

Social bionarratives and Afro-Brazilian identity: The Congada as an intercultural and anti-racist practice in graduate education

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the didactic-pedagogical potential of Congada as an intercultural, anti-colonial, and anti-racist formative practice in the context of graduate studies in Education. The study is a segment of research conducted within a curricular component of the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (*Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro*), which involved the participation of masters and experts in Afro-Indigenous knowledge as an educational collective. It takes a qualitative approach and was approved by the institution's Ethics and Research Committee. Here, we present analyses based on excerpts from Social Bionarratives (*Bionarrativas Sociais* - BIONAS), produced by participants of the curricular component and Congada masters. The analyzed narratives show that immersion in the territory of the Terno de Congada Penacho in Uberaba - MG, led to significant epistemic shifts in the training of teachers and researchers, challenging the dominance of technicist and Eurocentric teaching models. The Congada thus emerges not as a folkloric object, but as a living pedagogy, structured around principles like orality, corporeality, musicality, ancestry, and community. The results show that incorporating Afro-Brazilian knowledge into graduate studies expands the possibilities for teacher training committed to justice in education regarding ethnic-racial relations and the implementation of intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist educational practices.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta o potencial didático-pedagógico da Congada como prática formativa intercultural, de colonial e antirracista no contexto da pós-graduação em Educação. O estudo constitui um recorte de uma pesquisa desenvolvida no âmbito de um componente curricular do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro, que contou com a atuação de mestres e mestradas dos saberes afro-ameríndios como coletivo educador. Tem abordagem qualitativa e foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética e Pesquisa da instituição. Apresenta-se aqui análises que se baseiam em excertos de Bionarrativas Sociais (BIONAS), produzidas por participantes do componente curricular e mestres da Congada. As narrativas analisadas evidenciam que a imersão no território do Terno de Congada Penacho, em Uberaba - MG, promoveu deslocamentos epistêmicos significativos na formação de professoras(es) e pesquisadoras(es), ao tensionar a hegemonia de modelos tecnicistas e eurocentrados de ensino. A Congada emerge, assim, não como objeto folclórico, mas como uma pedagogia viva, estruturada por princípios como oralidade, corporeidade, musicalidade, ancestralidade e comunitarismo. Os resultados apontam que a incorporação de saberes afro-brasileiros na pós-graduação amplia as possibilidades de uma formação docente comprometida com a justiça à educação das relações étnico-raciais e a efetivação de práticas educativas interculturais, de coloniais e antirracistas.

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Introduction

Brazil, as a diverse country made up of multiple cultures and unique traits, needs its educational system to pay attention to these differences and promote a teaching approach as intercultural as the nation itself. It's believed, therefore, that this requires decolonizing traditional teaching methods, which, as Franco (2022) points out, assumes that for an “epistemic self” favorable to learning, simply providing good materials and methods is enough for learning to happen. However, this just continues elitism and favors those who are already culturally advantaged, maintaining hegemony.

Decolonial didactics move toward interculturality, resistance practices, critical interculturality, and anti-hegemonic stances capable of bringing democratic pedagogical practices into educational institutions. Intercultural education promotes the recognition of different knowledge and identities, strengthens the autonomy and empowerment of historically marginalized peoples and groups (Walsh, 2001, 2007, 2009). It is not a state or final goal, but a continuous process of collective construction.

In an intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist approach, a curriculum component (CC) of the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE) at the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), called “Interculturality and Popular Education: Afro-Amerindian Decolonial Knowledge,” offered in the second semester of 2024, promoted training focused on sensitivity. Its goal was to encourage popular university outreach; introduce the field of research in Intercultural Education, especially Science Education, and its implications for thinking about cultural diversity and inequalities. It also aimed to value Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultural expressions and produce materials and curricular proposals in line with Laws No. 10,639/03 (Brazil, 2003) and No. 11,645/08 (Brazil, 2008). In this sense, it sought to encourage graduate students to reflect on themselves and the other.

The component featured masters of Afro-Amerindian knowledge, who are leaders of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultural traditions - a Candomblé iyalorixá, a capoeira master, a Congada general, a chief from the Pataxó ethnicity - as an educational collective who taught classes throughout the semester.

Thus, the general aim of this article was to analyze the didactic-pedagogical potential of Congada in the training of teachers and researchers, based on the analysis of narratives produced in the context of a course of the Graduate Program in Education at UFTM. The specific goal was to highlight the emotions, memories, and sensitivities of these participants through this immersion experience in the territory of the Terno de Congada Penacho in Uberaba, MG.

The analysis of the narratives is based on testimonies from four participants who are graduate students, one of them being a congadeiro member of the Terno de Congada and the other the Master General of Terno de Congada. These testimonies were included in a Social Bionarrative (*Bionarrativa Social* - BIONAS) written collectively by them. The BIONAS is a multimodal resource, in which the creator can use different forms of communication like audio, video, images, and text (Kato and Fonseca, 2021), depending on what they want to convey with it.

