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# "If no one reads to me, how will I learn to read?" – Listening to children about shared reading in early childhood education

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Silvanne Ribeiro-Velázquez  
Universidade Federal da Bahia (Brazil)

## Abstract

When addressing children who do not yet read autonomously, adults are responsible for ensuring opportunities for access to books and mediated reading experiences. Although the literature on reading acquisition and adult mediation is extensive, fewer studies investigate children's desires regarding shared reading practices. This qualitative study, grounded in the principles of quasi-ethnography, was conducted with 28 children aged 3 to 5 in a public school in Mexico. The objective was to understand children's perspectives on literary reading, its spaces, and shared reading moments. The data revealed two analytical dimensions: access to books and the presence of adult mediators. The results indicated a strong desire for mediated reading, associated with a scarcity of books, limited availability of mediators, and low attendance at libraries, perceived as spaces of silence and obligation. It is concluded that children long for reading experiences that strengthen interactions within the adult–book–child triad.

Keywords: Young children. Early childhood education. Shared reading. Literary reading.

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## "Se ninguém lê para mim, como vou ler?" – Escuta de crianças sobre leitura compartilhada na educação infantil

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## Resumo

Ao tratar de crianças que ainda não leem de forma autônoma, cabe aos adultos garantir oportunidades de acesso aos livros e experiências de leitura mediadas. Embora a literatura sobre apropriação da leitura e mediação adulta seja ampla, são menos numerosos os estudos que investigam os desejos

infantis relacionados às práticas de leitura compartilhada. Trata-se de um estudo de abordagem qualitativa, inserido nos princípios da quase-etnografia, realizado com 28 crianças de 3 a 5 anos em uma escola pública no México. O objetivo foi compreender o que pensam as crianças acerca da leitura literária, de seus espaços e dos momentos de leitura compartilhada. Os dados evidenciaram duas dimensões analíticas: o acesso aos livros e a presença de adultos mediadores. Os resultados indicaram desejo por leitura mediada, associado à escassez de livros, à limitada disponibilidade de mediadores e à baixa frequência em bibliotecas, percebidas como espaços de silêncio e obrigação. Conclui-se que as crianças anseiam por experiências de leitura que fortaleçam interações na tríade adulto–livro–criança.

Palavras-chave: Crianças pequenas. Educação infantil. Leitura compartilhada. Leitura literária.

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## **"Si nadie lee para mí, ¿cómo voy a leer?" – Escucha de niños sobre la lectura compartida en la educación infantil**

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### 2

#### **Resumen**

Al tratar con niños que aún no leen de manera autónoma, corresponde a los adultos garantizar oportunidades de acceso a los libros y experiencias de lectura mediadas. Aunque la literatura sobre la apropiación de la lectura y la mediación adulta es amplia, son menos numerosos los estudios que investigan los deseos infantiles en relación con las prácticas de lectura compartida. Se trata de un estudio de enfoque cualitativo, inserto en los principios de la cuasi-etnografía, realizado con 28 niños de 3 a 5 años en una escuela pública de México. El objetivo fue comprender qué piensan los niños acerca de la lectura literaria, sus espacios y los momentos de lectura compartida. Los datos evidenciaron dos dimensiones analíticas: el acceso a los libros y la presencia de adultos mediadores. Los resultados indicaron un deseo de lectura mediada, asociado a la escasez de libros, la limitada disponibilidad de mediadores y la baja frecuencia en bibliotecas, percibidas como espacios de silencio y obligación. Se concluye que los niños anhelan experiencias de lectura que fortalezcan las interacciones en la tríada adulto-libro-niño.

Palabras clave: Niños pequeños. Educación infantil. Lectura compartida. Lectura literaria.

