
The child and the right to participate: challenges for Early Childhood Education

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Summary

The text, a theoretical essay, is based on the Sociology of Childhood and bibliographical research. It aims to discuss children's right to participate and their place in contemporary society based on respect for their voice and action as individuals of rights. The results show an advance in child and childhood studies in recent years, configuring a multidisciplinary field around the understanding the childhood experienced by children themselves. The underway social transformations affect the relationships between children and adults in their political, cultural, and educational dimensions, making it necessary to deconstruct the adult-centric normative production that subordinates children and hinders and/or makes their participation in society impossible. The child moves from being an object to become an actor. From the change of child's place, it is necessary to make the school a democratic space for socialization and a more child-friendly context where takes place a respectful dialogue between children and adults, with more symmetrical relationships.

Keywords: Child. Normativity. Right to participate. Early childhood education.

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A criança e o direito de participação: desafios para a Educação Infantil

Resumo

O texto, um ensaio teórico, fundamenta-se na Sociologia da Infância e na pesquisa bibliográfica. Objetiva discutir o direito de participação da criança e seu lugar na sociedade contemporânea a partir do respeito à sua voz e ação como sujeito de direitos. Os resultados evidenciam um avanço nos estudos da criança e da infância nos últimos anos, configurando um campo multidisciplinar em torno da compreensão da infância vivida pelas crianças a partir delas mesmas. As transformações sociais em curso afetam as relações entre crianças e adultos nas suas dimensões políticas, culturais e educativas, tornando-se necessário desconstruir a produção normativa adultocêntrica que subalterniza a criança e dificulta e/ou impossibilita sua participação na sociedade. A criança sai do seu lugar de objeto para tornar-se sujeito ator. A partir da mudança de lugar da criança, é necessário tornar a escola um espaço democrático de socialização e um contexto mais amigo das crianças onde acontece um diálogo respeitoso entre crianças e adultos, com relações mais simétricas.

Palavras chave: Criança. Normatividade. Direito de participação. Educação infantil.

El niño y el derecho a participar: desafíos para la Educación Infantil

Resumen

El texto, un ensayo teórico, se basa en la Sociología de la Infancia y en la investigación bibliográfica. Tiene como objetivo discutir el derecho de los niños a participar y su lugar en la sociedad contemporánea a partir del respeto a su voz y acción como sujetos de derechos. Los resultados muestran un avance en los estudios de lo niño y de la infancia en los últimos años, configurando un campo multidisciplinar en torno a la comprensión de la infancia vivida por los niños desde sí mismos. Las transformaciones sociales en curso afectan las relaciones entre niños y adultos en sus dimensiones políticas, culturales y educativas, haciendo necesaria la deconstrucción de la producción normativa centrada en el adulto que subordina al niño y dificulta y/o imposibilita su participación en la sociedad. El niño pasa de ser un objeto para convertirse en sujeto actor. A partir del cambio de lugar del niño, es necesario hacer de la escuela un espacio democrático de socialización y un contexto más acogedor a los niños, donde exista un diálogo respetuoso entre niños y adultos, con relaciones más simétricas.

Palabras clave: Niño. Normatividad. Derecho de participación. Educación Infantil.

Introduction

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Child studies is a multidisciplinary field that has been developed around the world, with emphasis on English-speaking countries. Like other interdisciplinary fields, what defines child studies is not the existence of a unique, and proper theory, nor the definition of an epistemological autonomy toward disciplinary knowledge or even an exclusive methodology. What defines the nature of the multidisciplinary field of child studies is the mobilization of knowledge from different disciplines around a specific object: children, and childhood (Sarmiento, 2015).

The dialogue that the Sociology of Childhood has mobilized with other areas of study has been fundamental to understand the childhood lived by children from themselves, as the only condition to account for the complexities that are revealed in their worlds of life in contemporary times. This perspective opens the way to talk about child studies, with interdisciplinary relationships that involve a set of areas of study in the field of social sciences (Pedagogy, Anthropology, Economics, History, and Sociology).

This dialogue, and the development of the field of child studies has gradually allowed a greater sensitivity to listen to children's voices, and carry

out studies aspiring to an understanding of the human condition from the child's point of view. In this theoretical field, the contributions are relevant in making visible children, and urban childhoods, indigenous people, quilombolas, immigrants, who live on the streets, involved in wars, and conflicts. The promotion of the study of children, based on their own practices, cultures, and actions, rescues them from the secondary perspective based on the role granted to them (Dornelles; Fernandes, 2015).

