


INDIGENOUS SCHOOL EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF AKWĒ-XERENTE EDUCATORS IN CULTURAL MEDIATION IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the practices of cultural mediation developed by Akwê-Xerente educators in the school context, emphasizing the appreciation of cultural traditions and the

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construction of an intercultural education. Starting from a qualitative and bibliographic approach, the study explores how artistic expressions and ancestral knowledge, such as songs, dances and rituals, are resignified in the educational environment, promoting a more meaningful learning connected to the local reality. The analysis revealed that the school, when adapted to cultural specificities, assumes a fundamental role in the preservation and revitalization of cultural identity, while preparing students for the challenges of a globalized world. The study discusses the challenges faced by educators in the implementation of these practices, highlighting the tension between the formal curriculum, often aligned with a Eurocentric perspective, and the cultural demands of the community. It is observed that, although there are public policies and initiatives aimed at indigenous school education, such as Decree No. 2,367/2005, there are still gaps related to the initial and continuing training of teachers, as well as the structuring of pedagogical methodologies that effectively dialogue with local knowledge. The results also point to the transformative role of artistic and cultural practices, which not only strengthen students' bonds with their community, but also enrich the pedagogical process, making it more creative, inclusive and aligned with the principles of interculturality. Through these practices, educators contribute to the construction of an education that resists cultural erasure and promotes the emancipation of indigenous peoples. It is concluded that indigenous school education is not only a space for formal learning, but also a territory of resistance and cultural innovation, with the educator being the bridge that connects tradition and modernity.

Keywords: Indigenous School Education. Cultural mediation. Cultural identity.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous school education in Brazil reflects a history of transformations marked by the attempt to impose Eurocentric values and the active resistance of native peoples to preserve their cultures and traditions. For the Akwẽ-Xerente people, the school is not only a space for formal education, but also a place of struggle for the appreciation of their cultural identity. This dynamic requires an approach that goes beyond the mere transmission of content, promoting a dialogue between traditional knowledge and the demands of the contemporary world. In this scenario, the figure of the educator emerges as a cultural mediator, capable of articulating these dimensions and transforming the school environment into a territory of belonging and meaningful learning.

Historically, formal education in Brazil has been used as a tool for cultural assimilation, disregarding local knowledge and promoting the erasure of identities. However, the enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) of 1996 brought advances by recognizing the right to differentiated education for indigenous peoples. These achievements have paved the way for the construction of curricula that value cultural and linguistic specificities, providing an educational model that respects indigenous worldviews and promotes interculturality (Muniz, 2017).

In the Akwẽ-Xerente context, artistic and cultural practices, such as chants, dances, and rituals, play a central role in strengthening the identity of students and enriching the pedagogical process. By integrating these elements into teaching, educators create a bridge between the past and present, enabling young people to connect with their roots as they prepare for contemporary challenges. This approach highlights the relevance of an intercultural education, where the dialogue between tradition and modernity not only enriches learning, but also promotes the preservation of indigenous cultures in the Brazilian educational scenario.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand and strengthen the role of indigenous school education as a space of resistance and cultural revitalization. Investigating how Akwẽ-Xerente educators act as cultural mediators allows not only to shed light on their pedagogical practices, but also to contribute to the debate on public policies and more inclusive and contextualized educational strategies. By resignifying traditional knowledge in the school environment, educators not only preserve the local culture, but also broaden the horizons of their students, connecting them to the globalized world without losing their roots.