## Introduction

Recent studies on childhoods and children's cultures attest to the importance of guaranteeing the rights of young children in different spheres and in the most varied socio-cultural contexts. Thinking about more just and equitable societies involves guaranteeing innumerable rights for all, but above all, caring for the most vulnerable public, such as children: "The rights of the child, as human rights, are universal, equal for all children; and indivisible, as they are interconnected and cannot be prioritized over each other [...]", asserts Picornell-Lucas (2019, p. 1, 178, our translation) when recalling the principles set out at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, which, in turn, reaffirm the principles already set out in previous documents such as the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Regarding Latin America, the most unequal continent on the planet<sup>1</sup>, there have been considerable advances regarding the realization of rights in early childhood, however, we are still far from satisfactory levels. Thinking about economic, social, civil, political highlights, among others, necessarily involves placing early childhood as a fundamental condition for the advancement of a country as a strategy for socio-cultural, economic, and inclusive development. The search for equity in our continent, undoubtedly, also resides in the guarantee of an early childhood education school that serves children by implementing quality parameters, since the right to education is an intrinsic condition to full human development (Ribeiro-Velázquez; Sepúlveda, 2023).

However, the right to attend an early childhood education institution is still crossed by profound inequalities in access to school, many of them resulting from factors such as geographic location, housing conditions, food insecurity, violence and different forms of violation of rights, which affect both children and their families. In the context of the search for the realization of equal opportunities to remain in early childhood education, this study emphasizes access to written cultures as a social, inclusive, and democratic practice. For

young children, contact with literacy events is a sociocultural right, and it is up to the government to ensure significant experiences with different languages, including reading and writing from early childhood. In view of the inequalities, early childhood education institutions are configured as a privileged *locus* for the promotion of experiences with multiple languages, expanding literacy (Kleiman, 2001).

This study is part of the field of studies on childhoods and reading, highlighting the voices of children to understand their thoughts, tastes, opinions, and desires in relation to books, especially literary ones, and to written culture. The study dialogues with research in childhood sociology, psychology, pedagogy, among other sciences. It is part of a broader investigation, developed in a postdoctoral degree, entitled "Processes of initial learning of orality, reading and writing: perspectives of/ with/ on children, teachers and educational agents of Early Childhood Education in Mexico and Brazil" carried out in inter-university cooperation (Federal University of Bahia/Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla). Finco (2011, p. 169) affirms the need to validate childhoods as a social construction that cannot be disregarded, since it guides "[...] a new paradigm of studies: the understanding of the active role of the child makes it possible to perceive that there are social realities that can only be discovered, apprehended and analyzed from the children's point of view [...]".

Despite the legislative advances aimed at the education of children in early childhood in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, consistent with the need for an integral promotion that considers the changes in the conceptions of children and childhood, validating their rights and the construction of curricula in which interactions and playful activity are founding and structuring axes, it is still unusual, in the scientific field, to listen to children.

In addition to the legal plan, in recent decades, studies on the Pedagogy of Relations, developed by pedagogue Loris Malaguzzi in the region of Reggio Emilia, in northern Italy, have called attention to the importance of listening to children in a sensitive way, as well as to the construction of curricula based on this listening. The Sociology of Childhood, according to Sarmiento (2008), presents this fabric by explaining the relevance of placing the child at the center of reflection, considering what they say through

their multiple languages. However, listening to children and asking about their opinions, thoughts, desires, and feelings, on the most diverse themes, is still a little recurrent dialogic practice in early childhood education institutions, with limited impact on pedagogical proposals.

In this sense, Cruz and Schramm (2019, p. 4) emphasize that “[...] transmissive pedagogies, still predominant, think of childhood in terms of a universal abstraction, not valuing the generational and sociocultural singularities of children”. Rinaldi (2021), a follower of Malaguzzi, points out that a democratic school presupposes attentive listening to young children. On the part of adults, this listening requires the mobilization of all senses, to understand children in their different languages. Thus, listening becomes essential for the construction of pedagogical planning and enhances the full development of children.

Regarding language, children learn to speak by being immersed in the language they have heard since they were babies. In this sense, “[...] adults are part of the human process of learning language” (Teberosky; Jarque, 2014, p. 3). Based on the ideas of Tomasello (2019), Teberosky (2020) states that exposure to language is not enough, as it is in its use that children, through adult-mediated social interactions and participation, understand and produce the different aspects of language. “Dialogue is the main context in which language learning occurs” (Teberosky; Sepúlveda, 2018, p. 73). The authors argue that both the quality and quantity of linguistic interactions are important in this appropriation and that reading aloud supports children not only in their initial literacy process, but in the systemic development of their language. In line with the authors, we also argue that moments of reading interactions between adults (family members and teachers) and children are essential for the appropriation of language and the learning of orality, reading and writing (Ribeiro-Velázquez; Corona-Sanches, 2025).