The Sociology of Childhood, by assuming that children are full social actors, competent in formulating interpretations about their worlds of life, and revealing the social realities in which they are inserted, considers participatory methodologies with children as an important methodological resource, in the sense of assigning to the youngest the status of individuals of knowledge, and not of simple study object, instituting collaborative forms of knowledge construction in the Social Sciences that are articulated with modes of production of knowledge committed to social transformation, and the extension of social rights.

Among social rights, child participation is, in contemporary times, an inescapable principle in scientific, and political discourses that are produced about childhood. The Sociology of Childhood, when considering children as social actors, and as individuals of rights, assumes the issue of children's participation as central in the definition of a social status of childhood, and in the characterization of its scientific field (Sarmiento; Fernandes; Tomás, 2005).

The child leaves the place of object-child to become an individual actor. This perspective opens the debate on the need to overcome a normative conception of children, and poses the relations challenge restructuring between adults, and children, questioning the adultcentrism that prevails in society (Coutinho, 2016).

Having presented the theoretical basis on which it is anchored, the text is organized into sections whose themes permeate the child's place in contemporary society, their right to participation, listening, and respect for their voice, and action as a plural individual present in society with the status of social actor, producer of cultures, and participating in the construction of knowledge with the right to a quality early childhood education that enables their citizen participation. This is a theoretical essay based on bibliographic research.

The place of the child in contemporary society

Children, and childhood have always existed as a construction from a set of social representations, and beliefs that are structured through devices of socialization, and control, which exist from the 16th, and 17th centuries. But current times introduce new circumstances, and living conditions for children, and the social insertion of childhood (Sarmiento; Pinto, 1997).

Childhood is a social, generational, permanent group. Despite the existing heterogeneity, there are common elements among children, they are: vulnerability, and social, economic, and legal dependence. These common elements are transformed over time from geographic, and social spaces, and configure specific conditions of existence for children (Sarmiento, 2011).

Childhood is made up of children, and undergoes the continuous renewal inherent in the birth, and growth of human beings. Adults assume the decisive role in determining the living conditions of children, and are the holders of political, and social power, which mark childhood by adopting processes of symbolic administration (explicit or implicit definition of norms of inclusion, and interdiction) of children through the continuous exercise of a normative power. This power is realized both in the production of meaningful content about what is appropriate or not for children, and in face-to-face interaction, and in the performance of their roles as parents, teachers, trainers, employees of institutions that deal with children (Sarmiento, 2011).

The normative power that constitutes the normativity inherent to contemporary childhood – that is, the representations, prescriptions, obligations, and prohibitions present in the practices considered characteristic of children, and the relationships of adults with them – developed from modernity, and was based on four structuring axes that, according to Sarmiento (2011):

- The public school, created at the end of the 18th century, with mandatory attendance from the first half of the 19th century, constituting an institutional space where children belong;
- The nuclear family that replaced other forms of family grouping, assuming itself as a space of attachment, and affective belonging of the child;
- The construction of a set of institutionalized knowledge about the “normal child”, propagated by an institutional reflexivity, and

associated with a set of prescriptions – of a medical, psychological, pedagogical, and behavioral nature –, which was especially relevant for Developmental Psychology, and for the idea of the child as a biopsychological being in the process of maturation, and growth;

- Symbolic administration, with the definition, implicit, and explicit, of rules of inclusion, interdiction, compulsion, and recognition of children.

The set of norms, and rules resulting from these four associated pillars that constitute child normativity have contributed, for about two and a half centuries, to placing the child in its own social place, whose design corresponds to the dominant social representation of childhood.

Child normativity is a historical construction that was born in modernity, but was consolidated in the 20th century through national, and international legal documents that regulate the lives of children, and standardize relations between States, families, and children. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, is the most significant expression of the political, and cultural globalization of a given model of childhood.

This normative orientation regarding child, according to Marchi and Sarmento (2017), does not exist only at the legislative level, but is expressed in society in response to the question: What is it to be a child, and how does a child act? According to the authors, it is a pattern of behavior, conduct, habits, and procedures of adults that characterize the symbolic administration of childhood. This normative set establishes a social place for the child, and institutes the child craft, which, for Sarmento (2011), is the set of behaviors, and actions that are expected from the child, initially conceived as a student craft.