This work aims to analyze the practices of cultural mediation carried out by Akwẽ-Xerente educators in the school context, with emphasis on the valorization of cultural traditions and the construction of an intercultural education. For this, a qualitative and bibliographic approach is adopted, based on academic references that discuss indigenous education, interculturality and the preservation of ancestral knowledge. The research is guided by the following question: how do Akwẽ-Xerente educators balance the traditional knowledge of their community with the requirements of the formal curriculum, and what are the impacts of these practices on the valorization of cultural identity and student learning? From this investigation, it seeks to offer subsidies for the construction of a more inclusive, innovative educational model aligned with the specificities of indigenous peoples.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CULTURAL REFLECTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The debate around the cultural reflexes in the construction of the school curriculum of indigenous populations, especially the Akwẽ-Xerente people, dates back to the historical process of schooling in Brazil. Since colonization, educational policies have been marked by a Eurocentric vision, which sought to integrate native peoples into the dominant culture, ignoring their traditional knowledge and practices. Schooling, initially promoted by the missionaries, was a tool for acculturation, distancing indigenous populations from their cultural identity (Muniz, 2017).

This logic, which lasted over the centuries, began to be questioned with greater intensity in the last decades of the twentieth century. Indigenous movements, in conjunction with researchers and educators, began to demand a model of education that respected the cultural and linguistic specificities of these peoples. It was in this context that the idea of an intercultural curriculum emerged, with a focus on incorporating elements of indigenous culture and worldview as a central part of the educational process (Souza et al., 2021).

In the case of the Akwẽ-Xerente people, the log race, traditional chants, and ceremonial rituals illustrate the depth of their cultural heritage. These practices, which reflect not only spiritual values but also principles of collectivity and belonging, encounter barriers in the traditional curriculum model. The implementation of an intercultural curriculum has sought to break down this barrier, promoting an appreciation of local practices and connecting them with formal learning (Xerente et al., 2020).

The Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), of 1996, marked significant advances by recognizing the right of indigenous peoples to differentiated education. Such legal frameworks opened space for

the elaboration of specific curricula and for the training of indigenous teachers. In Tocantins, Decree No. 2,367/2005 regulated indigenous school education, reinforcing the need to meet the cultural and linguistic demands of the communities, as in the case of the Akwẽ-Xerente (Tocantins, 2005).

Despite legal advances, curricular practice faces challenges. The work of Akwẽ-Xerente educators is fundamental in the cultural mediation between traditional knowledge and formal education.

"Mediation is then an act of putting an update in place. Presence understood certainly not in the immediate sense, but in the representation of the present (symbolization). It seeks to make contemporary, to bring to the time of the receiver that which is no longer there..." (Barbosa and Coutinho, 2009, p. 73).

Educators, often trained in contexts where the curriculum still prioritizes a joint perspective, act as bridges to translate and adapt school content in a way that respects the traditions of their people (Arroyo, 2013).

However, the appreciation of indigenous culture in the school curriculum is not limited to the inclusion of traditional content. Cultural mediation also involves rethinking methodologies and pedagogical strategies that dialogue with the reality of Akwẽ-Xerente students. Art education, for example, has proven to be a powerful tool for exploring identity and cultural themes, allowing students to recognize themselves in the learning process (Barbosa; Coutinho, 2009).

The training of indigenous teachers in Tocantins reflects an effort to build a truly intercultural education. The training of these educators has been directed not only to the mastery of formal disciplines, but also to the strengthening of their cultural identity and to the appreciation of traditional knowledge. This training is crucial to ensure that the curriculum is a space for dialogue and not for cultural imposition (Muniz, 2017).

However, the intercultural curriculum faces tensions between the modern and the traditional. On the one hand, there is the need to prepare indigenous students to face the challenges of the globalized world; on the other hand, there is a commitment to preserve its cultural roots. This duality requires a delicate balance, where the school becomes a space for collective negotiation and construction (Souza et al., 2021).

Artistic expressions, such as traditional singing with the use of maraca, stand out as elements that transcend the teaching of specific contents. These moments allow students to not only learn but also experience their culture, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. This approach, by valuing the sensitive and the symbolic, contributes to the strengthening of cultural identity (Selbach, 2010).

The experience of indigenous school education in the State of Tocantins is an example of how the curriculum can be re-signified to meet cultural specificities. The challenges are still many, but the role of Akwẽ-Xerente educators, combined with public policies, is central to the consolidation of an education that respects diversity and promotes inclusion (Xerente et al., 2019).

