferred from one context to another or even internationally. Moreover, researchers in the South, particularly in Latin America and Asia, have produced original studies that should be shared with researchers based in Europe or North America.

Without intending to underestimate or neglect the importance of national and regional educational policies in the treatment of cultural diversity, in this section I analyze and discuss cultural diversity in education systems from a comparative and international perspective.

Cultural diversity has been a central concern of many international organizations. Thus, since the 1950s, UNESCO has continued to place this issue at the heart of its work (Lévi-Strauss 1952; UNESCO 2010).

Dealing with diversity means addressing the state of justice, equity, democracy, and discrimination:

Multicultural Education refers to the ways in which all dimensions and aspects of schooling address the needs and talents of culturally diverse populations to ensure equity and social justice for all. It is both a philosophy and a process. As a philosophical concept, it is rooted in the principles of democracy, social justice, equity, and the affirmation of human diversity. As a process, multicultural education is fluid and continually undergoes modification to meet the needs and demands of an ever-changing society. To this end, it becomes a concerted strategy, an educational project or instrument that employs multiple knowledge(s) of peoples' histories, and demonstrates an awareness of contexts (e.g., social, historical) in an effort to challenge current state policies that discriminate against, or simply ignore people based on their socio-economic status, race, gender, dis/ability, religion and sexual orientation. (Grant 2008, p. 9)

Reviewing ten years of issues of four prominent journals of education in the United States, Sleeter and Grant (1987) observed that "Race, social class and gender tend to be treated as separate in education literature". Further, they write, "A failure to consider the integration of race, social class, and gender leads at times to an oversimplification or inaccurate understanding of what occurs in schools, and therefore to inappropriate or simplistic prescriptions for educational equity" (p. 197).

Cultural diversity in education is an international challenge, not only because most human societies are culturally diverse but also because this diversity, if it is not valued and addressed in the educational system, can result in tensions and threats to social cohesion.

Two main models for managing cultural diversity are frequently mentioned. The assimilation model is built on the idea that cultural differences must give way to equality among citizens. In contrast, the multicultural model provides a right to cultural identity. Many recent comparative studies have attempted to determine if these models remain dominant or have converged somewhat.

Comparing the Swedish and French cases, Blanc-Noël (2010) pointed out that narratives about national identities are largely linked to the way the two countries adapted to the increasing pace of globalization. In Sweden, it was logical to extend the benefits of the *folkhemmet* welfare state to all citizens, regardless of their origins. The shift from an assimilationist stance to a multicultural one can be seen as a development and an extension of traditional values rather than as a radical transformation. When the national identity narrative included the connected values of welfare and internationalism, these values were extended to immigrants in the domestic sphere. It was also a logical enforcement of traditional values of equality and solidarity. France, on the other hand, has never considered itself to be a multicultural country. The French national narrative, developed in order to keep different peoples together in one nation, cannot afford to open its doors to diversity. The opponents of multiculturalism are numerous, and their preferred argument is that it would facilitate the creation of “communities” that would place the republic in danger. In both countries, however, the narrative of national identity is under discussion:

The national narratives were constructed to respond to historical situations. Nowadays, these situations are changing faster than ever. The Swedish case seems to show that a brutal change of national narrative cannot have immediate effects, whereas the French attitude consisting of sticking to an obsolete narrative has no more positive effects. Moreover, the two countries' examples show that both multiculturalism and equalitarian universalism can have bad effects on national social cohesion. So both countries rather try to find a balance between universal democratic rights and diversity recognition. To solve this difficult challenge, it is time to learn lessons given by history, and especially by the global history works. They show that diversity has always been constitutive of human history, and that the frames of cultures have always been moving, at various paces. In a globalized world, they will move and maybe fade or merge a little faster than previously, but the important thing is [to] realize that global [mixing provides an opportunity] for mankind. (p. 22)

Even within a single country like France, opinions about diversity vary widely. Greenwalt (2009) identified two discursive practices of national identity among French students. In the first, labeled “republican”, students refer to the traditional republican values of revolutionary progress, political activism, and the objective search for mechanisms that benefit the common good. They see their teachers as mentors in the uses of institutional power. By contrast, a second group of student narratives is centered on a discourse of “social recognition”. This second way of speaking tends to present teachers as social equals and more generally implies that a postcolonial France should learn to recognize itself as a multicultural nation.

