

Assessment processes and teaching in Early Childhood Education: daily dialogues¹

Processos avaliativos e docência na Educação Infantil: diálogos cotidianos

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is a question that consistently occupies research in the field of childhood studies. This paper is part of the debate on assessment in childhood education with an approach to the assessment of children and its specificities at the school daily life. It presents findings from qualitative researches with daily lives, children and teachers, with observation of practices and production of narratives from teacher's reports, besides documentary and bibliographic research. The lack of academic material that focuses on assessment in the relationship between teachers and children, evidenced by the bibliographic review, exposes that this debate and the socialization of investigations about this subject are relevant. Daily life scenes are brought to reflect upon assessment processes and evince the power of the interaction between teacher and children, which guides the movement or proposing an assessment focused on children's learning and development. The dialogical, reflexive and participative dimensions of the assessment stand out in a proposal that affirms the teaching action in the creation and the conduction of work, as well as the need of child presence in this process, because recognizes child as a subject of rights. Its conclusions assert that assessment is important

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for the understanding of children's learning, for the organization of teaching actions and for the indication of significant issues to the continuing teacher education, as an activity integrated with school acts.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Learning assessment. Child assessment.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar como, nos processos de avaliação na Educação Infantil, os pareceres pedagógicos, que compõem a documentação pedagógica das instituições, operam certos saberes e normas que legitimam um determinado modo e tipo de infância e a criança produzida como sujeito em risco e a ser ajustado. Ocupando-se de um arquivo de dados composto por fragmentos de pareceres pedagógicos opera-se uma análise inspirada nas noções-ferramentas saber e norma, a partir dos estudos foucaultianos, para mostrar como os usos desse instrumento de avaliação pode estar (re) produzindo saberes e matrizes normativas que produzem sujeitos-crianças e uma posição para certas infâncias serem rotuladas e identificadas como em risco e necessidade de ajustamento. Com a análise, busca-se mostrar os processos de avaliação que podem naturalizar um modo de ser criança em risco e a ser ajustada. Conclui-se apontando o limite que o conjunto de saberes e regras colocados em funcionamento, através dos processos de avaliação, nas instituições de Educação Infantil, ao identificar e rotular as crianças, podem estar limitando a percepção e a atuação das instituições e dos docentes no sentido de compreender a diversidade e multiplicidade de criança(s) e de infância(s) na contemporaneidade.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Processos de Avaliação. Produção da criança.

Introduction

Evaluation as a part of pedagogical work constitutes a relevant issue in the debates about children's schooling processes. Early Childhood Education is imbedded in this discussion and involves particulars that actually bring new contours to it. Early Childhood Education, institutional ambience, relationships with adults, guidelines set forth in official documents, and the fact that it is not possible at this stage of basic education to attribute grades to children, or to flunk them – practices that seem to identify the process of evaluating learning – indicate the need to grant the issue a particular treatment. Such matters

converge to a focus on evaluation of children in Early Childhood Education as the issue in the present paper, which aims at discussing the power of relationships between teachers and children in the composition of evaluation practices that will question its classificatory feature and promote continuing teacher education.

In order to discuss this matter, three researchers united to converse upon their investigations. One of them is in its early stages (LOUZADA, 2020). The other two have been concluded (ESTEBAN, 2020²; FERNANDES, 2018) and can be described as research with school routine (GARCIA, 2003; ANDRADE; ALVES; CALDAS, 2019), using not only what can be captured from what is produced in the spaces where they are inscribed, but also a permanent dialogue with the subjects participating in the research – both adults and children. With them we meandered through the movements experienced in the daily lives of children's education in order to investigate both the evaluation processes installed and the potency of encounters between adults and children in the composition of meanings for the practice of evaluation.

The results we found clearly show the preservation of normative curricular practices in Early Childhood Education, induced by technical rationality which is supported by positivistic epistemology and that apply recurring techniques based on theory – understood as the source of solutions for day-to-day problems (SCHON, 1992). From this perspective, the ends for the actions in this stage of basic education and the means to accomplish them are articulated by technical decisions that are disconnected from the specifics of each particular context, and actually highlight the instrumental dimension of the teaching practice. Such definitions, which precede and lie on the outside of pedagogical practices, support classificatory evaluation in spite of their insufficiency and despite official provisions that priority be given to children's overall development rather than to performance.