Theoretical Foundation

From hegemony to intercultural and anti-racist education: Paths of resistance

Franco (2022) points out that Brazil's historical educational trajectory reflects the history of a nation marked by colonialism, patriarchy, genocide, and the epistemicide of Black and Indigenous people, and the educational system carries deep marks of Jesuit education. According to the author, in Brazil, Portugal's political-economic project predominated in education for 149 years, and even after the expulsion of the Jesuits, little changed in terms of the pedagogical situation, maintaining elitist, encyclopedic, illustrative, memorization-based teaching. Authoritarian and disciplining pedagogical methods developed passivity, submission to authority, and adherence to outdated models among students (Franco, 2022).

D'Ávila (2025) states that our education, inheriting Western thought since Modernity, seeks to turn reality into something objectified by introducing a model in which education is reduced to transmissive and assimilative cognitive processes, leaving out feelings and emotions from educational environments and institutions. According to the author, “a pedagogical experience that doesn't value the voices of students, that doesn't listen to these voices, greatly hinders their transformation into active and engaged individuals.” And oppressing subjectivities slides into “the silencing of developing personalities who could potentially contribute to the so-called social transformations” (D'Ávila p. 9).

If the reality of schools and educational institutions also reflects the reality of the training of teachers, researchers, and other professionals working in basic and/or higher education, in their teaching practice there is no connection between the “epistemic self” and the “empirical self,” with the empirical prevailing, which might explain teachers' desire for models, scripts, formulas, and teaching strategies (Franco, 2022). In this context, the author states that students, undergraduates, and postgraduates are neglected in their epistemic specificities, since many teachers believe that just presenting information and content stimulates intelligence. This is not true, as it only works for those who have productive

relationships with knowledge, who are few, given that there are many colonizations and subjectifications in the epistemic self (Franco, 2022). The universalization of knowledge based on the legacy of Eurocentrism is also a problem within the educational system, as it makes other forms of knowledge present in students' everyday lives invisible (Franco, 2022).

However, there are those who work in the opposite direction, resisting the system through education that is counter-hegemonic. Teacher training, according to Rodrigues et al. (2025), as a historical, social, and political process, has been the subject of intense debates given the challenges posed by technological changes, social inequalities, and new training demands. These demands affect pedagogical practice in the contemporary context, marked by exclusion, precariousness, and fragmentation of public education policies. Many see education as a practice of freedom, as proposed by Freire (1967), to overcome the lack of dialogue, the culture of complacency, and authoritarian education. The author advocates for an education capable of promoting critical awareness on the path to overcoming social inequalities and the traditional education that reproduces the alienation present in the social system.

hooks¹ (2013) dialoguing with Freire criticizes education as a tool of repression and breaks away from passivity and social complacency, in favor of an educational model based on dialogue. Both authors understand that education is not neutral, but meant to shape conscious individuals, capable of intervening in society and fighting against the dominant elitist repression (Freire, 1967; hooks², 2013). So, if education is to be an act of freedom, a brave process of reflection and action (praxis) that allows an individual to understand and transform their reality (Freire, 1967). Dialogue between the educator and the student is key in this process to establish a horizontal relationship that strengthens the person as a cultural and political agent (Freire, 1967).

The intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist perspective, in the same sense, is also about the existence of an alternative, counter-hegemonic way of doing science and education. It's an epistemologically disobedient path to the current coloniality, which promotes a decolonial turn, a process of epistemic subversion of power that operates in a coordinated way on theoretical, ethical, aesthetic, and political levels (Segato, 2021). According to the author, it encourages a relocation of the subject within a new historical horizon, based on a critical rereading of the past, reshaping the present, and envisioning the construction of a democratically oriented society.

¹hooks written in lowercase because it's the pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins, a Black American writer, who signs as bell hooks in a movement of ancestral appreciation honoring her maternal grandmother Bell Blair Hooks.

Curricular component: Interculturality and Popular Education: Decolonial Afro-Amerindian knowledge

The curricular component under investigation seeks a new approach in the Graduate Program in Education (*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação - PPGE*) at the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (*Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro - UFTM*), a counter-hegemonic way to build knowledge. Across 16 meetings, the topics covered were popular education, identity and culture; social movements, politics, and education of ethnic-racial relations; participatory research methodologies in education; critical interculturality and the dialogue of knowledge; interculturality, multiculturalism, and human rights; post-colonial and decolonial theories; and the production of intercultural educational resources (Kato and Ferracini, 2024).

The formative process happened collaboratively, in which the construction of knowledge occurred in a horizontal way, where all university professors, masters of Afro-Indigenous knowledge, and graduate students played an active role. The researchers called the learning community formed around the investigated CC a community of interest and resistance (Smith, 2018; hooks, 2013) that expanded beyond it. Smith (2018) points to a community of interest as one that brings together people with a common interest, not necessarily from the same territory, and it becomes a community of resistance when this learning community comes together resisting oppression, racism, prejudice, and discrimination (hooks, 2013) resulting from coloniality, which arises with colonialism and continues to this day, acting as a force of domination in different aspects of life for both the colonized people and the colonizing people (Quijano, 2005).