For this study, the children’s speeches are evident regarding access to written cultures as a right and as a fertile substrate for the construction of a curriculum that should promote interactions and playful activity in its centrality. It is therefore emphasized the importance of the right to interactions and sharing of readings (among children and between children and adults) through a literate culture and the use of quality books in collaborative practices, in which

children are regarded as beings who produce culture and history. Considering the child as a sociocultural being, the problem of the study focuses on the following question: what do young children express about literary reading and its importance, as well as about the book and the act of reading, the spaces in which reading happens and the presence of adults in this path? Therefore, the main objective of the research was to understand what young children think about literary reading, their spaces, and moments of shared reading in the family and school context. The act of listening stands out as an essential pedagogical action in caring for and educating in early childhood, recognizing that children, as culture makers, can address a multitude of themes related to their experiences and their ways of being in the world. Regarding reading with and for children, Carrasco-Altamirano (2014; 2017) defends the importance of everyday contexts, both family and school, that promote emotional experiences with books. To this end, the author suggests the construction of reading routines, which requires the availability of material resources, in the form of varied and quality books, as well as available adults who enable significant encounters between children and books.

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To achieve the proposed objective, an empirical study was carried out in a school located on the outskirts of a large capital of Mexico, promoting the listening of 28 children, aged 3 to 5 years, about their perceptions of some dimensions of reading. In this article, two of these dimensions stand out: materiality (books and spaces) and sharing and mediation (with the teacher and in the family context).

## Methodology

The research<sup>2</sup> was carried out in a state-run early childhood education school located on the outskirts of a major Mexican capital, serving children aged 3 to 6 years full-time. A qualitative approach was adopted, inserted in the principles of *quasi-ethnography*, which dialogues with some precepts of classical ethnography, but emphasizes that immersion in the investigative field is more related to quality than to prolonged duration. In this sense, Rios and Dávila state that:

[...] in a minimum time, it is possible to generate sufficient knowledge. It should be clarified that when we use the term “sufficient,” we are referring to a limit of meaning in which the researcher considers that the information collected is apt, suitable, and significant to account for the objectives outlined; and by “sufficient” we mean information that is neither leftover nor lacking. Obviously, this will depend on the particularities of each case; simplifying, what is sufficient or enough for one investigation may not be for another (Rios; Dávila, 2011, p. 91, our translation).

Thus, the time spent with children in the school environment was conducive to listening to them, respecting their availability, building dialogues, and promoting pleasurable listening moments. Throughout this process, laughter and experiences of mutual reception were shared between the children and the foreign female researcher. The methodological instruments involved non-participant observation in the reference classroom, and other spaces of the school, semi-structured interviews with the school team and conversations with the children. For data analysis, field notes and audio recordings were used as auxiliary instruments, respecting all ethical procedures provided for research with children, which will be detailed below.

The sessions lasted two and a half weeks, with a previous visit of non-participant observation in reference classrooms and approaching the children. The study was previously approved by an ethics committee at a public university in the country of origin of the research. In addition, permissions were obtained from school management and teachers through an Informed Consent Form (TCLE, the acronym in Portuguese). It is noteworthy that the consent of the children to participate in the research was prioritized, as well as the written authorization of their guardians (TCLE).

For the moments of conversation and listening to the children, we proposed voluntarily participation, according to their desire, being able to organize themselves in pairs or trios, if they felt comfortable with this arrangement. The groupings for the moments of conversation did not need to be formed only by colleagues from the same reference classroom, since we share the perspective of Prado (2011, p. 108), that states that it is important to consider childhood “[...] beyond an age cut, in privileged spaces of different relationships (age, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.)”. For the dialogues, an average time of 20 to 30 minutes was used with each group of children. After

completing all ethical procedures, the children were invited to enter the space for interviews, a room located in the school itself. In the place, there were some books, previously chosen by the researcher, arranged on low tables and with free access to the children. Also, present was the school supervisor, who worked at a separate table, in the same environment where the conversations took place.