THE AKWË-XERENTE EDUCATOR AS A CULTURAL BRIDGE: MEDIATION PRACTICES IN TEACHING

We begin this subtopic by addressing the images (1 and 2) that illustrate the log race, as it allows us to understand how elements of the Akwẽ-Xerente cultural tradition can be reinterpreted in the educational context as pedagogical tools and mediators between traditional knowledge and school knowledge.

Image 1. Dancing around the racing logs



Source: Curt Nimuendaju/National Museum (1930)

The first image, dated 1930, depicts a dance around the running logs, captured by researcher Curt Nimuendaju. This historical representation not only documents an aspect of the Akwẽ-Xerente culture, but also highlights the centrality of collective practices as the foundation of their social organization.

The collective gesture, symbolized by the dance around the logs (Image 1), reinforces values such as cooperation, resilience and belonging, which can be integrated into the pedagogical process as forms of collective learning and community strengthening (Barbosa; Coutinho, 2009).

Image 2. Log Rush in the present day



Source: Valci Sinã Xerente (2015)

When added to the second image, captured in 2015 by Sinã Xerente, the continuity of this cultural practice in contemporary daily life can be perceived. Log racing, now embedded in community events and celebrations, illustrates how tradition resists and adapts to social changes while preserving its significance as an identity-strengthening ritual. In the educational context, this practice can be used as a powerful metaphor to address themes such as collective effort, overcoming, and the importance of cultural memory in the formation of young people. The Akwẽ-Xerente educator, by inserting these narratives into teaching, not only values cultural heritage but also promotes contextualized and meaningful learning for students (Xerente et al., 2020).

These images highlight the relevance of the educator as a cultural mediator, a role that goes beyond the transmission of academic content. They point to the need to resignify traditional practices, such as log racing, so that they are understood as pedagogical instruments and sources of knowledge applicable to the school context. Through this approach, educators can connect the present experienced by students to the historical roots of their culture, promoting an educational process that combines tradition and modernity in an integrated way (Souza et al., 2021).

Also according to Souza (2021), this tradition and modernity becomes evident by integrating elements such as community rituals into learning, allowing students to recognize their cultural identity while developing contemporary skills. This action is not only pedagogical, but also political, as it strengthens the sense of belonging and cultural resistance, indispensable elements in decolonial contexts.

By inserting traditional practices and symbols in teaching situations, the educator resignifies content and promotes contextualized and critical learning. This mediation

requires a sensitive understanding of the cultural and social particularities of students, as well as a broad view of how these aspects can enrich the curriculum. This mediating work is challenging, as it seeks to balance the demands of the formal school with the expectations and values of the local community (Arroyo, 2013).

The specific training of these professionals reflects the recognition of the importance of integrating diverse knowledge, breaking with homogeneous teaching models. Through this training, these agents become not only educators, but also guardians of cultural practices that find new meanings in the school environment. This approach expands the role of teaching, which becomes both a space for learning and cultural preservation (Muniz, 2017).

Teaching practice goes beyond the reproduction of content, incorporating symbolic elements and methodologies that connect everyday experiences to school learning. The use of traditional narratives, collective activities, and artistic expressions creates bridges that make learning meaningful, contributing to the strengthening of individual and collective identities in the educational environment (Barbosa; Coutinho, 2009).

By resignifying cultural elements in teaching, the educator promotes not only the transmission of content, but also the formation of critical citizens who are aware of their cultural heritage. This allows students to develop an expanded understanding of their own history, connecting both to the globalized world and to the traditions that define them as a people (Xerente et al., 2020).

ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL EXPRESSIONS IN AKWĒ-XERENTE EDUCATION

In Akwĕ-Xerente education, artistic manifestations, such as traditional chants, dance, and the use of the maraca, are not only symbolic elements, but also pedagogical tools that connect students to their cultural roots. These expressions not only promote the transmission of ancestral knowledge, but also foster a space for dialogue between generations, where the younger ones learn from the older ones in a process of collective construction of knowledge (Barbosa; Coutinho, 2009).