The school de-privatized the children, and partially disconnected them from the domestic space, and the exclusivity of family protection. With school, childhood was instituted as a social category of future citizens, in a state of preparation for full social life.

In fact, it is the student more than the child that the school is concerned with. Concomitantly with the school, and the student's invention, the child is invested with an institutional condition, and gains a public dimension. In some way, before the institution, the child is annulled as a concrete, and plural individual, with knowledge, and emotions, aspirations, feelings, and wills of his/her own to give way to the apprentice, recipient of adult action, agent of prescribed behaviors, for which he/she is evaluated, awarded, or sanctioned.

The school created a particular relationship with knowledge, standardizing the way of acquiring, and transmitting knowledge, without respecting differences (class, culture) (Sarmiento, 2011).

The school has formatted a school culture, and the student's task is to acquire the school culture. From its medieval religious roots to the adoption of a factory organizational model, the school enters into crisis, and promotes inversions of the analogy of the school with the factory, and the child with the worker. It institutes a reformist attitude that defines the public school as a company, providing educational services, the teacher turns into a proletarian specialized in teaching functions, and the student becomes an apprentice. A reverse school that, according to Sarmiento (2011), reformed pedagogical work in its methodologies, and forms, which implied changes in the learning process.

In this perspective, adults play a decisive role in determining the living conditions of children by adopting symbolic administration processes, but they also contribute to reconfiguring family, school, institutional practices, and social spaces in which they find themselves. The hegemonic idea of what it is to be a child is produced in the social practices of adults, and children in each historical moment. Practices, and conceptions that deviate from normativity can exclude children from their social status (Sarmiento, 2011).

Information, and communication technologies reinvent the student craft, and the keywords of this new configuration are autonomy, creativity, initiative, entrepreneurship, but the keywords of the old craft do not lose relevance, such as discipline, and individual effort. The new student craft is enhanced by the effect of institutionalized individualism (globalization) that weakens social ties. The individual is called to a performance that is expected to be competent, and its success is considered a personal merit. There, the student's craft is configured, in the value of merit, competitiveness, and autonomy of the child. The student's craft gives way to a school work that mobilizes, in addition to cognitive capacities, attitudinal, behavioral, and dispositional aspects expressed in competencies, and learning outcomes (Sarmiento, 2011).

This configuration mobilizes around the tension between autonomy, and control. The child-student is called to develop as a competent individual, capable of defining their school, and social path, but is placed under evaluative control. What is paradoxical in this modality of symbolic administration

of childhood is that, at the same time that children's autonomy is defended, it places children in the direct or indirect control of adults. The unequal conditions of children's access to the enjoyment of their social rights lead to the need to pluralize the meanings of autonomy: by obligation (successful student), and by deprivation (abandonment of those who fail). Thus, the student's office, as well as the child's office, is incomplete, imperfect, and partial, concludes Sarmento (2011).

Contemporary social transformations affect this scenario, and changes in the social condition of childhood are unequally experienced by children, regarding the enjoyment of their social rights, as well as in the daily situations of mobility, safety, healthy living, democratic intergenerational relations, information, and communication technologies, and global culture of products, and services for children.

In this context, Sarmento, and Pinto (1997) point out some paradoxes of childhood: children are more visible from their existence in smaller numbers, according to demographic indicators. Although there is international legislation ensuring the rights of children, there are no guarantees of better living conditions. Children are seen as the future of humanity, but they live oppressed in the present. The very idea of childhood is paradoxical, since contradictory discourses, and policies present different images, and conceptions of children.

Considered to belong to a minority group, children live in a situation of exclusion from full participation in social life, therefore, it is necessary to look at the child from within themselves, as an individual of rights. This look is based on interdisciplinarity, capable of understanding, and interpreting the multiple factors that build childhood (Sarmento; Pinto, 1997).

Children have specific characteristics to their stage of development, which does not make them less competent, and/or incapable as social actors, but configures them as a singular, and, at the same time, plural group. Children were modernly thematized from a constituent negativity, the image of a child submissive to adult authority, portrayed by the absence of voice, and action. This group suffers from social invisibility, and childhood aphonia, but resists by actively participating in cultural construction.