After welcoming the children, the researcher informed that she would ask some questions about books and reading at school and in their homes. It is worth noting that all the children participated voluntarily, and most preferred to group themselves in pairs with classmates from their reference classroom, except for one child who chose to participate alone, and one instance of a trio grouping. The moments of conversation were supported by a script to guide the researcher, but the listening was numerous and often spontaneous, arising from how the children conducted some triggering themes of the conversation. The children were eager to talk and explore the books. It is noteworthy that the presence of the selected children's literature books had a great impact on most of them, who flipped through the pages enthusiastically, made comments on the illustrations and created their own stories.

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The content of the interviews, which we chose to call "moments of conversation", underwent a preliminary analysis of the material produced by the children, considering their speeches and reports, which guided the course of the narratives. After transcribing the audio material, some more significant and recurrent units of analysis stood out in the children's own dialogues. Next, the frequency with which each content appeared in the participants' speeches was counted, seeking to understand its relevance. Returning to the objectives, the data obtained were interpreted in the light of the identified categories. The discussion focused on the categories that stood out most from the children's speeches. During the moments of conversation, their tastes and interests in books were evidenced, as well as complaints related to the unavailability of adults for reading aloud and the scarcity of books and spaces for reading. For this article, the results will be presented based on three categories of analysis. In this sense, the aspects that children tell us about stand out:

- 1 - reading and access to books;
- 2 - reading spaces and times;

3 - the sharing of readings at school, in the family and in the library.

Next, we present the results and the discussion of the research. We emphasize that the names of the children used in the text are fictitious, guaranteeing anonymity and reaffirming the commitment to the ethical procedures adopted in research with human beings, especially when they involve children.

## Results and Discussion

In this section, we will address what the children told us from the categories mentioned earlier. Initially, it was decided to present brief considerations, built from observations made in the school space and, then, present the children's perceptions about reading and the shared practices they experience and desire, bringing up their opinions and feelings about the themes emerged in the moments of conversation. The Mexican school in which the research was carried out is registered in the municipality as a "state preschool," serves 190 children and has eight reference classrooms, in addition to a cafeteria and a large outdoor area with a park, located in a peripheral area of the city. When asked about the existence of a library or toddler section, the manager informed that there was none, due to the lack of space, and that the room where previously existed this specific space for reading with children presented "a structural problem for a long time," depending on public investments for its adequacy. At the time of the research, the space was being used for music classes. It was not possible to identify the structural problem, since the same room was being used for another activity.

The manager, who took over the direction of the institution that year, said that the school lacked an adequate infrastructure to serve the children with quality: there were not enough adapted bathrooms for young children and often lacked various materials for use in the reference classrooms, as well as toys for the patio. She also reported that the mothers and fathers of the children attended at that institution are, for the most part, "[...] very young and of low socioeconomic and educational status." Despite the absence of the school library, the classrooms had a library and a collection of varied books, widely enhanced in Mexico<sup>3</sup>.

After briefly situating the school, we recapitulated the main objective of the research, trying to understand the listening of young children on topics related to books and reading. About the dialogues with the children, we question what they tell us about their literary experiences. The conversations addressed topics such as reading and the act of reading, access to books and the spaces and times dedicated to reading, the sharing of readings with the teacher and with family members, among others. From this point, the categories of analysis presented at the end of the previous section were resumed. We chose to preserve the children's speeches in their original language (Castilian), to maintain the completeness of their reports, avoiding losses that may occur in the translation. Next, the respective translation into English is presented.

### Reading and access to books

As for reading and the act of reading, all children said they "adored" the books and their stories. They showed great interest in the subject, showed enthusiasm and curiosity for the literary books presented and, above all, were eager to be told stories. When asked about reading and whether they could read, most answered that they are learning and that they really want to "read alone". Javier, a 4 years and 4 months old child, added: "Yo quiero mucho aprender a leer, pero para eso las personas tienen que leerme" (I really want to learn to read, but for that, people must read to me), (Javier, 2023). Following the same line of thought, Artur, 3 years and 9 months old, said: "Para aprender a leer, los adultos nos tienen que comprar y leer muchos cuentos" (To learn to read, adults must buy and read many stories for us), (Artur, 2023).