Thus, the learning community formed around the CC brought together people from different territories and territorialities around a shared interest, which is intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist education. It had a decolonial approach, as it allowed for the unveiling of the logics of coloniality and the mechanisms that reproduce the colonial power structure, by challenging and shifting hegemonic Western-based subjectivities and categories of thought (Mignolo, 2008). It brought Afro-American-indigenous knowledge into the university, having an intercultural aspect, by listening to the voices and experiences of the participants.

Above all, having masters and teachers of Afro-Indigenous knowledge acting as instructors and using their expertise in the CC was a real teaching-methodological highlight. In the 2024 semester, these teachers were: A chief from the Pataxó ethnicity, a Makuxi/Wapichana indigenous woman, a capoeira master, a Congada general, and an

Iyalorixá. They covered Afro-Indigenous knowledge and Afro-Brazilian values related to indigenous traditions, capoeira, Candomblé, and Congada, always linking it back to the theoretical frameworks from the Global South brought in by the CC faculty.

The meetings took place at the university and in the territories of the master(s). The epistemic perspective focused on values such as Circularity, Religiosity, Corporality, Musicality and Communitarianism, Ancestrality, Memory, Playfulness, Vital Energy/ Axé, and Orality (Brandão and Trindade, 2006), all present in our Brazilian identity. This experience was unprecedented for most of the teachers and researchers.

For Larrosa (2015), the knowledge of experience is formed as an understanding that is inseparable from the person who lives it, and it cannot be objectified or externalized in the manner of scientific knowledge. It's a kind of knowing that makes sense insofar as it shapes unique ways of being in the world, rooted in each individual's history and sensitivity. From this perspective, the author suggests an alternative that doesn't rank itself higher or lower compared to other forms of knowledge, but as a different path, emphasizing that education should create conditions for something to genuinely happen to us. This implies allowing ourselves to be touched by experiences capable of breaking with the usual, producing shifts and unease that prove to be essential for the processes of subjectivation and for the emergence of new meanings (Larrosa, 2015). The experience analyzed in this text takes the Congada as the central axis, understood as a powerful didactic-methodological tool for promoting intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist education.

The construction of social Bionarratives (*Bionarrativas sociais* - BIONAS) within this formative and collaborative process with the teachers met the final proposal of the CC, resulting from a didactic-pedagogical dynamic used throughout the semester, which culminated in the formation of groups that chose one of the teachers for this collective writing. BIONAS appear here as another approach to narrative within intercultural and decolonial training. It is an Open Educational Resource (OER) (*Recurso Educacional Aberto* - REA), teaching, learning, and research materials in various formats, digital or otherwise, in the public domain or released under an open license, which allows free and unrestricted access, as well as adaptation and redistribution by third parties, with few or no restrictions (Santos, 2013), and can be made available for access on a virtual platform. They are set up as strategies to deal with the colonialism that affects the epistemological South, while at the same time challenging the dominant models of academic writing. According to Kato (2020), it's a genre that breaks away from rigid, standardized structures, historically driven by the value given to erudition and the supposed universality of scientific knowledge, which tend to suppress the emergence of the author as a subject involved in the process of knowledge production.

These stories highlight personal conflicts, socially produced silences, and possibilities for taking a stance toward otherness, aspects that are shaped and expressed through the

relationships we have with the local biodiversity (Kato, 2020). The author states that BIONAS assert themselves as a theoretical-methodological resource that connects subjectivity, territory, and epistemological critique, expanding the ways of speaking and producing knowledge in the academic field.

We believe that, unlike a standalone narrative, BIONAS are a type of encounter-based, decolonial, and intercultural narrative, in which, without the conventional strictness of academic writing, graduate students were able to reflect on traditional formative processes. In this process, they brought into the dialogue academically recognized knowledge and Afro-Amerindian wisdom, which are sometimes overlooked in their own training and in their practices as education professionals. They were also able to address sensitivities, existence, and identity, as well as education for ethnic-racial relations and their role in the anti-racist struggle.

The Congada

The Congada emerged as a celebration that reenacts the crowning of the king of Congo, incorporating the memory of African kings and their courts, but over time it lost these characteristics (Martins, 1997). Its rituals evoke an African past of glory, resistance, and spirituality, in which the songs, originally African and later translated into Portuguese, as well as the drums and snares, trigger collective and spiritual memories silenced by the violent process of forced diaspora. As Lima (2022) points out, these sound and bodily expressions reintroduce combative Black presences into the urban space, symbolically challenging the colonial order and its contemporary outcomes.