Other researchers highlight the emergence of a form of racism, which can be called “cultural racism” and is built on an allegedly insurmountable distance between values, including religious ones. For example, Leeman and Reid (2006) identified interethnic differences connected with a social hierarchy operating in both Australia and the

Netherlands. What is consistent across both contexts is a cultural form of racism (culturalism). In both countries, this culturalism seems to be increasingly focused on religious difference. The situation in Australia is even more complex when one considers the position of the indigenous peoples.

Differences between the countries relate to the rejection of multicultural education by Indigenous peoples in terms of their own struggles and prior occupation of the Land, and the fact that multicultural education is seen as something done for immigrants. In the Netherlands, it is a separate issue, but only teachers in schools with a high percentage of immigrants are interested. In Australia, the debate was highly politicized until recently; the new trend in Australia towards non-tolerance, despite the rhetoric of government, has silenced this issue. In the Netherlands intercultural education is seen as important for mutual respect and as helpful for integration, but indifference is evident in schools. This probably relates to a perceived lack of relevance to Dutch culture; a sense of relevance that, due to a history of immigration, is part of the Australian culture. (p. 67)

As Sen (2006) points out, the limits of multiculturalism become apparent if it privileges difference to the extent that it places people within impermeable silos:

There would be serious problems with the moral and social claims of multiculturalism if it were taken to insist that a person's identity must be defined by his or her community or religion, overlooking all the other affiliations a person has [...] and through giving automatic priority to inherited religion or tradition over reflection and choice. (p. 160)

Ultimately, how cultural diversity is addressed in the education system depends on both the narrative and historical myths of national identity, and also on socio-cultural transformations brought about by migration and globalization. Following an 80-year process of democratization and growing integration into the global economy, Brazil has undertaken a major review of its education system and is working to enhance cultural diversity in schools.

Interethnic relations in Brazil: Historical legacy and contemporary challenges

In the Brazilian educational system, the idea of providing space for discussions of cultural diversity is relatively new. Despite the intrinsic racial and ethnic diversity of Brazilian society, intercultural approaches only made their appearance around 15 years ago. The country has successively experienced slavery and an official policy of "whitening" the population, and Afro-Brazilians continue to be the victims of both racial and social inequality. In recent years, however, many intercultural approaches have emerged in the education system; here, I try to situate them within the Brazilian context and to highlight their prospects of development. I also analyse the strong resistance these transformations encounter in schools. This opposition reflects the difficult reconciliation these intercultural approaches must achieve, between the right to be different on the one hand, and the imperative of equality on the other, and between equal treatment among ethnic groups and the unified national educational system. This is leading to a persistent paradox. In Brazil, interculturalism has recently become a much-discussed topic, and certain legislative initiatives have attempted to give it its proper place in the educational system. Yet, it is rarely

seen in the genuine day-to-day reality of the classroom, for it reopens historical wounds, antagonisms, and conflicts that generate fears about national cohesion.

Brazil's history is intimately connected to the ethnic plurality of its population. Indeed, the original Amerindian population was joined by Portuguese conquerors, slaves from Africa, and extensive waves of immigrants, mainly European but also Japanese and Syrian-Lebanese. Historically, a key element that shaped and structured this ethnic and demographic mix was the marginalization and domination of ethnic groups of Amerindian and African origin (Moritz Schwarcz 2001). Amerindians were the object of an enterprise of colonization and "civilization" that resulted, over time, in a dramatic drop in their numbers. As the frontier of agricultural colonization advanced steadily inland, particularly in Amazonia, it gradually, and considerably, reduced their territory. Although slavery was abolished in 1888, Afro-Brazilians have seen their history and culture systematically devalued. Today, they represent the ethnic group most affected by poverty, urban violence, and social exclusion (D'Adesky 2001). Their inferior status developed because, as former slaves, they were not equipped to exploit their freedom; without education, or economic or cultural resources, they automatically became part of the excluded population.