Javier and Artur draw our attention to what Carrasco-Altamirano (2023, p. 2, our translation) highlights about the moments of shared reading between children and adults: "Reading to young children allows us to feed our own reader growth and that of the people for whom we read". The author defends the importance of adults reading to children daily. She argues that, both in families and in the school environment, early childhood reading should enhance encounters between books and people. At this stage, when young children still do not read autonomously, the availability of adults is essential.

Those who read to others have diverse resources and, in general, our actions are governed by certain beliefs and evaluations about the forms and purposes of reading. An essential and often scarce resource is time. Another is the availability of quality children's books – having a variety of genres, formats and styles within reach is also not common. Our own reading experiences and the licenses we grant ourselves in adulthood to make new readings feed our considerations about the very way we read, and nourish beliefs and decisions about readings carried out for pure pleasure (Carrasco-Altamirano, 2023, p. 3, our translation).

Regarding access to books at school and in families, Helena, a 4 years and 5 months old child, tells us: “¡Mi mamá quiere que yo aprender a leer, pero ella no me compra libros de cuentos, solo para dibujar, que a mí me gustan también, pero quisiera los otros para leer!” (My mom wants me to learn to read, but she does not buy me storybooks, only drawing ones, which I like too, but I wish I had the other ones to read!), (Helena, 2023).

With this speech, Helena expresses a sensitivity to the need for a dialogical conception of listening and reading, showing that there is a dual relationship between the act of reading and the need for books “to read,” which are of another category for her, not those of drawing, although these are also interesting. The child repeatedly complained that his teacher does not count many “*cuentos*” (stories), but other types of books, always in the space of the reference classroom. Bajour (2023, p. 25) draws our attention to the need to be aware of a dialogical conception of reading with children, since “[...] it is part of every act of reading in which we seek to open meanings and expand them in a cooperative way”. Thus, it is necessary that there is adult availability not only to identify desires. The same author states that “[...] constructing meanings with others without needing to finalize them is a fundamental condition of listening, and this presupposes an awareness that the construction of meanings is never a purely individual act.” (Bajour, 2023, p. 25).

In addition to the availability of adults, the proposal and the daily lives of the school do not seem to prioritize literary reading. Starting with times and spaces: most children say that their teachers read little to them and that they would like them to read more. In the same direction, previous studies (Ribeiro-Velázquez; Carrasco-Altamirano, 2023) highlighted an approach to reading and writing in early childhood education that, in fact, considered this social

practice as a right of children. Likewise, it is their right to live with adults and other children who promote varied, contingent, and responsive interactions.

As mentioned earlier, there is no specific space for reading in the school, such as a school library, although it has been found that some classrooms have a library. Even so, most of the children's complaints are related to access. It is as if they were saying – and, in fact, some children have said – "if there are no adult readers to read with me, how am I going to read?" In his studies, Carrasco-Altamirano (2017, 2023) highlights three essential principles to provide children's encounters with books: (1) quality books chosen for them, (2) specific and adequate spaces for reading and (3) people who bring books closer to children. Based on this assumption and what was possible to observe, the school in question does not have or does not potentiate these principles, which is directly reflected in the speeches of young children.

Such scarcity also seems to be reflected in children's literary repertoires. When asked which books they liked, most cited classic fairy tales such as *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*), *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* (*Little Red Riding Hood*), *Schneewittchen* (*Snow White*), *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Cinderella*; however, many did not know what to say. Others, however, mentioned enjoying books with varied themes, such as unicorns (a recurring theme among girls at that time), fish, monsters, foods, princesses, numbers and "fun stories." One child recited riddles, while another mentioned "news" – possibly because it was the textual genre being worked on by the teacher during that period, as observed during prior observations in the reference classroom.