Congada, being an Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestation, can also be seen as a movement of Afro-Brazilian identity, according to Gomes (2018), originating from the African diaspora in Brazil, which began with the arrival of enslaved Africans from the 16th century. It's a cultural expression that, although rooted in Africa, was built and recreated by Black Brazilians; it emerges as an authentically national expression that, like many other Black social and cultural movements, arises through struggles of resistance (Gomes, 2018).

When recalling African ancestry, Congada doesn't erase the trauma of kidnapping, slavery, and over three hundred years of violence inflicted on the Black population, of which contemporary structural racism, prejudice, and discrimination are still echoes. The costumes, symbols, and military-inspired elements within Congada, which represent battles from the slavery era and forms of cultural resistance, point to the struggles against different forms of racial oppression in modern times (Lima, 2022). In his work, the author notes that Congada has intricate systems of knowledge, from the dance to the music and the organization of the

group itself with hierarchy.

In the territory of the Terno de Congada, the construction of Afro-Brazilian identities doesn't happen primarily in formal school settings, but rather in anti-racist social struggles and collective practices of Black resistance, as Gomes (2018) points out. In this context, teachers and researchers participating in the curricular component Interculturality and Popular Education: Decolonial Afro-American Indigenous Knowledge experienced education as a practice of freedom, engaging in the collective production of knowledge in an intercultural, critical, political, and decolonial way. In this process, Congada became a powerful intercultural educational and formative resource, capable of breaking the historical silencing of Afro-Brazilian knowledge and starting a non-romanticized dialogue grounded in insurgent pedagogical practices (Walsh, 2009).

As they get closer to the songs, rituals, rhythms, and congadeira hierarchies, participants learn through the body, collectivity, and ancestry (Lima, 2022), recognizing that this knowledge doesn't threaten the systematized academic knowledge, which is traditionally focused on the cognitive. On the contrary, it highlights the possibility of a dialogue between forms of knowledge aimed at building a more democratic, plural, and socially engaged education (Walsh, 2009).

Methodology

During the Interculturality and Popular Education Curriculum Component: Decolonial Afro-Amerindian knowledge, the graduate students had experiences with masters and mistresses of Afro-Amerindian knowledge who taught classes at the university and in their own territories together with the university professors. Using decolonial teaching and learning strategies applied in the classes, groups were formed between the graduate students and the masters/mistresses. And following the principles of experience and meaning proposed by Larrosa (2016), these groups produced seven BIONAS as the final product of the curriculum component.

In a living process of education for ethnic-racial relations, with this multimodal resource, the groups built a narrative of encounter about the knowledge developed during the semester. Aiming in this article to analyze the didactic-pedagogical potential of Congada, a narrative analysis was carried out on a BIONAS created by four teachers/ researchers participating in the curricular component and the General of the Terno de Congada Penacho. One of the postgraduate researcher/ teachers is also a congadeiro. To ensure the ethical principles of the research, the participants' names were withheld. The exclusion criterion for the other BIONAS was that they did not address the topic in question.

For the analysis, the experiences and Afro-Brazilian values related to Congada were taken as a reference, using it as the central axis of understanding. The immersion in the territory of the Terno de Congada Penacho, in Uberaba (MG), the participation of researchers sharing responsibilities, emotions, and protagonism with the other members of the Congada community, in order to grasp reality in its dynamics, complexity, and entirety (Brandão, 2007), and how this experience affects their formation.

Results and discussions

In the experience lived, the investigation points out that within the Penacho Congada Group, participants of the curriculum component “Interculturality and Popular Education: Decolonial Afro-Amerindian knowledge” experienced that Congada is not just a celebration and a religious place, but also a political and social space of influence. It’s an exemplary center for empowering the Black population, highlighting the prominence and leadership of Black women through the matriarch of the group. It’s a place of activism, anti-racist vigilance, and community self-organization.

We present some testimonials followed by the narrative analysis of the BIONAS excerpts conducted within the CC 2024 offering and the testimonial given by the Master General of Congada:

Participant testimonial 1 - Excerpt BIONAS, 2024

“Schools, universities, and curriculum still operate under the logic of the coloniality of knowledge, marginalizing epistemologies that don't fit into Western, rationalist, and Eurocentric molds. In this logic, knowledge from Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and popular traditions is often silenced, exoticized, or reduced to folkloric objects. It's in this context that Congada - an Afro-Catholic cultural manifestation of resistance and ancestry - asserts itself as a powerful and insurgent educational practice [...] I stay connected to axé, all the vital energy we carry as an inheritance from Africa, something our people bring as an inheritance from Africa. [...] But I think that most of the elements that Congada has been incorporating there, for organization, to reach today's times, are genuinely Brazilian elements. The slavery processes made us create something, the pains of the civilizing process, during and after slavery, made us create something that is ours. [...] Africa is a source of our essence, but I

understand that these are elements of an Afro-Brazilian identity that is present here with us” (Participant 1 and member of the Terno de Congada).