Based on their analysis of the structure of relations between whites and blacks, Bastide and Fernandes (1955) revealed inequalities between the black and white segments of Brazilian society. White ideology seems to consider blacks as primitive: dirty, ugly, superstitious, financially irresponsible, immoral, aggressive, and unreliable at work, sexually perverted, and exhibitionist. In a multicultural and racially mixed society such as Brazil, the educational system always gave preference to white culture, setting deculturation and "whitening" as its objectives (Da Silva 1987). Deculturation is the deliberate process of allowing a group to disintegrate culturally to facilitate its exploitation, during either colonial or neo-colonial times. "Whitening" means accepting the superiority of the white race, and seeing its values, history, and culture as the only references worthy of consideration. Whitening also finds expression in the processes that devalue the groups being dominated.

"Republican" political projects, such as that of Caetano de Campos, suggested a solution based on cultural transplantation: importing teaching methods, materials, and even personnel in order to transform the Brazilian race. As Carvalho de Chagas (1989) asserts, the idea was to increase immigration from Europe, not only to replace blacks with whites in the main sectors of production, but also to promote vocational development and training; the primary instrument for this project would be interethnic mixing and the ultimate objective was the moral whitening of the black population.

Perceived as inferior, but impossible to eliminate, the Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians were the object of an official policy of assimilation that aimed to anchor the country exclusively in its European cultural heritage. In reality, the ideology of whitening aimed at transforming Brazil into a white nation through a series of concrete measures, particularly by encouraging European immigration. This transformation was perceived as crucial if Brazil was to have access to modernization or to what in Brazil is still called the "first world" (*o primeiro mundo*). Parallel to the ideology and practice of assimilation, a powerful myth emerged of a successful Brazilian "racial democracy" (ethnic intermixing) among the country's three constituent ethnic groups: Amerindian, African, and European. For Freyre (1933, 1952), the leading proponent of Brazilian racial democracy, the nucleus of harmonious coexistence among these three groups has enabled the merging of the three "races" despite the violent experience of colonization and slavery. Thus, Brazil would be the only place on earth where diverse populations and cultures live together in harmony.

These beliefs are reflected in the classroom. The recent study by De Nazaré Baía Coelho and Paiva Costa (2009) in the state of Pará showed how the myth of racial democracy in the classroom has persisted among educators. The researchers' classroom observations and analysis of the language of both teachers and pupils show how widely people accept the notion of a highly racially mixed Brazil, one that is a source of both wealth and national pride. Yet, it should be remembered that, as early as the 1950s, research carried out by the Paulista School of Sociology, with support from UNESCO, revealed the magnitude of racial inequality in Brazil (Bastide and Fernandes 1955; Fernandes 1960; Iannii 1966; Maio 1999). As pointed out by Fernandes (1960), in Brazil, racial democracy is a façade masking an unequal social order:

An effective racial democracy does not exist in Brazil, where the exchange between individuals belonging to different "races" begins and ends at the level of conventional tolerance. The latter may be the "right thing" to do, satisfying the demands of a questionable "Christian spirit" and the practical necessity of "keeping everyone in his or her place". Yet, it cannot really bring individuals closer together, but creates the basis, within a given social space, of mere coexistence strictly regulated by a code that legitimizes inequality by veiling it behind principles of social democratic order. (p. xiv) [my translation].

After Brazil gradually returned to democracy in the 1980s, the issue of inequality linked to racial categories re-emerged in a new form under pressure from social movements and a few intellectuals. In Brazil in 1995, the Brazilian black movement organized the Zumbi dos Palmares march against racism, to support "citizenship and life". This demonstration, a milestone in the history of intercultural approaches in the country, presented the Brazilian president with a document demanding not only the end of racial discrimination, but also suggesting specific measures to promote equality.

Ethnic and racial relations in Brazil are extremely complex (Reichmann 1999). Even though the myth of racial democracy is increasingly being challenged and the struggle against racial discrimination is a larger issue than ever, intercultural approaches encounter strong resistance, as can be seen in the current debate on affirmative action. Opposition is sometimes linked to the role that foreign governments and international and nongovernmental organizations (for example, UNESCO and the Ford Foundation) play in oversimplifying intercultural approaches. Some Brazilians see this activity as interfering in the country's internal affairs and importing issues that are not well adapted to the Brazilian historical context.