By relating the socioeconomic conditions of the families served by the school to the scarcity of books and specific spaces for reading, it is possible to assume that, despite the existence of an important national program for the distribution of books to schools in Mexico – with collections destined for both the school library and the reference classroom libraries –, books with greater thematic, editorial diversity and multimodal perspectives do not seem to be within the reach of young children in the institution where the research was carried out.

## Reading spaces and times

Regarding the spaces and times intended for reading, most children said they had access to few books, although they expressed a desire to have more. Of the 28 children participating in the research, 27 revealed that both teachers and their families read to them less than they would like. When asked about who usually reads to them, only one child mentioned that their father, mother, and older brother performed shared readings, highlighting how much they appreciated these moments. The teacher and the school environment were not mentioned. For most children, the moments of sharing and reading aloud are insufficient – a worrying fact, because, in addition to having compromised the right to reading and literary language, they also lose fundamental opportunities for interaction for the construction of their subjectivities, largely absent due to the unavailability of adults. In addition, most children associated the moments of reading with the period before sleep, and few reported reading experiences in the school context or conversations with adults around the books read. As a 4 years and 6 months old child reports: “*A mí me gusta más cuando mi mamá me lee porque leemos juntas en mi camita y después me besa. Pero muchas veces es muy rápido...*” (I like it better when my mom reads to me because we read together in my bed and then she kisses me. But many times, it is very fast...) (Luna, 2023).

Following the same line about reading times, Juan José, 5 years and 2 months old, shared: “*A mí me preocuppa crecer porque cuando seamos mayores los papás ya no nos cuentan cuentos.*” (I am worried about growing up because when we are older, our parents will not tell us stories anymore) (Juan José, 2023).

This child’s speech reminds us of the way reading is conceived by them: an act of affection, something that López (2022) coined as “*leiturar*”:

*“Leiturar,”* for me, is about producing this narrative, linguistic, poetic immersion, which has a ritualistic character and engages profound psychic, intellectual, emotional, and symbolic processes, on which the very occurrence of becoming a reader largely depends. *“Leiturar”* brings together something from the verb “to read” (*leer*, in Spanish) and something from the verb “to love” (*amar*). Something akin to lovingly transferring to others the initial knowledge and skills needed to build, with increasing autonomy, the full and

emancipatory experience of reading. Therefore, "*leiturar*" presupposes a relationship of commitment and intimacy between those who "*leitura*" and those who "*leitura*" themselves, as a condition of the experience (López, 2022, p. 1).

When insisting with the children on the importance of literary reading moments at school, and not only in the family environment, Amina, a 5 years and 4 months old child, answered about the frequency with which her teacher reads to the class: "No cada día, como yo quisiera" (Not every day, as I would like) (Amina, 2023). To this same question, many children answered simply, "Às vezes lê" (Sometimes you read). Juan, a 3 years and 8 months old boy, expressed his frustration when he said: "Yo quiero aprender a leer, entonces juego a la lectura ya que nadie me lee, hago así blablablá" (I want to learn to read, so I play at reading since no one reads to me, I go like blah blah blah) (Juan, 2023). As he narrated, he took one of the books placed on the table and flipped through it quickly, a gesture that provoked laughter from the two children who were with him at that moment of conversation.

14 In these rich periods of wandering thoughts, dialogues, laughter, and confessions, children teach us that they desire more time, spaces, and interactions with adults through reading, claiming more shared moments. In addition, several studies attest to the importance not only of access to books, but also of promoting dialogues with adults about what was read, enhancing interactions on topics related to the physical, natural, and social world. These studies point to a significant relationship between these literate practices and children's conceptual repertoires (Sepúlveda; Teberosky, 2016). As Reyes (2021, p. 29) points out: "At heart, books are this: conversations about life. And it is urgent, above all, to learn to talk."

### Share readings at school, with family, and in the library

The children's speeches formed an amalgam of topics related to reading. In this category, we aim to highlight, in a more specific way, the moments of sharing in environments where reading, especially literary reading, should be promoted as a language of rights for young children. Often, this category was configured as a point of recapitulation and synthesis of what the children reported to us earlier.