The insertion of artistic practices in education is not limited to the appreciation of traditional culture. It also enables a pedagogical approach that respects the different rhythms and modes of learning of students. Music, for example, can be used to teach complex concepts, such as mathematics or languages, in a playful and meaningful way. By singing songs that involve rhythmic sequences, students exercise cognitive skills, such as memorization and logical reasoning, while reinforcing their cultural identity and community belonging (Xerente et al., 2020).

In addition, artistic expressions enable a critical reflection on the relationship between the traditional and the modern in the school context. The use of traditional materials to create artifacts, for example, offers a unique opportunity to discuss topics such as sustainability, ancestry, and the influence of social transformations on local culture. These activities allow students to understand the implications of modernity in their territory and, at the same time, value the cultural legacy they carry (Souza et al., 2021).

Image 3. Prof. Elivanda Sibaka presented traditional singing with the maracá



Source: agenciapalmas.com/noticia/241107 (2024)

Art also occupies a prominent place in the construction of an intercultural curriculum. In the Akwẽ-Xerente case, elements such as body painting, ceremonial adornments and traditional graphics can be explored as topics of study in art, science and history classes, promoting a transdisciplinary approach. This curricular integration, in addition to enriching learning, legitimizes the cultural practices of the community within the school, creating an environment in which diversity is celebrated and respected (Selbach, 2010).

Engaging with music, drawing, and dance not only stimulates creativity, but also acts as a form of emotional expression (Image 4).

Image 4. Activity with the Akwẽ-Xerente children



Source: Valci Sinã Xerente (2015)

For children and young people in contexts of social vulnerability, as is the case in many indigenous communities, these activities can become a powerful coping tool, allowing them to channel their experiences and challenges in a constructive and meaningful way (Arroyo, 2013).

Image 5. Celebration at the delivery of a new school.



Source: povosindigenasdobrasil.blogspot.com/2014/08/os-akwe-xerente.html (2018)

The educator, in this context, becomes a facilitator who promotes these artistic expressions as a means of learning and human development. He is responsible for creating safe and welcoming spaces where students can explore their creativity and traditions without fear of judgment. This teaching practice, in addition to being pedagogical, is also political, as it resists the invisibility of indigenous cultures in the Brazilian educational

system, reaffirming the importance of art as a universal language and as an instrument of cultural resistance (Barbosa, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research point to the relevance of Akwẽ-Xerente educators in cultural mediation in the school context, highlighting how their pedagogical practices contribute to the appreciation of cultural identity and the construction of an intercultural education. The bibliographic and contextual analysis revealed that the insertion of cultural elements, such as songs, dances and traditional rituals, promotes not only the strengthening of the students' identity, but also a more meaningful and contextualized learning process. This approach, by connecting ancestral knowledge with the requirements of the formal curriculum, represents an active resistance to the homogenizing educational model historically imposed on indigenous peoples (Souza et al., 2021).

Chants, for example, are not only vehicles for transmitting historical and spiritual knowledge, but also teaching strategies that reinforce cognitive skills, such as memorization and rhythmic comprehension. The use of the maracá in school activities exemplifies how a traditional object can acquire new meanings in the educational environment, being re-signified as an instrument of learning and cultural bond (Barbosa; Coutinho, 2009). These results show that the school environment, when adapted to cultural specificities, can become a space for the preservation and revitalization of culture, while preparing students for the challenges of the contemporary world (Xerente et al., 2020).

One of the main obstacles identified is the tension between the demands of the official curriculum, which often reflects a Eurocentric perspective, and the need to incorporate indigenous practices and knowledge into teaching. This tension is aggravated by the initial training of many indigenous teachers, which is still shaped by a system that privileges content that is disconnected from local realities (Muniz, 2017). Despite this, the commitment of Akwẽ-Xerente educators to act as cultural mediators demonstrates how continuing education and the strengthening of specific public policies are essential to overcome these barriers (Tocantins, 2005).