The question of positive discrimination is not only a technical debate about individuals who are black, white, or other. It is, above all, a political and social question that has long prevented the black minority from uniting around a positive and coherent ethnic identity. As Sansone (2003) clearly showed, not only did Afro-Brazilians fail to mobilize as an ethnic group to obtain equality of opportunity; they also failed to see themselves as a distinct group, because many aspects of their culture have deeply penetrated into Brazilian culture as a whole. Brazilian music and dance are clear examples of this. For a long time, the genuine ethnic mixing of the Brazilian population neutralized any demands from specific ethnic groups. The value of analysing intercultural approaches in Brazil resides precisely in this paradox: it is a multiethnic society that cannot come to terms with its real diversity, but at the same time, it is far removed from the dual, bipolar model that focuses on "blacks" vs. "whites" in the United States and South Africa, or on "nationals" vs. "immigrants" in Europe. Hence the interest, for international-level research on intercultural approaches, in focusing on the unique case of Brazil.

Legislation in favour of incorporating cultural diversity in education

It is important to emphasize that the gradual return of democracy in Latin America made it possible for the demands by the dominated cultural and ethnic groups to emerge in many countries in the region. In the 1980s and 1990s, eleven Latin American countries recognized in their constitutions the multi-ethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual character of their societies. As a result, public policies on education have had to seriously envisage the management of cultural differences (Ferrão Candau and Russo 2010). In Brazil, discussions about the situation of marginalized groups in schools began in the 1970s and 1980s, with the development of the Afro-Brazilian civil rights movement and the first investigations into stereotypes and discrimination in the educational context. As associations of Afro-Brazilians demanded the full recognition of their rights, it became clear that considering the cultural identity of Afro-descended pupils would be indispensable for improving their educational outcomes. In addition, educational researchers found abundant evidence of the ways that negative stereotypes towards Brazilian blacks had persisted in the school environment, especially in the ways they were represented in the minds of teachers and in school textbooks (Pinto 1987a).

At the legislative level, the first important step was the 1988 Brazilian constitution that initiated the progressive return to democracy. It recognized the nature of the Brazilian population as a pluralistic composite, both culturally and racially. Article 215 reaffirms the state's responsibility to protect the expressions of popular, indigenous, and Afro-Brazilian cultures.

Next, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law no. 9,394/96 of 1996, or LDB, instituted a more decentralized educational system, distributing responsibility in the area of education among the union, states, and municipalities. This law also stipulated that all students, nationwide, should be provided with a common basic education, but also stated the need to adapt each school to its local and regional situation (Art. 26). For the first time, a right to be different made its way into educational legislation. However, the LDB mostly takes up the issue of cultural diversity in a general, cross-cutting way, except for the special attention it brings to bear on the bilingual and intercultural education of indigenous peoples (Articles 78 and 79) (Saraiva 2010).

Brazil achieved a new milestone in 2003 with the passage of legislation promoting intercultural education. Law 10,639 introduced the mandatory teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the official elementary and secondary curriculum. For the first time, educational programmes were officially required to mention the contribution of the black community in constructing and shaping Brazilian society and identity. This law also introduced November 20th into the school calendar as annual National Black Awareness Day. In 2008, Law 10,639 was converted into Law 11,645, which reaffirms the necessity of teaching African/Afro-Brazilian history and culture and introduces the history and culture of indigenous peoples (Saraiva 2010).

Table 1 shows the specific legal treatments for introducing intercultural approaches to teaching about the two primary ethnic minorities. Because Amerindians represent under 1 % of the Brazilian population and live in geographically confined areas, they were the first to benefit from the opening of schools to cultural diversity. In contrast, one can observe considerable reluctance to affirm the Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage. This group constitutes the majority in some parts of the country, especially the northeast, and recent statistics show that blacks and mestizos represent the majority of Brazil's population (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística 2010). Even in the southern regions,

Table 1 Main dates and legal measures fostering the emergence of intercultural approaches in Brazil

1988	New Brazilian constitution	Places duty on the state to protect the expressions of popular, indigenous, and Afro-Brazilian culture
1996	National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB)	Decentralizes the management of education and states the need to adapt education to local realities Requires bilingual and intercultural education for indigenous peoples
2003	Law No.10,639	Introduces mandatory teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the official primary and secondary level curricula
2008	Law No.11,645	Confirms the requirement to teach about the history and culture of African, Afro-Brazilian, and indigenous peoples

sometimes considered to be “white” Brazil, mestizos and Afro-Brazilians have long been part of the population.