In contemporary society, several national, and international movements fight for the rights of children, however, they run into social inequalities that limit their effectiveness. The world seems to have become more complex,

unequal, and heterogeneous with the predominance of the economic issue that subordinates national states to multilateral agencies that influence, and impose their ideologies, and public policies that do little for children. In this scenario, social organizations, and movements become a space for struggle, resistance, and assume a potential for social transformation (Tomás, 2014).

For Tomás (2014), the 20th century was considered the century of the child, which led to a decolonization of childhood. For the author, the expansion of knowledge about children, and childhood, and the recognition of children as social actors, participatory individuals, and producers of children's cultures are milestones of this process. Children are cultural beings. Their rights are considered by the author as a set of values consecrated in legislation at the national, and international levels that are intended to respect, and implement certain principles, and conditions of life for children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), CRC, an international legal instrument, and other national legal documents had the fundamental role of repositioning the child in contemporary society, recognizing that the child has rights similar to those of adults. By ratifying the CRC, countries have committed to protecting, and ensuring children's rights, and accept responsibility to the global community for their compliance.

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The CRC is born at a time of social, cultural, technological, and economic transformations caused by advanced capitalism in which children in the Southern Cone countries suffer the most from the consequences. The CRC, the result of a lot of social pressure around children's rights, while defending children as individuals of rights, has come under a lot of criticism. Among them, according to Marchi and Sarmiento (2017), is the mismatch between the universal notion of rights with the particularities of the local contexts of children, and childhoods. Another criticism is the dominance of the countries of the global North in its elaboration, bringing to the text their conceptions of children, and childhood. Children who do not meet these standards are excluded to the margins (poor, indigenous, gypsy, homeless children).

Thus, a certain type of childhood is instituted that excludes certain children from their social status. They are the generational group most affected by social inequalities caused by globalization, and neoliberal ideology. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has failed to end discrimination, and social inequalities involving children. The CRC contains cultural,

and economic ambiguities. Of the three “P”, the right to participate is the least observed, the institution focuses on the rights of provision, and protection without recognizing the status of children as social actors with the right to socially participate in the sharing of decisions in their life worlds (Sarmiento; Pinto, 1997).

There is a contradiction between this idealized childhood, based on their rights, and the current reality of childhood on the global plane. Marchi and Sarmiento (2017) question whether it would not be preferable to consider the multiplicity of conceptions of childhood, the diversity of children’s ways of life, their relationships with adults, in a critical, cosmopolitan, and multicultural perspective of children’s rights, and the consideration of new childhood policies, more attentive to subordinate conditions.

Diverse violence affects childhood: poverty, physical, and sexual violence, migration, among others. Children have their rights violated whenever hegemonic economic or political interests override the needs for child protection, and development. For Marchi and Sarmiento (2017), the last decade has highlighted the contradiction between the child normativity produced by modernity from its adult-centric matrix, and the living conditions of children victims of inequalities, generated by financial capitalism, climate, and health crises, wars, and conflicts that plague countries, and societies.

Child participation and child listening: implications, and challenges for Early Childhood Education

It has been a long historical journey of social institutions, including legal, and academic institutions, for adults in Western societies to recognize the child, his status as an individual, and his dignity as a person. Among the founding milestones of this recognition, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child, promulgated by the United Nations (UN) in 1959, stands out. This Declaration, and the precedent of 1924, known as the Geneva Declaration, under the auspices of the League of Nations, focused on defending the idea of child protection. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, also recognizes the specificity of the child, adopting a conception close to that of the preamble to the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, stating that

the child needs special protection, and care due to his lack of physical, and intellectual maturity (Rosemberg; Mariano, 2010).

From this legal framework, the clash between child protection, and participation implies a complexity of factors that extends beyond the cultural context, and the scope of the family, since the adult perspective presupposes the child's lack of competence for social participation (Brostolin, 2021). According to the author, this understanding produces the invisibility of the child in the public space, causing a distance between the right of protection, and the right of participation. For Brostolin:

[...] the understanding of the vulnerable, unprotected, and dependent on the adult child compromises the realization of the rights that assist the child in the face of the traditional distinction between the rights of protection, provision, and participation, the three "p", guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, of 1989. Among these, the right to participate is demonstrably the right with less progress, and this finding allows us to affirm the urgent need to involve society in a learning process that revises the asymmetric relationship between adults, and children, and allows a sharing of power, and negotiation (Brostolin, 2021, p. 4).