The results also indicate that the integration of cultural practices in teaching goes beyond the inclusion of contents. It is about transforming pedagogical methodologies and strategies so that they reflect the values and worldview of the community. Dance, for example, is used not only as a physical activity, but as a way to explore concepts such as collectivity, joint effort, and respect for the cycles of nature. This type of approach



demonstrates how cultural practices are not only complementary to the curriculum, but constitute the very foundation of quality intercultural teaching (Selbach, 2010).

In the case of the Akwẽ-Xerente, the school is not only a space for formal learning, but also a territory of identity affirmation. By inserting cultural elements in the curriculum, educators contribute to students recognizing themselves as active subjects in their community, capable of dialoguing with the modern world without giving up their roots. This duality, although challenging, is essential for the formation of critical individuals who are aware of their cultural heritage (Arroyo, 2013).

In addition, the analysis showed how art education has been a structuring axis in the strengthening of intercultural education. The use of traditional graphics, oral narratives and other artistic elements in pedagogical activities broadens students' perception of the richness of their culture, promoting a more sensitive learning that is connected to their reality. At the same time, these practices challenge the traditional view of education as a mere transmission of knowledge, showing that learning is a dynamic and interactive process, where culture and pedagogy are inseparably intertwined (Barbosa, 2002).

The discussion also reinforces the importance of public policies aimed at indigenous education, such as Decree No. 2,367/2005, which regulates indigenous school education in Tocantins. These policies play a fundamental role in guaranteeing the right to differentiated education and in providing the means for indigenous educators to act more effectively. However, its implementation still faces challenges, especially with regard to infrastructure and continuing education of teachers (Tocantins, 2005). These aspects demonstrate that, although significant advances have been achieved, there is still much to be done to consolidate a truly intercultural educational model.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Akwẽ-Xerente educators perform the fundamentals that connect ancestral knowledge to the requirements of the formal curriculum. Through pedagogical practices that value artistic and cultural expressions, such as traditional songs and collective rituals, educators promote meaningful learning and the preservation of cultural identity. These practices not only strengthen students' bond with their community, but also challenge homogenous educational models, demonstrating the importance of contextualized and intercultural education.

Despite the advances, the challenges to consolidate quality indigenous education remain significant. The tension between the official curriculum, which is often Eurocentric in nature, and local cultural practices highlights the need for more robust public policies and



continuing education for educators. The inclusion of cultural elements in teaching requires constant efforts of resignification, where the role of the educator goes beyond the transmission of formal knowledge, becoming an agent of social transformation and cultural resistance. This scenario demands articulation between indigenous communities, educational managers and policymakers, in order to ensure the strengthening and expansion of intercultural initiatives.

Thus, Akwẽ-Xerente education, by incorporating traditional and artistic elements, proves to be an educational model with the potential to inspire other initiatives aimed at inclusion and the appreciation of cultural diversity in Brazil. This study reinforces the importance of deepening research that investigates the practices of cultural mediation in other indigenous communities, in addition to analyzing the impact of public policies on teacher training and the strengthening of local cultures. The commitment to an education that respects and values cultural plurality is an essential step towards building a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE CONTINUING EDUCATION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS

For future research, it is suggested to investigate the impact of continuing education on the performance of indigenous educators as cultural mediators. This approach can explore how specific capacity building programs, aligned with the cultural and pedagogical demands of communities, contribute to strengthening intercultural teaching.

It would be relevant to analyze the implementation of methodologies that promote the integration between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge, as well as the role of technology in strengthening educational practices in indigenous contexts. These perspectives can offer subsidies for the formulation of more effective public policies and for the improvement of pedagogical practices aimed at the specific cultural realities of indigenous peoples.

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