Furthermore, the over-representation of Afro-Brazilians in the *favelas*, or urban slums, has prompted researchers and decision-makers to think that Brazil’s problem with racial disparities would be automatically solved by taking more vigorous action to eliminate social exclusion and poverty. Extending this analysis to all of Latin America, Hooker (2006) even speaks of how nations have included the indigenous and excluded those of African descent.

In short, the introduction of the Afro-Brazilian heritage into the educational system makes it necessary to rethink Brazilian national identity and to problematize it differently (Canen 2000). In particular, rethinking this identity implies recognizing the mestizo nature of every Brazilian, and the multiple layers of historical discrimination against Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians. Therefore this rethinking amounts to a veritable Copernican revolution in the Brazilian educational scheme, which was originally conceived by the Jesuits as a means of assimilating “uncivilized” groups and preparing the nation for the modern world, one they saw as exclusively European.

Intercultural approaches in the training and work of teachers

Many terms are used in pedagogical initiatives that try to incorporate cultural diversity into educational systems. The expression multicultural education is used in some contexts and intercultural education in others. In this article, I opt for the concept of intercultural approaches, a term that clearly underscores the searching and hesitation involved in this work (Dasen and Perregaux 2000).

In attempting to define intercultural approaches in the training and work of teachers in Brazil, I use the typology of Burnett (1994) who places these approaches into three categories according to their main emphasis; programmes may be content-oriented, student-oriented, or socially-oriented. Based on this typology, Table 2 shows the main approaches currently being used in the Brazilian educational system, and reflects the variety of both approaches and initiators. Apart from curriculum-related initiatives, which have a clear presence, a proliferation of commemorative days celebrate the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups. They are reminiscent of the commemorations created in the United States after multicultural education was introduced: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Black Month, and Cinco de Mayo, a day to honour Chicano culture.

Table 2 Intercultural approaches in the training and work of teachers

Emphasis	Description	Triggering element and initiators	Application in the classroom and resistance noted
Content	National curriculum parameters The history of Africa and indigenous peoples Indigenous and African art and culture	General legislation Ministry of education History and geography teachers Teachers of the arts (music, dance, visual arts)	Classroom teachers are relatively unfamiliar with curricula Teaching on these topics is left to individual initiative The most successful projects are linked to a school-based project (<i>projeto politico pedagogico</i>) or incorporate an artistic dimension
Student	Antiracist education Inclusive education Education for citizenship	Social movements Teachers Ministry of education	Intercultural approaches are integrated into broader education innovations
Social action	Day to commemorate the abolition of slavery (13 May) National Black Awareness Day (20 November) Indian Day (19 April) Training of indigenous teachers Implementation of positive discrimination policies and ethnic quotas in certain educational institutions	Afro-Brazilian and indigenous movements Ministry of Education	Policies promoting access to equality, in particular in the form of ethnic quotas, meet resistance on many sides, motivated by the myths of racial democracy and scholastic merit

Art is also a part of nearly every intercultural approach in Brazil. Indeed, art may be considered to be the backbone of culture, since the artistic dimension is particularly relevant to classroom exercises in cultural diversity. Students generally like learning about the characteristics of African and indigenous art. Crafts, songs, and dances bring students closer together. However, teachers must avoid the temptation of presenting these cultures merely as handed-down curiosities and thus reinforcing stereotypes and the distance between cultures.