Concomitantly, such results indicate other less frequent curricular movements in which experiences, knowledge and interactions among children articulate with the different types of knowledge that compose their cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific and technological heritage. The latter outline new perspectives for evaluation and also express – at times by means of mere cues, at times with clear evidence – propositions that extrapolate the classificatory perspective and weave into more comprehensive concepts that are present in methodological and theoretical propositions in studies on educational evaluation (GIMENO SACRISTÁN; PÉREZ GÓMEZ, 1998). This converges with

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the current proposal for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2010) in the articulation between evaluation and daily life and within the interfaces it bears with teacher education/action.

The present article examines this second movement, which we deem quite mobilizing. We have analyzed studies, conversations, dialogues, actions and interrogations collected along our paths that invite educators – or maybe summon them – to deepen their reflections into evaluation practices experienced between teachers and children³ in their routine at school.

We started out reviewing the literature and placing our study within the current debate on evaluation in the scope of Early Childhood Education. Guided by children's hands, we then entered the school's routine in order to contemplate possibilities and challenges that build up when one envisions evaluation practices that are dialogical, investigative, reflexive and based on participation. We treaded this path attending to all legal guidelines (BRASIL, 2010) and to the warning by Campos (2016) about the difference between practices by institutions working with Early Childhood Education and the pedagogical logics provided in official ordinances. This latter point refers us to the third aspect: Evaluation as a meaningful element of continuing teacher education, a formative process that brings us to what we want to propose as infant teaching, dialoguing with Kohan (2007, 2019).

Evaluation as a routine practice affirms itself as a powerful process for resetting curricular dynamics, and reiterates school as a space for producing knowledge for children, for teachers and for the field of studies on childhood education.

Literature on evaluation in/of Early Childhood Education: a first approach

There has been an intense debate on the education of childhoods, especially by means of rebuilding the idea of Early Childhood Education. This decades-old discussion has grown more intense as it is recognized as a stage in basic education⁴. There is a certain restlessness that translates as constant debates in the realm of education research. Given that this is precisely our field of

³ We chose to use “teacher” as a female noun because there are more women working in Early Childhood Education and elementary school than men in Brazil.

⁴ In Brazil “Basic Education” includes elementary-middle-and high-school.

endeavor, we understand it is a requirement that we state our position within the set of studies carried out on this matter. We resorted to our literature review as a starting point to our investigation, which aims at following Early Childhood Education as it is brought into the (Brazilian) *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* – SAEB [Elementary Education Evaluation System]⁵. The detailed results based on consultations made to the Scielo platform and to the *Catálogo de e Teses e Dissertações da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES* [Theses & Dissertations Catalog of the Higher Education Personnel Training Coordination], can be found in Louzada (2020). We have chosen not to limit our search to any specific period of time, since we assumed that the literature on the topic contains few references (SOUSA; PIMENTA, 2018), a fact we shall discuss further in the article.

We deem it important to include some information published in the above-mentioned article, given that it shall work as the basis for our argumentation on the need to widen the debate on the issue of evaluating learning in Early Childhood Education. This is a relevant aspect, given that we intend to deal with the evaluation practices experienced between teachers and children.

On the Scielo platform, three different keywords led to the same six articles: **evaluation of Early Childhood Education, evaluation during Early Childhood Education and evaluation in Early Childhood Education**. In addition to these, as shown in Table 1, there are a relatively low number of articles on the issue of evaluation of/ during Early Childhood Education, and no articles were found under the keyword “evaluation of learning during Early Childhood Education”:

TABLE 1 – NUMBER OF ARTICLES FOUND ON THE SCIELO PLATFORM

Keywords	Number of Articles
Evaluation of Early Childhood Education	07 (seven)
Evaluation during Early Childhood Education	07 (seven)
Evaluation in Early Childhood Education	06 (six)
Evaluation of learning during Early Childhood Education	0 (zero)

SOURCE: Louzada (2020).

⁵ This literature review used the following keywords: a) evaluation of Early Childhood Education; b) evaluation during Early Childhood Education; c) and evaluation in Early Childhood Education; and d) evaluation of learning during Early Childhood Education.

Regarding the issues approached in the articles mentioned, we found:

CHART 1 – ISSUES FOUND IN THE ARTICLES AVAILABLE ON THE SCIELO PLATFORM

a) avaliação de contexto;
b) avaliação de desenvolvimento infantil;
c) políticas públicas;
d) políticas e práticas escolares;
e) autoavaliação;
f) avaliação e qualidade da Educação Infantil;
g) avaliação e gestão.

SOURCE: Louzada (2020).