The experiences of literary reading that children need and want to experience necessarily go through the mediation of the other. Munita (2024, p. 88), citing Bonaccorsi (2007), states that “[...] to talk about reading mediation is, in general terms, to talk about every form of action aimed at promoting the cultural practice of reading”. For the young children participating in this study, their teachers and families promote shared moments of reading. However, these moments still prove to be insufficient. In these (inter)actions, through reading with children, adults, as mediators, give meaning and significance to this important sociocultural practice. Specifically for young children, literate practices are not dissociated from the act of care, nor from the bodily, psychosocial, and emotional dimension, becoming enhancers of an explosion of feelings, experiences, and subjectivities.

Juana, a 3 years and 8 months old child, stated that the two things she liked the most were playing and reading. Asked if the book could be a toy and with whom she liked to share moments of reading, María, a 5-year-old child, replied: “Sí, porque yo entro en él y me pierdo allá dentro cuando no están mis papás” (Yes, because I go into it and get lost in there when my parents are not around) (María, 2023). In our dialogues, this same child regretted, with some sadness, that his father had traveled to New York City “[...] para poder enviarnos dinero a mi mamá y a mí, y así poder comprar ropa y libros” ([...] so that he can send money to my mom and me, and thus be able to buy clothes and books) (María, 2023). María probably referred to her father’s condition as a Latin American immigrant in the United States – a reality often imposed by the difficult living conditions in their countries of origin, which lead many families to seek new livelihood opportunities. When stating that books can be toys because they allow her to enter fantasy, María refers us to the need we have to fable and to the thought of Petit (2024, p. 47) when she states that books are a possibility of: “[...] opening an invisible world to make the real world habitable”. In the longing for her father and in the search for intimate moments with her mother, María seems to find in books a refuge – a space to “lose” herself and, at the same time, to find herself in a possible world.

When asked if they knew of a library and whether they had ever visited such a space, many the children responded affirmatively, but stated that there was none at their school, confirming the information provided to

us by the school administrator. However, most children associated the library with a place where one had to "be quiet" or "engage in activities." When asked about the reason for the silence, Lucía, a 4 years and 6 months old child, replied: "¡Porque son las normas de las biblioteca!" ("Because they are the library rules!") (Lucía, 2023). Guadalupe, 4 years and 8 months old, was categorically positioned: "¡Porque son las reglas! Yo no sé mucho, pero allá tenemos que guardar silencio, pero creo que es para hacer bien las tareas. ¡Pero el silencio es aburrido!" (Because they are the rules! I do not know very well, but we must be quiet there, but I think it is to do the activities well! But silence is boring!) (Guadalupe, 2023).

It should be noted that a significant part of the children interviewed did not know a library. Those who knew it clearly associated it with the idea of *silence*. They also related the space to emotional moments of being with their parents. When asked about the moments of shared reading at school, most of the children answered that they were not frequent and that it occurred "*only in the classroom*". The data reveal that specific spaces for reading are scarce and, according to the children, in the investigated school, these moments happen mainly in the reference classrooms, despite the school having a large patio.

Sharing readings is a valuable act for children, who, with great sensitivity, recognize the importance of the presence of adult readers in this process. Once again, we turn to Munita (2024, p. 89) when he states: "It is not enough to create material conditions for access to the book, it is also necessary to work on the multiple mediations that condition the practice of reading".

As a narrative that condenses the meanings produced throughout the research, we highlight the speech of a 5-year-old child, who, indignant and expressive, declared: "Leer es un poquito difícil, pues unos niños saben y otros no. Los más grandes saben. Es importante que la mamá lea para nosotros. Mi mamá quiere que yo sea doctora, yo también quiero serlo. Pero ¿cómo voy a ser doctora si nadie me lee?" (Reading is a little difficult, since some kids know how and others do not. The older ones know. It is important that mom reads to us. My mom wants me to be a doctor, and I want to be one too. But how am I going to be a doctor if no one reads to me?) (Marina, 2023).