The National Curricular Parameters (PCN) elaborated by the Federal Ministry of Education (MEC) encourage the integration of cultural diversity in education. The introductory document of the PCN for primary schools (MEC 1997) emphasizes the need to take diversity into account and adapt the goals, contexts, and evaluation criteria. Diversity is one theme that must be incorporated into the various disciplines (Portuguese language, mathematics, history, geography, science, and the arts) and thus make interdisciplinarity possible at the primary level (Kadlubitski and Junqueira 2009). The MEC (1998) emphasizes the importance of this work:

In order to live as a democratic and pluralistic society, we must respect and value the ethnic and cultural diversity of which that society is composed. By virtue of its historical formation, Brazilian society is marked by the presence of various ethnic and cultural groups, and descendants of immigrants of diverse nationalities, religions and languages. (p. 68)

It should be noted that the training of Brazilian teachers has recently undergone far-reaching reforms, to promote the university-level training of teachers and greater professionalism. The space granted to intercultural approaches in these reforms was marginal: they were not imposed as a mandatory, essential dimension. They seem, instead, to be left to the individual initiative of those who develop and manage training programmes. Often, intercultural approaches in the curricula for training teachers are placed under the general umbrella category of inclusive education, which also includes sensitization to the needs of students with disabilities and those facing other problems. However, once federal funding became available for training indigenous teachers, it prompted some public universities to launch training programmes that focus on appreciating diversity (Grupioni 2006).

Given that the primary objective of intercultural approaches to the training and work of teachers is to change their behaviour with regard to ethnic and cultural diversity, I now offer a brief overview of Brazilian research on the subject.

Pinto (1987a) demonstrated the nearly complete absence of research dealing directly and specifically with the education of blacks and mestizo children. This finding reflects the lack of official statistics on racial and ethnic identity, giving the impression that Brazil is a mono-racial country. In educational research circles, the lack of studies taking colour into account was also justified by the fact that the Brazilian blacks are concentrated in the most disadvantaged levels of the national population (Pinto 1987a). For some researchers, skin colour is an issue to be considered only in studies on poverty and social exclusion.

Apart from this long-term debate on how race becomes dissolved into social category, other researchers have attempted to analyse the representations conveyed by textbooks, since textbooks express what a society considers worth handing down to future generations. These resources have great symbolic value in the valuing and devaluing of different cultural groups (Akkari and Sampaio 2003). Thus it is noteworthy that Brazilian researchers found persistent racism in textbooks used in classrooms. Various studies have looked into the representation of blacks in textbooks. Pinto (1987b), for example, collected

a sample of 48 books used in the 4th grade in the São Paulo region between 1941 and 1975, and analysed ethnic categories based on the characters that appeared in both the text and the illustrations; 1,378 characters were illustrated and 4,449 described. Comparing the status of the white, mestizo, and black individuals in the illustrations revealed that whites were advantaged by far. They were most numerous ($N = 1,099$)—and they monopolized strategic parts of the books, such as the covers. No black women were portrayed as such; instead they were represented by the *black maid*, with pronouncedly stereotyped traits. The portrayals of white characters had the greatest diversity, and engaged in over 30 types of professional activity (including the most prestigious), whereas blacks and mestizos were shown in only a few professional activities, including the most demeaning. Practically the same observations applied to both the texts and the covers.

Therefore, as the main vehicle for learning in formal education, textbooks reinforce the image of black individuals as inferior to whites. They contribute to the confusion between skin colour and social class. When hygiene is mentioned, the black child is shown as dirty. Textbooks constitute an instrument for building an “awareness” of the inferiority of the black race (Triunpho 1987). Lino Gomes (2003) revealed the educational system’s hesitation to accept and portray the black body positively, obliging black teachers to find other spaces where they could assume their specific racial identity. Oliveira (2003) made the same observation with regard to the predominant representations of Amerindians, who are portrayed as “savages”, “warriors” and “Indians!”

The Brazilian teacher and visionary Paulo Freire demonstrated the power of images in education: images of the peasant, the worker, the Indian, and the black. As visual language, images foster human communication and a better understanding of students’ actual conditions. The use of artistic images enhances the sensory experience. At Freire’s request, the artist Francisco Brennand created a series of ten images with figures composed of simple lines and colours. These images showing animals and certain work and leisure-time activities portray interculturality positively, and were used successfully in literacy courses. It is of paramount importance in education to make use of personal sensitivity and affective experiences because they can be more powerful than cognitive and rational ones (Pompeu Da Silva 2009).