Our search conducted in the CAPES Catalog of Theses & Dissertations was compromised by difficulties using the platform's search tool, which made it impossible to obtain precise results. The first difficulty we encountered was that the searches do not identify publications linked to specific keywords; several articles are identified that do not match the focus of our study. In this sense, the following results were found for each keyword: a) **evaluation of Early Childhood Education** (1,189,596 entries); b) **evaluation during Early Childhood Education** (1,045,308 entries); c) **evaluation in Early Childhood Education** (1,144,595 entries); d) **evaluation of learning during Early Childhood Education** (1,200,806 entries). Also, it could not be ensured whether all these entries refer to dissertations and theses in the area of education, since articles were found on other areas of study (such as psychology, for example), or whether they refer to the area of evaluation but not specifically to evaluation of/during/in Early Childhood Education. There were also few articles on the issue of evaluation *during* Early Childhood Education, since texts came out on other stages of education.

Considering the points above and aiming at giving better treatment to the data produced, we decided to limit our search to the first 500 articles listed under each keyword. (LOUZADA, 2020). Regarding the number of entries found, the topic areas contemplated in MS and PhD papers that converse with the issue of evaluation of/during/in Early Childhood Education⁶, thirty-five dissertations and seven theses were found:

⁶ Sixteen dissertations were identified under the different keywords. There were no repetitions.

TABLE 2 – TOPIC AREAS FOUND IN DISSERTATIONS AND THESES AVAILABLE ON THE CAPES PLATFORM

Dissertations	Theses
Teachers' ideas of evaluation: 7 (seven)	Evaluation in nurseries: 1 (one)
Evaluation instruments: 10 (ten)	Evaluation instruments:
Evaluation of learning: 6 (six)	Evaluation in nurseries based on directives by the Brazilian Department of Education (MEC): 1 (one)
Evaluation of context: 1 (one)	Pedagogical notebooks, first-grade education and independent evaluation: 1 (one)
A case study in a preschool institution: 1 (one)	Evaluation concepts and practices: 1 (one)
Preschool children in elementary education: 1 (one)	Participation of children in the evaluation process: 2 (two)
Early school evaluation: 1 (one)	
Evaluation as a dialogical practice: 1 (one)	
The state of the art on the topic: 1 (one)	
Planning, record-keeping and evaluation: 1 (one)	
Management: 1 (one)	
The importance of record-keeping in Early Childhood Education and in the first grade of elementary education: 1 (one)	
Academic production on the topic in meetings held by the Brazilian Association of Research & Graduate Studies in Education (ANPED): 1 (one)	
Independent evaluation during Early Childhood Education 1 (one)	
Evaluation and quality: 1 (one)	

SOURCE: Data organized based on a review of the literature.

A review of the literature on the topic exposes the need to widen the debate on the evaluation of learning in Early Childhood Education among education researchers and professionals. It also points out that it is necessary to articulate the issues discussed in the dissertations and theses in order to treat evaluation for children's learning. We also noted that the number of theses is significantly disproportional to the number of dissertations, indicating the need for more academic investigation on the issue.

Regarding the articles available on the Scielo platform, we agree with Rosemberg (2013, p. 46, our translation), when the author claims that, "(...) when looking into the area of education employing the descriptor *evaluation for Early Childhood Education*, very few references turn up". Sousa and Pimenta

(2018, p. 1277, our translation) follow the same line of argumentation and state that there are scarce studies analyzing the “proposals aimed at evaluation in this segment of basic education. In this same context, Rosemberg (2013, p. 47, our translation) even criticizes “this near silence imposed to Early Childhood Education and observed in the studies of educational evaluation”. In the course of our investigation we also found an article by Moro and Souza (2014) in which the researchers map and examine Brazilian academic production between 1997 and 2012, to conclude that in-context evaluation has a stronger presence, whereas “(...) children’s evaluation has been less-frequently approached in this area” (MORO; SOUZA, 2014, p. 120, our translation).

Although evaluation in Early Childhood Education may involve evaluation of learning by children, an observation of the topics addressed on the Scielo Platform also do not show the articulation with children’s learning processes. However, theses and particularly dissertations point to a wide interest in the topic. This evidences both the need and the opportunity to bring up the issue, articulating the different dimensions of the process, in order to discuss the pedagogical work carried out at this stage.

We could observe that discussions about evaluation in Early Childhood Education are relatively recent. Jussara Hoffmann (1991) was a pioneer researcher on the topic, in a book chapter titled “Evaluation in preschool?”. In this text she highlights *observation* and *reflection* as pillars of evaluation practices. She supports the view that her principles must value infants’ manifestations, and therefore “(...) definitively distance themselves from the evaluation model used by common teaching” (HOFFMANN, 1991, p. 105, our translation), which the author identifies as predominant in preschool. Her most renowned publication on the topic is her book titled “Evaluation in preschool: a reflexive look on the child” (HOFFMANN, 2009), published in 1996 and still a reference in present days.