Participant 1 is a researcher, has taken the CC twice, and is also a member of the Terno de Congada. Their account is a narrative of both denunciation and epistemopolitical affirmation, highlighting the persistence of the colonality of knowledge in schools, universities, and curriculum. From a critical and situated perspective, the participant points out the reproduction of Eurocentric and rationalist frameworks that govern what is recognized as legitimate knowledge, revealing the historical power-knowledge dynamics that sustain the exclusion of Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and popular epistemologies. Their statement comes from a historically produced subordinate position, yet one that is politically aware of the exclusionary dynamics that determine what is legitimized as knowledge.

By pointing out the processes of silencing, exoticizing, and folklorizing these knowledges, it highlights the symbolic violence involved in hegemonic curricularization, which strips cultural practices of their historical, spiritual, and community meanings. In this process, the narrative not only describes marginalization but also questions the ways schools and universities neutralize the political-pedagogical potential of living cultures by disconnecting them from their territories of belonging.

The repositioning of Congada as a rebellious pedagogical practice is at the core of its epistemological affirmation. By calling it an “Afro-Catholic manifestation of resistance,” rooted in ancestry and community organization, the participant shifts Congada from the realm of marginalized culture to that of knowledge production, giving it epistemological and educational status. This shift is a gesture of reexistence, where Congada is recognized as an ancestral pedagogical technology capable of challenging the colonial framework of knowledge and creating other ways to teach, learn, and make sense of the world.

By weaving together lived experience, identity belonging, and epistemological critique, Participant 1's narrative performs, in the very act of telling it, a break from the colonial logic of knowledge. By presenting the Congada beyond just a festivity - as a Black movement, a formative practice, and a historical expression of resistance of Black people - the testimony reaffirms the legitimacy of ancestral epistemologies in academic formation and in building intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist education.

Beyond just a party, Congada is a Black movement of ancestral cultural expression. It's a way of resisting and affirming the identity of Black people, who fight against racism by expressing their culture and faith. In the case of the Terno de Congada Penacho, it also shows their social and community organization. Lima (2022) says that Black people enslaved under a colonial market order reinvented themselves in Brazilian lands and, even though they were

beaten, corrupted, and segregated, they kept alive the traditions of African spirituality that reconnected them in the search for the freedom that had been denied to them.

[...] We celebrate our ancestors, keeping their memories alive, which were gradually erased by colonization that took over the books and destinies passed down by our parents and grandparents, who practiced these celebrations in the past and handed this knowledge down to us. In this sense, the congo is an event and an occurrence of ongoing ancestral memory (Lima, 2022, p. 80).

The Terno de Congada Penacho has a record dated in Uberaba from the year 1889. Continuing with his story, Participant 1, who is a congadeiro, links African ancestry, the historical experience of slavery, and the creation of meanings anchored in Brazilian territory. He states the persistence of axé as a vital energy inherited from Africa, connecting body, spirituality, and ethnic-racial belonging in opposition to historical attempts at erasure promoted by colonialism. But he warns that, although Africa remains a source of essence and a symbolic reference, much of the elements that shape contemporary Congada come from historical processes experienced in Brazil. By stating that these elements are “genuinely Brazilian,” it breaks away from essentialist or fixed interpretations of Afro-diasporic culture, highlighting Congada as a dynamic practice shaped at the intersection of African heritage and the conditions imposed by slavery and post-slavery processes, showing sensitivity, Brazilian-ness, and historical knowledge.

Mbembe (2018, p. 29-30) warns that the West, in order to justify its power, gave rise to an idea of the human being by coding a set of customs, rituals, laws of war, rights of conquest, public morality and manners, trade techniques, religion, and government. And the rest was seen as negative, “it is precisely this sign that we call Black and, by extension, the seemingly unrelated that we call Africa, whose characteristic is to be not a common name, let alone a proper name, but an indication of an absence of work.” For the author, the “black becoming” is not just a social or racial condition, but a symbol of the imposition of an existence marked by precariousness, the risk of death, and instrumentalization under the neoliberal and capitalist regime. At the same time, however, this condition sparks in the subalternized the awareness of the need to resist and assert black identity in order to break away from the historically imposed place of exclusion (Mbembe, 2018). In this line of thought, the participant shows a clear understanding of the African heritage, the ancestry we carry from this culture, all its richness, and this people from various nations who brought us religious, cultural, culinary, genetic, and lifestyle roots.

The beginning of the Black population's journey in the Americas goes back to the African continent, with kidnapping and the transatlantic slave trade being the mechanisms that moved millions of stories, bodies, and knowledge to the other side of the ocean (Munanga; Gomes, 2016). This process is recognized for its scale and duration as one of the greatest

tragedies in human history (Munanga; Gomes, 2016). The authors also point out that in the Brazilian context, the Afro-descendant population was, for a long time, deprived of the historical memory of their ancestors due to the systematic erasure strategies imposed by the slave-owning regime. This shows the need to embrace our Brazilian identity, to see ourselves as Brazilian, Afro-descendants that we are.