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According to Pereira (2017), the concept of participation in childhood is polysemic, and complex, presenting itself under different dimensions. Due to the dimension of the right, the participation documented for the first time in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to participate in everything that concerns him/her. Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17 safeguard, promote, and explain the right of children to participate.

According to Pereira (2017, p. 168), "[...] article 12 is the ultimate example in declaring that all children have the right to express opinions on matters that concern them, taking into account their age, and maturity". The author also states that children, and adults are part of the same society, and the child has the right to participate in its organization and defend its interests. Fernandes and Trevisan (2018) reinforce that projects involving child participation can generate greater awareness of children's rights, and strengthen community relations through intergenerational dialogue, and shared experiences.

For Pereira (2017), the participation of children, and adults should not be evaluated by the same frame of reference, since children have less

experiences, and knowledge, as they live less time in society, which is why they were not able to gather more knowledge, and skills.

Then, it is up to the adult to enable the participation of the child through their action, and voice, creating significant spaces for discussion, mobilizing their various languages, and enabling the construction of their own voice. The consultation of opinion, and decision-making processes is absolutely essential to enable children's voice, a voice that, even if small, resonates in spaces, but is not always heard, and respected.

Fernandes and Souza (2020) assert that the concept of voice is polysemic, and has been gaining visibility in academia in recent years, even though there is concern about the trivialization of the term. Its etymological origin is found in the Latin "vox" which means scream, sound, speech. The advance in research with children highlights the concern to capture, and expand children's voices through increasingly friendly, and respectful methodological means, maintaining epistemological vigilance, and ensuring the alterity of the child, which, between said, and unsaid, allows the researcher to go beyond fads, the trivialization of their voice.

The voice of children is mainly characterized by polyvocality, and is expressed in multiple ways, from verbal language to sign language, through images, drawings, and various records. This polyvocality requires sensitivity, and appropriate methodologies for its listening, and interpretation (Sarmiento; Trevisan, 2017). It requires sensitive, open, and understanding listening to the child's voice, and action, not being a vertical, and isolated dialogue, but a horizontal act shared between adults, and children.

The recognition of the central role of children has required a more careful, and ethical look at research methods, which requires methodological approaches that respect the otherness of children, their languages, and times, without leaving them submissive to the voice of the adult who interprets them. Child participation in research enables them to better produce knowledge about themselves, and their peers.

Fernandes and Marchi. (2020) draw attention to the research developed in recent years that has the character of a consultation culture, which, in a way, empties the concept of voice, since giving the child a voice does not simply mean letting them speak, but rather understanding, and theorizing the child's social world. For the authors, this challenge presents three factors:

- authenticity refers to not misrepresenting the child's point of view in relation to translation, interpretation, and mediation problems in view of the strategies used to capture children's voices, paying attention to how research between adults, and children is built, the power relations that are established, and how the conditions are created so that authenticity can be expressed;
- diversity – the concept "voice of the child" is a category often used to speak of an undifferentiated voice, regardless of social or cultural class, and hides the issue of diversity. Care must be taken to enable the visibility of the plural, and diverse voice, respecting the child as a social actor;
- nature of participation – research should be understood as a process carried out with children, and not in children.

12 The expression "giving voice" to the child, according to Marchi (2018), is already commonplace in current research, however, it is necessary to consider the possibility of emptying meaning due to the epistemological, and methodological change in which the child ceases to be the object of the research. For the author, giving voice involves a double meaning, first the researchers take the political position of looking at a minority social group, and historically absent from the research. Second, children's participation should be considered, and what they have to say about their worlds, ways of thinking, and acting.

It is not about giving voice, allowing, but recognizing the existence of different voices present, remembering that the voice of young children is not always verbal, and that they have other ways of expressing themselves. Giving voice does not mean speaking on behalf of the other, it is not about including the voice of the other (Marchi, 2018).

The invisibility or exclusion of children from social spheres of influence represented by the world of work, and social coexistence with adults outside the family circle compromised their participation in community, and political life. The confinement of childhood to a social space conditioned, and controlled by adults produced, as a consequence, the widespread understanding that children are naturally deprived of the exercise of political rights (Sarmiento; Fernandes; Tomás, 2007).