## Final considerations

In this study, we propose to listen to young children about their perceptions of some aspects related to literary reading, especially regarding the sharing of these moments with adults, both in the early childhood education they attend and in their families. In light of the principles of quasi-ethnography, the results indicate that children were very willing to share their impressions and to handle the literary books that made up the listening environment, in a context of daily interaction and sensitive observation. The data revealed that young children are not unaware of what happens in their school and family daily lives. Most of them clearly demonstrated, very appropriately, what they perceive and what is happening around them, and expressed themselves confidently, taking a stance on various topics. They were spontaneous and authentic in their claims and, from the analysis of the set of answers, the message they left us becomes explicit: "Adults need to be more present and unhurried in the moments of reading. We still do not know how to read autonomously and we need this access: to books, to the voices that read us, to the time, to the conversations and to their availability".

As the Argentinean author Graciela Montes (1999, p. 109, our translation) indicates, more than questioning whether people read or not, or the reasons that lead them to dedicate themselves or not to reading, "[...] it would be better to ask ourselves, for example, how books, newspapers, magazines, education, etc. circulate, before other considerations". The children in this research call us to these questions pointed out by Montes when they say that, for books to circulate, it is not enough to have spaces favorable to their circulation; it is also necessary to have time and the presence of people who promote "the circular movement" (Montes, 1999, p. 110). In this study, children indicated to us that adults are going in the opposite direction to this movement. By not counting on the availability of adults, they are deprived of experiences rich in literate practices, especially literary reading, which feeds their imagination, strengthens their symbolic world and close ties with adults in unique moments provided by shared readings and sensitive conversations about what was read.

Despite the promotion of the appreciation and distribution of non-textbooks through public policies implemented forcefully in Mexico, the country of origin of the children in this study, the school library did not work, and the reference classroom libraries did not seem to be within the reach of children – at least, not in the way they would like, in their own words. In the present study, most children revealed that the specific spaces intended for reading were seen as environments of rigid rules and excessive control, whose handling of books was prohibited and conversations about the books were scarce. Thus, these spaces could not mobilize people or promote meaningful meetings.

It should be noted, however, that under no circumstances do we blame the school and its professionals who, as we saw during our stay in the internal spaces, are people engaged in promoting integral education for children. However, it is essential that they seek ways to listen to them so that, in fact, they are the centrality of pedagogical planning. The early childhood education school, therefore, should not remain inert in the face of this situation. Although it is not the primary *locus* where children's books circulate, the school becomes essential, as, in many contexts, it is the only space of access and can act as a "catalyst" for abundant literary encounters. When it comes to the commitment to children to provide them with rich experiences with languages – and, among them, literary language –, the school investigated is certainly not just "another place of circulation." Given the less favored conditions of the families of the children who attend it, it becomes a necessary and urgent space for the promotion of literate practices.

Last but not least, it is necessary to affirm that listening to children must transcend their speeches in research and translate into concrete actions – governmental, pedagogical, and cultural – that impact, above all, adults. As a small child told us, in an almost confidential gesture, in the form of a *whisper*: "These people who, when they read us, smile..."

## Notes

1. According to a United Nations Development Programme report (2023-2024), Latin America remains the most unequal continent in the world. Poverty worsened after the pandemic and global conflicts, while inequalities between poor and rich countries intensified. The concentration of income in the hands of a few reveals an alarming picture for the region.

2. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of a state university belonging to the participants' country of origin according to local and country regulations (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla/BUAP - Mexico).
3. According to Carrasco-Altamirano (2023), the first two decades of the 21st century in Mexico stood out for the editorial production of children's books through the National Reading Program. School libraries were created and high-quality non-textbook books were produced and distributed, increasing children's access to reading.

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Prof. Dr. Silvanne Ribeiro-Velázquez  
Federal University of Bahia (Brazil)

Graduate Program in Education

Leader of the Study and Research Group on Early Childhood Education, Teacher Formation, Languages and Childhood (FLEI/CNPQ)

Orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9778-7721>

Email: [silvanneribeiro@gmail.com](mailto:silvanneribeiro@gmail.com)

English language translator

Affonso Henriques Nunes

[affonsohnunes@gmail.com](mailto:affonsohnunes@gmail.com)

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