Within Afro-Brazilian values such as circularity, musicality, ancestry, and corporeality (Brandão and Trindade, 2006) identified in the Congada, the Congada Master points to musicality as one of the strong aspects of blackness. It brings communication, beauty, and the history of a people, being able to educate, teach, and shape the community:

Testimony of the General Master of the Congada Costume

“For us, musicality is a way for us to communicate. Within a congado group, sometimes just by singing, a simple look that a leader gives to their dancers, they’ll understand what we’re communicating. So for me, congado and musicality are a way for us to communicate within a group. Congado itself, like I told you, is like a school, where you start seeing who’s learning, and noticing that whether it’s a child or a young person growing up there, they can be promoted [...] but all of that happens through the perspective of the elders. [...] Kind of like a training in a school or a college. We look at those who have the best learning to promote them within a congado group” (Master General of the Terno Penacho, 2024).

The narrative of the Master General of the Terno Penacho points to Congada as a complex pedagogical-communicational system, where musicality, embodiment, and hierarchy are formative elements of their own, historically rooted and epistemologically legitimate. Recognizing musicality as a language, moving it away from an aesthetic or performative understanding to a communicational and pedagogical construct. The Master of the Terno Penacho reveals the existence of shared symbolic codes, built within the practice of Congada. In this sense, Congada is described as a “school,” a metaphor that not only brings this cultural practice closer to formal educational institutions but also reshapes the very concept of learning. The learning described by the General happens in a gradual, continuous, and context-specific way, involving careful observation of the elders, the “maiorais,” and following the growth of individuals over time. The reference to children and young people who “grow up in there” highlights a generational pedagogy, where knowledge is transmitted and produced collectively through active participation in ritual and community practice.

Unlike mainstream school systems, marked by abstract and standardized criteria, according to General do Terno Penacho, the Congada operates with a validation logic that considers embodied learning, commitment to the group, and the ability to take on responsibilities within the community. And the master says that the decision about who is ready to be promoted isn't individual or bureaucratic, but comes from the experienced eyes of the elders, holders of knowledge legitimized by their journey and experience.

The General states that within Afro-Brazilian practices, there are their own systems of training, evaluation, and progression, endowed with intentionality and complexity. His narrative is shaped as a story of survival, in which Congada emerges not just as a cultural expression but as a living, intercultural, and decolonial pedagogy. This historical, cultural, political, and ancestral construction is Afro-Brazilian identity built and learned not in school, but “in anti-racist social struggles, starring the diverse forms of [...] Black resistance.” (Gomes, 2018, p. 115).

The journey of congada, which unfolds in a circular and ancestral way, has been driven by various spheres, from the academic environment to the classroom, from teacher training to student education. It stands out as a powerful pedagogy, creating dialogues and opening new paths for Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations. This approach breaks down paradigms and amplifies the wisdom of a people who face constant challenges and adapt, finding innovative ways to keep going (Lima, 2022, p. 27).

According to the author, Congada helps preserve history, offers opportunities to reclaim Black identity, plays an important political and social role, and serves as a space for empowering the Black community, taking the lead, and raising awareness against racism through education.

Participant Testimony 2 - BIONAS Excerpt, 2024

“After living a lot and understanding every little piece of myself, I realized how important it was to recognize where I came from, experience life, and honor what my ancestry laid out for me, beyond the choices I made before bringing my body into this plane. I remember the first time I saw a procession pass by. My eyes sparkled, and I felt like I belonged to it all. But I grew up and learned that, for many, I was ‘too light-skinned’ to belong to the family I believed was mine. [...] Discipline brought me incredible experiences and awakened memories within me that I didn’t remember and could only access there. I understood that I learned beyond the books, I learned in capoeira, in candomblé, in congada; it was alongside my people in the Congada and

Mozambique groups that I learned a lot of what I carry today into education and life. Educating has always been my dream. When I was a child, my wish was to learn how to draw, but not for myself, I wanted to be a drawing teacher. Of course, I didn't know how to draw. [...] Today, right in the middle of this crossroads, I realized that I was shaped not only by the books I read, but by all the teachers who brought me to where I am now" (Participant 2, researcher and teacher, 2024).