Widening the debate on evaluation processes in preschool, Esteban (1993) proposes an analogy between evaluation and jigsaw puzzles, frequently used in Early Childhood Education. In this perspective, standardized activities – which accept exclusively one answer as correct – also teach children to conform to school reality. In this context, evaluation becomes the tool that ultimately leads children to fit in with universal models of development, learning and specific contents presented by schools, so that they can be prepared for elementary school⁷.

Finally, still on the topic, we found a piece by Fernandes (2006) included

⁷ The author describes this stage using nomenclature changed by Federal Law number 9394 (BRASIL, 1996).

in “*Revista Criança*”, published by MEC, which states that evaluation practices are justified based on conceptions acquired by teachers along their lives, their school memories and their expectations regarding their pupils, as well as on their theoretical-epistemological convictions. She also maintains that during Early Childhood Education, teachers usually conduct evaluations closer to formative evaluation, once there is no need to grade children’s learning using numerical or other types of indicators for purposes of their approval.

The reflections set forth by the authors point to a shared direction for developing proposals for evaluation in Early Childhood Education, even considering the latter author’s diverging position regarding what is evident in her routine. This interpretation is in line with the Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil – DCNEI [*Brazilian Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*] (BRASIL, 2010): investigating and monitoring in order to promote learning and development by children, recommending multiple types of record-keeping “with no intention to select, promote or classify” (BRASIL, 2010, p. 29). This recommendation is consistent with the provisions in the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional – LDB [*Brazilian Education Law*] (BRASIL, 1996) and with the Base Nacional Comum Curricular [*Common National Curricular Base*] (BRASIL, 2017).

It is worth highlighting that what is a consensus among researchers, also specified in official regulations, has proved insufficient for promoting evaluation practices supported by a consideration of each individual child’s learning power and observation of their development. Moro (2018) warns about the risks of making evaluation in Early Childhood Education more bureaucratic as a result of alterations made to the Brazilian Education Law LDB in 2013, especially under Article number 31, in regards to “the issuance of documentation that can attest children’s development and learning processes” – that ultimately bring evaluation closer to a perspective that follows “a predetermined standard of development, learning and desirable contents for children 0 to 6 years of age.” (MORO, 2018, p. 70, our translation). Our investigation intends to discuss lines of escape from the customary discourse on evaluating children in preschool. The understanding that they resist totalizing and concentric ways of describing their own learning and development processes impose upon us researchers some reflections on the field of evaluation in Early Childhood Education, which is tense and disputed, loaded with interrogations.

Children as starting points and finishing points for *what* and *how* to evaluate

Scene 1

“Daddy, come see this!” Maria Luiza, 3, brings her father to look at one of the mural boards in her classroom at school⁸. It’s the beginning of the day, and parents often come inside classrooms. Maria Luiza approaches the mural board on cicadas her group is putting together, which displays the stages in the children’s investigations and their discoveries starting from an exoskeleton found in the school yard. “*This is an exoskeleton. Gabriel was the one who taught me this word*”. We found out that “*cicadas leave this skeleton and fly away*.” “*It’s the male who sings to call the girl!*” Maria Luiza shows her father the images and tells him in fluent, detailed language about both the insect itself and about the investigative movements she engaged in together with her peers and teacher. Her subjective discourse shares discoveries and presents a learning process in which the subject creates him/herself and reveals his/her force in social relations. The father appears excited with his daughter’s knowledge, smiles and asks questions. Maria Luiza answers excitedly and goes on and on about her findings (FERNANDES).

Scene 2

Enzo, Sofia, Nicolas and Isabel are three years old and they are drawing at one, single table. Isabel puts graphic marks down, appearing to attempt at cursive writing, and says, “*I’m writing my name!*” Her classmates look at Isabel’s writing. Enzo gives me a piece of paper and asks me to write his name on it. I do, then give it back to him. He copies two of the letters in his name onto his drawing that are easily recognizable – the *E* and the *O*. “*I wrote my name!*”, he says. Isabel also writes her name with the scribbles. I go up to her and say: “*Can I write your name in a different way now?*” After her consent I write her name in the conventional way, next to her writing. Isabel does not demonstrate any uneasiness while observing my writing. The other three kids observe. Sofia looks at Enzo’s writing, then she finds my eyes and says: “*Write my school name?*” I ask her what her “*school name*” is and she points to the file where her name is printed: “*That one!*” I write it on a strip of paper and give it to her. She looks fixedly at it. The she looks again at the strip of paper with her name on it and makes no mention of copying it. She leaves the strip with her name on it.