The child's withdrawal from the political world, coupled with the fact that they do not have the power to share decisions with adults, reinforces the child's negativity. Participation relates to space in different ways, allowing children to be located in public space as social agents. This idea allows recognition as a fundamental collective to consider them as politically competent agents. It also allows the expansion of these domains with more reciprocal, and more negotiable relationships between adults, and children, when adults work together with children (Fernandes; Trevisan, 2018).

In this scenario, the participation of children in the space of relationships with others that are significant to them, whether adults or children, is affected by factors that arise from the relationships of power, and hierarchy that exist between adults, and children. Thus, for Sarmento, Fernandes and Tomás (2007), considering the participation of children in the public space requires us to take into account the influence of the structures, and institutions that involve them, whether educational, economic, legal or social, which often function as obstacles to the construction of spaces for child participation.

Considering the participation of children refers to the recognition of their rights as members of society, who need time, and space to propitiate, and enhance their participation. "Authentic participation involves inclusion, and not just integration [...]" state Fernandes and Marchi (2020, p. 6). This participation should consider four aspects in participatory dynamics, according to the authors: space – ways of expressing points of view; voice – through different forms of expression; audience – being heard in a meaningful way; influence – their opinions should be considered in the decision-making process. The principles that support child participation indicate that it is necessary to invest in child autonomy, since true autonomy is based on a reciprocal commitment between the individuals involved. Overcoming children's conception of becoming is fundamental for child participation to become a reality.

There is a consensus today on the importance of Early Childhood Education as an institution that complements family education, and, through pedagogical work, contributes to the expansion of social relations, and the enrichment of the child's many languages. Thus, educational work is an act of directly, and intentionally producing, in each individual, humanity produced collectively by society.

In this sense, Early Childhood Education institutions should be characterized as spaces that allow children to immerse themselves in sensory, expressive, bodily, playful, and verbal experiences, environments in which children express themselves as creative beings (Delgado, 2015).

However, the lack of these conditions caused the revision of their meanings, which took place in the national debate, directing policies within the framework of educational reforms. Therefore, there was a shift from the discourse of social equality to the defense of quality that follows criteria based on market logic, and neoliberal ideology, considering families that consume services, and products, which reinforces social, and educational inequalities.

Modernity introduced the school as a condition of access to citizenship, and, at the same time, separated children from the public space. Children are seen as citizens of the future, and, in the present, they are distant from collective life, except in the school context, and protected by families from full presence in life in society.

And, in this school space, to what extent are children respected in their rights as social actors? Is there space for participation, and child listening? Listening to a child is not having an answer to all their questions, and learning together with them, it is allowing them to ask. Because their whys show curiosity, creativity, inventiveness, tools that the child uses to express, and relate. When the teacher is open to listening to the child, "he decreases the use of 'control'". Dialogue is an indication of respect for the child (Santos; Rebouças; Varandas, 2019).

Giving voice to the child means sensitive listening on the part of the other, it means being in a dialogic, and respectful space, and not just putting the child in the place of those who listen, and speak. The issue is not to reverse this place, but to provide reciprocity in the adult-child relationship. Attentive, sensitive, dialectical listening involves care, attention, and not just listening in the sensory sense.

It is a listening that puts teachers, the technical-pedagogical team, children, and families in dialogue to think about what is the meaning of school in childhood. Listening to children at the pedagogical level means building knowledge from the relationships between children, and adults in the construction of knowledge, and not just following the official curriculum (Fernandes, 2019).

Schooling, social control, and modern childhood criteria are intertwined. The social transformations that occurred from the 17th century onwards served as a context for the school to become a place of childcare, and, in the Western world, a space for the imposition of discipline, and separation from the adult world of children, spreading the perception that the child was a being of the future. The institutionalization of care for children, and the excessive time they spend involved with school have become impediments to their social participation, given the degree of control exercised by adults, and the little influence that children have over their environments (Pires; Branco, 2007).

Thinking about pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education means thinking about its specific challenges, which go beyond formation, as the teacher needs to understand this context, its advances, and setbacks throughout history. Among them are discussions about the inseparability of caring, and educating; the relationships built with families; the conceptions of the documents that guide their practices, and conceptions in relation to children, and childhoods. The way children think, and conceive about these issues is fundamental so that they can ensure a quality education that respects, and listens to them.