Participant 2 draws on personal experience to shape her identity, educational, and professional development, reflecting on her past. She connects memory, ancestry, and her educational journey, creating a self-portrait that includes spiritual, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions. She shows a process of self-understanding highlighted by recognizing her origins and valuing ancestry as a core part of who she is. The memory of her first encounter with the Congada procession stands out as a foundational experience of belonging, full of emotions and an immediate connection with this cultural expression. However, this experience is challenged by an episode of identity denial, when she recalls being considered "too light-skinned" to belong to the family she recognized as her own. Such passage reveals the symbolic violence of colorism and racialization, showing how the coloniality of being makes racial relations permeated by the idea of different levels of humanity, often historically validated by biological sciences (Restrepo; Rojas, 2010). It also operates within communities, creating cracks in recognition and belonging. At this point, the narrative highlights an identity conflict that goes through the participant's body and memory, but entering the curriculum component becomes a turning point, capable of activating silenced memories and producing deep subjective reconnections. By stating that the course made it possible to access knowledge that wasn't available to conscious memory, Participant 2 recognizes the learning experience as a process of reshaping oneself, where learning goes beyond the epistemological and reaches emotional, bodily, and spiritual dimensions. This movement highlights the central role of experience as a formative category, in line with Afro-Indigenous knowledge and decolonial and intercultural educational perspectives.

In this way, Participant 2's testimony not only recounts an individual journey but also performs an epistemological critique of the centrality of bookish knowledge, affirming the legitimacy of ancestral, bodily, and spiritual knowledge in shaping the educator. It's a narrative of resilience that broadens the understanding of teacher training in the context of intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist education. According to Laws No. 10,639/03 (Brazil, 2003) and No. 11,645/08 (Brazil, 2008), being able to recognize stigmas, stereotypes, structural and institutional racism, and the folklorization of Afro-Brazilian culture is essential for teachers and researchers working in education. Only in this way are they able to pursue anti-racist, decolonial, and intercultural education as provided by these legal provisions. They change the

Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação - LDB*) (Law No. 9,394/1996) and make teaching about Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture mandatory in public and private elementary and high schools.

Participant 3 in their statement below, in line with Participant 2, points out that colonialism brought Eurocentrism and the invalidation of knowledge that does not come from it:

Participant Testimony 3 - BIONAS Excerpt, 2024

“Living with my paternal family, who were mostly white, I experienced the distancing of a part of myself that recognized as Black, even if without words. In Bahia, my Black roots were made invisible; in Minas, they were noticed, but never valued. This dynamic reflects what Anzaldúa describes as the “open wound,” a space where cultures clash, bleed, and try to heal each other, without ever fully merging (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 26). The pain from this wound isn’t just personal but collective; it’s in the untold stories, in the silences that echo for generations, in the invisibility that suffocates our humanity. [...] It was in Uberaba, where I currently live, that I began to reconnect with the roots that once seemed so distant. The city, with its rich history of cultural resistance, became the stage for my awakening to issues of identity and belonging. Engaging with congada, especially with the Terno do Penacho, with its more than 136 years of history, made me realize the power of culture as a form of resistance” (Participant 3, researcher, 2024).

The analyses show that intersectional issues significantly came up during the curriculum component sessions, revealing structural differences between white and non-white men, between men and women, and more specifically, between white women and Black women. The narratives analyzed make it clear that race, gender, and class don’t operate in isolation, but work together in creating social experiences marked by different types of inequalities. When we think about Black women, even though everyone is subjected to patriarchal structures, historical and social conditions make Black women face specific and intensified forms of oppression, where sexism combines with racism, prejudice, and silencing (Collins and Bilge, 2020).

Additionally, the story of a Black man disconnected from his roots, shared by Participant 3, highlights the concrete impacts of structural and institutional racism, seen in marginalization, discrimination, and denial of belonging. Although both individuals face

processes of exclusion, their experiences aren't the same, as they are shaped by different positions at the intersection of race and gender. In this sense, intersectionality serves as a key analytical tool to understand the complexity of these experiences, as it allows us to look at how multiple axes of oppression interact in different ways in specific contexts (Collins; Bilge, 2020). The authors point out that intersectionality isn't a single or fixed model, but rather a set of approaches that can address various social issues, broadening the understanding of the power dynamics that produce inequalities.

The narratives also show the participants' awareness of the historical consequences of the enslavement process, which led to the systematic marginalization of the Black population, as well as the persistence of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, worsened by the lack of effective reparation policies (Nascimento, 1980).

As Kabengele Munanga and Lino Gomes (2016) point out, the history of the Black population in the Americas traces back to the African continent, with kidnapping and the transatlantic slave trade being the mechanisms that displaced millions of stories, bodies, and knowledge to the other side of the ocean. This process is recognized for its scope and duration as one of the greatest tragedies in human history and in the Brazilian context. Unlike other groups, the Afro-descendant population remained, for a long time, deprived of the historical memory of their ancestors due to the systematic erasure strategies imposed by the slave regime (Kabengele Munanga; Lino Gomes, 2016). This makes it essential to develop a critical awareness about stigmas, stereotypes, structural and institutional racism, and the folklorization of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Santos and Kato (2025) propose, in this sense, a racialized reading in Black territories as an epistemic strategy capable of shifting the analytical perspective and expanding the understanding of social phenomena. Congada is an expression of Blackness, without being essentialist, Blackness presented in Mbembe's (2018) view as a "Black consciousness of the Black person," a declaration of identity against the dehumanizing imposition of the "Western consciousness of the Black person." Therefore, it is a movement that redefines and affirms the Black experience from the inside out, rejecting stereotypes and subalternization (Mbembe, 2018). I would add, a local identity, according to the territories, here specifically the Congadeiro territory, which acts as a politics of resistance, fostering solidarity and the fight for rights in institutional and local spaces, such as city halls, schools, and universities.