A study by Sampaio and Leite (2002) in a school located in the historical centre of Salvador reveals the way that black students learn early on to suppress their racial identity. The *capoeira* teacher decided to ask the students (aged from 10 to 14) in his class who among them was black. From a mere glance at the class, it was clear that all the children were black, though some were darker than others. All the children, however, replied that they were not black. But the teacher insisted, and some said that his son was black, but not that any of them were. At the next lesson, the teacher continued his questioning, addressing each student individually: “Is your father black? Your mother? And you?” Even the students who replied that one of their parents was black refused to identify themselves as black. After much insistence, the children ended up “accusing” one of their classmates of being black. The authors say this illustrates that even young children integrate a sense of shame about their colour and their bodies. The expression “É de pequenino que se torce o pepino” means “You have to bend the cucumber early”, or that children must be moulded while still young.

Following the significant legislative changes aimed at promoting intercultural approaches in the educational system, and in particular in the training and work of teachers, one might expect that more recent studies would have discovered changes in attitudes among Brazilian teachers or students. However, these studies continue to reflect educators’ resistance to intercultural approaches.

In an action research project carried out with teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Canen (2007) noted the persistence of an essentialist vision of cultural identity among teachers. Moreover, the majority of teachers were not sensitive to the historical inequalities to which the Afro-Brazilian population had been subjected.

De Nazaré Baía Coelho and Paiva Costa (2009), studying a school in the state of Pará, found that teachers were not aware of the issue of ethnic and racial discrimination or of Law 10,639/2003, which requires them to teach about the history of African and Afro-Brazilian culture. Only one history teacher, who was black and a member of an Afro-Brazilian social movement, was familiar with the content of this law and tried to implement it in the classroom. Hence, interculturalism is apparently not presented as an institutional pedagogical proposal that is integrated into the educational system in order to implement the new law, but rather as an isolated position deriving from a teacher's personal convictions. Those observations in the classroom refer back again to the myth of the three races which masks the racism that sometimes comes out in jokes between children or slips of teachers' tongues.

A study by Akkari and Santiago (2010), conducted in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, reached the same conclusions. Few of the teachers interviewed had heard about laws No. 10,639 or 11,645 on promoting minority cultures in school curricula. Moreover, the few teachers who did know about these laws had heard about them through the media or outside of the school.

UNESCO and the Brazilian government are currently involved in translating eight volumes devoted to African history. Teaching materials for teachers and textbooks for students are also planned, so that, within one or two years, all the teachers will have the resources they need to teach about African history.

In short, as laudable as these legislative changes might be, the efforts to introduce intercultural approaches in the Brazilian educational system have not yet produced the desired results in the schooling of minorities (Silva and Araujo 2009). Thus, they constitute a necessary but not sufficient condition for translating intentions into intercultural attitudes and behaviours.

Conclusions

In this article I have highlighted two aspects of the intercultural debate in Brazil. First, the country is open to intercultural discussions and experiences at the international level. It has put into place several legislative measures promoting interculturalism in the classroom. The issue now is how to move beyond the legislative, legal, and commemorative approach that currently predominates and attempt to anchor Brazilian interculturalism in a critical thinking process that engages interethnic relations not only at school, but also in the society as a whole.

To my mind, teachers are the main engines for moving beyond the current conservatism and wariness of the Brazilian education system about intercultural approaches. To bring about real change in the treatment of cultural diversity, teachers must have a broader vision of intercultural education, which is more than simply knowing about typical costumes, festivals, music, and cuisine. They must comprehend intercultural education within the broader context of critical and democratic citizenship, rather than merely holding a contemplative appreciation of the richness of various ethnic groups.

In the Brazilian education system, intercultural approaches are mediated by two main strategies. The first focuses on curricular reform, to better acknowledge the contributions

made by the traditionally oppressed groups, Afro-Brazilians and Amerindians. The second centres on policies of access to equality that rely on a system of ethnic and social quotas to open up access to certain educational institutions. If the first strategy has not encountered much explicit resistance, it is because it has not yet become effective on a daily basis in the classroom. The second strategy, however, because it challenges the privilege of being white, has stirred numerous controversies that will not soon be settled.

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