It is not, therefore, a matter of disregarding the role of the educator, and the school in childhood, but of reconfiguring the daily work in these spaces, in order to enable the construction of a curriculum based on respect for the child as a protagonist in his process of learning, development, and experience of his childhood. This implies valuing their speeches, interests, needs, and productions, in addition to enabling their access to diversified learning experiences, treating them as people they are.

It is necessary to build spaces, times, situations, and relationships that allow the child access to culture through its critical appropriation, and consider the role of the child in the production, and transformation of this same culture that we seek to socialize. Thus, institutionalization can be built based on a pedagogy of participation, and children's rights that are intertwined with the action of teachers.

Social images of childhood, and children influence educational practices. Based on this premise, antagonistic views about the child, and childhood coexist. The one that portrays the innocence, angel, joy, future of society, and the other associated with negative aspects of incompetence and immaturity

that compromise the right to child participation, and the recognition of the child's social status. Children, and childhood are social constructions that interfere with children's daily lives. Education is also a social construction, and the different images of children, and childhood in different countries are reflected in policies, and care services (Tomás, 2014).

Contemporary transformations have led to substantial, albeit partial, improvements in children's living conditions, and advances in indicators such as infant mortality rates, freedom from oppressive forms of work, the use of information, and written culture, and access to basic necessities such as education, health, and housing are visible (Sarmiento; Fernandes; Tomás, 2007). However, it is worth noting that these advances are not universal, nor common to all children in the world. Therefore, there are still many challenges in favor of children's rights, and their recognition as a child-citizen.

Final considerations

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Childhood undergoes a process of redefinition through restriction to the structural conditions that are related to it. The children's ways of life in each concrete historical moment are determinant in the processes' configuration of symbolic control, and administration that adults exercise over them, and are the basis of the origin of the social images of childhood. Therefore, it is necessary to create an image of a child capable of defining it by what it is, what it does, and what makes it distinct, and diverse in relation to people of other age groups such as adults.

The debate on normativity is essential to understand the processes of transition, and ongoing changes in the relationship between children, and adults in their different political, educational, and cultural dimensions. There is a need to analytically deconstruct adult-centric normative production.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), by promoting an image of children as beings with active, and participatory rights in society, symbolically configured children as full citizens for the first time. In this domain, the rights of participation in matters that affect them, and the importance of hearing their voices in the public, and private space are emerging research themes today.

However, a critical perspective of Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in the globalized society identifies promises impossible to fulfill in the face of social reality, in which poverty, hunger, lack of medical care, school dropout, child labor and child soldiers question the promises of CRC. It is in the analysis of social inequalities about children that a political orientation can be sustained that announces the conditions of inclusion, well-being, and citizenship to all of them.

Child citizenship demonstrates an ambiguous reality when we think about the concrete living conditions of children, and their opportunities for participation. Living conditions affect how adults view children, as well as the social opportunities they have; children experience the same common childhood condition differently.

In this scenario, schools insist on providing a service to children, and families, and not being child-friendly places. The classic image of a child-student-incompetent that feeds crystallized, and traditional pedagogical relationships that perpetuate unequal relationships still prevails. The school is more concerned with the student than the child. By acquiring an institutional condition, "the child dies" as a concrete individual with his/her own will to give way to the apprentice. It is necessary to advance in this process, and to think, to make the school a democratic space of socialization, of respectful dialogue between children, and adults, with more symmetrical relationships. Many teachers are unaware that children's rights can guide their pedagogical action. This is a topic that needs to be present in school debates, and in initial, and continuing teacher education courses, as well as in research with children that discuss participation as a way to include them in society.

The child is another person distinct from the adult, and in his peer group. This alterity becomes a challenge for the teacher by requiring a significant methodology that places itself in the interdependence between the world of the child, and the adult. The idea of enabling children's voices should mobilize dialogic processes to ensure the alterity of children, and adults.

The Early Childhood Education environment is a fertile space for children's participation, posing several challenges in relation to resources, and methodologies as a way of listening to children. One of the paths can be through their own languages, and ways of understanding the world, observing them in their contexts, perceiving their interactions, needs, and interests in an

investigative, interpretative, and critical perspective, ensuring that their participation becomes audible, and visible in their manifestations, and dynamics.

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