The journey of congada, which unfolds in a circular and ancestral way, has been driven by various spheres, from the academic environment to the classroom, from teacher training to student education. It stands out as a powerful pedagogy, creating dialogues and opening new paths for Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations. This approach breaks down paradigms and amplifies the wisdom of a people who face constant challenges and adapt, finding innovative ways to keep going (Lima, 2022, p. 27).

Being immersed in the territory of congada led the CC participants to reflect that it is about building knowledge in other ways beyond the school walls. About the adaptation to teach and learn that is often not reflected on within educational institutions.

Participant Testimony 4 - BIONAS Excerpt, 2024

“It’s worth noting that these masters went and still go through a training process with both their elders and younger ones constantly, without missing a day. It’s like a school, maybe it even is their way of thinking about their school. Masters who value the care of oral tradition, ancestry, continuity, all with charm, cunning, and wit. A different way of feeling and thinking about time, a time outside the box. Maybe this is the anguish of those ‘corpas’ (the participant uses it to affirm the feminine of bodies, which the Portuguese language doesn’t allow) who resist getting into the classroom box or trying to get out, because they no longer fit” (Participant 4, 2024).

The participant also explicitly highlights the boundaries between traditional training processes and the hegemonic institutional models of schooling. By stating that the masters “went through and still go through a constant training process” with both older and younger members, the narrator shows a conception of continuous, experiential, and intergenerational learning, where knowledge isn’t fixed or finalized but circulates and renews itself in the daily practice (Krenak, 2019). This perspective shifts the linear, certification-focused notion of training, typical of modern rationality, to emphasize a pedagogy of long-term engagement, permanence, and ritualized repetition experienced in the Congada. According to Krenak (2019), knowledge is not just rational; it encompasses ancestry, spirituality, worldview, and relationships.

From this perspective, the training of masters is anchored in orality, ancestry, and continuity—elements that are pillars of Afro-diasporic and popular knowledge systems historically dismissed by the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2005). The reference to “corpas,” a term consciously used to challenge the limits of the Portuguese language, introduces a central political-linguistic dimension to the narrative. By naming bodies in the feminine, the narrator affirms the materiality of historically invisible subjects and points out the insufficiency of normative language to account for dissident existences. This lexical choice not only describes a reality but also performs a gesture of resistance, aligned with feminist, decolonial, and anti-racist epistemologies (hooks, 2013; Walsh, 2001, 2009). In this sense, Participant 4’s testimony comes across as a story of critique and resilience, calling for the

recognition of other pedagogies based on oral tradition, ancestry, the body, and non-normative timelines, contributing to the discussion on intercultural and decolonial education within academic research. The Congada thus helps preserve the history of resistance to slavery and colonization, which led Black people to face a future of precarity and exclusion.

Final considerations

This study highlighted the didactic-pedagogical potential of Congada, based on the experience in the territory of the Terno de Congada Penacho de Uberaba - MG, as an intercultural, decolonial, and anti-racist formative practice in the context of graduate education. The study highlights experience, orality, corporeality, and ancestry as legitimate epistemological categories for the production of academic knowledge.

The analyses show that immersing oneself in the territory of the Terno de Congada Penacho causes an epistemic shift, challenging hierarchies and creating dialogues between academic knowledge and knowledge historically subordinated by the colonality of power, knowledge, and being. In this context, Congada emerges not as a folkloric object, but as a living pedagogical movement, with its own principles of learning, knowledge transmission, community organization, and assessment, where musicality, spirituality, memory, and collectivity act as ancestral teaching technologies made invisible by mainstream curriculum.

The narratives analyzed reveal processes of identity (re)cognition and racial awareness. Through these, the graduate students, empowered by the sense of community found in Congada, begin to see themselves as historical subjects shaped by power, race, gender, and colonality. In this sense, Congada proves to be a powerful tool for Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations, as it brings together reason and sensitivity, body and mind, individual and collective.

From a theoretical-methodological perspective, the use of Social Bionarratives reinforces the political nature of research and writing in education. By challenging normative models of scientific production, BIONAS allow historically silenced individuals to assert themselves as authors of their knowledge, producing situated, engaged knowledge committed to cognitive justice.

From everything that has been said, the results indicate significant contributions related to complying with Laws No. 10.639/03 and No. 11.645/08, going beyond mere formal implementation and promoting changes in teaching practices, educational relationships, and concepts of teaching and learning. Although the results presented are situated in a specific context of postgraduate teacher training, future studies can expand the analysis to other training contexts and intercultural teaching practices.

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