8 Parents authorized the survey and the use of their children’s names.

Attentive to the movement of the children I notice that some of them are interested in the writing of names, then spontaneously grab their folders and files in order to copy their names on their own drawings, and begin to perfect their possibilities supported by us, teachers (FERNANDES, 2018, p. 122, our translation).

This section brings scenes that took place while we were conducting research into the routine of a preschool unit (state-owned and university-operated), in the period between 2014 and 2017, which included children at 3, 4 and 5 years of age forming one single group⁹. Our observations and notes were later made into narrative records. Scenes like the ones we described connect pedagogical practice to the debate on evaluation.

Maria Luiza tells of what she experiences in her learning process, a result of her infant curiosity, mobilized by her encounter with an exoskeleton found in the school yard. Such experiences brought about conversations with her father and evoked past dialogues she'd held with her peers and her teacher. Indeed, they lay open the child's emotions, as well as her accomplishments and her knowledge – the acknowledgement she has perceived the presence of others in her learning, and the joy of knowing and being able to share knowledge in her own way.

Enzo, Sofia, Nicolas and Isabel are drawing together, and in this process they seem to build and rebuild knowledge about writing, about ways of thinking and expressing themselves and relating to others. The setting of the class in small groups and the availability of materials together make it possible to widen the teacher's perspective on the interactions taking place there, among the children.

The teacher observes, in her own timing, each of the scenes. She makes brief notes so as not to miss any details, and later puts down what she sees as a narrative. Interested in evaluation practices that are significant to her work with the children, the teacher inquires what elements each apparently trivial scene can provide for evaluating learning and development considering each individual child in their own way and at their own time. This is a process which opens itself to surprise and curiosity as it unfolds into different types of learning for both child and teacher. The insistent inquiries put by teachers, both at the practical and at the theoretical levels, foster reflection and ways of listening to children and to the relationships established with them— relationships that in

⁹ The organization of groups with children in multiple ages founds the search for new ways in Early Childhood Education. It seeks to contemplate children in her differences and to overcome the idea of child development as based on stages of psychological and biological development.

turn mobilize the teacher towards knowing and recreating his/her own teaching, favoring the production of a daily routine in which evaluation practices are developed collectively.

With Maria Luiza, several voices and different types of learning will be heard when, dialoguing with her father, he feeds her thoughts and her imagination. The teacher – who is now a viewer, sees herself taking part in the child's learning, still knowing she cannot determine it. As resources for her pedagogical praxis, she employs observation of the scenes and her own notes, because she understands that the opportunities for exchanges between adults and children are important for sharing children's accomplishments. When she refers to her notes, which are a result of her daily observations, she finds the elements to articulate evaluations that aim at shedding light on processes that are not yet clear to the child, to her family or to the teacher.

When the teacher brings her records of unscripted exchanges she observed – such as the one described above – she finds evidence of the child's learning. With the support of a mural board, Maria Luiza narrates what she has experienced, integrating different understandings, expressing curiosities, knowledge, competencies, abilities, feelings and cultural values that are present in her experiences. In her dialogue with her father, she points to discoveries; she distinguishes, explains, builds relations and reprocesses thoughts. In the enunciation game, when putting language into gear, she internalizes rules, postures and acts, while she gains control of operations and produces meanings, therefore building herself as a subject (SMOLKA, 1988).

Language as an object of learning and teaching is also present in the scene in which Sofia, Enzo and Isabel challenge each other and their teacher by means of writing; in full interaction, they reflect on the world before them, and they move with it. While watching the children interacting, the teacher feels challenged to establish a dialogue with them so as to promote other significant actions and consequently widen their experience with writing – something that seemed to interest them at that moment. The notes made on this situation will help the teacher focus on the different processes installed, appreciate them thoroughly and assign new meanings to them in areas where they relate to learning and teaching. Thus, the teacher puts forward a way of evaluating that intends to favor more diverse learning, integrating several types of information by means of articulating observations, infant behaviors and the knowledge they can express at the time.

By interacting in daily social relations, children enunciate themselves and mobilize the teacher's investigative posture. By accepting their enunciation we assure them a place for acting in a pedagogical relationship, which includes playing a part in the movement of producing evaluation in a process.

What connections can be made between the moments and movements presented and the children's evaluation? The emphasis of evaluation is placed on the fact that Maria Luiza, Isabel, Enzo, Nicolas and Sofia can talk about themselves, because they have things to say about what they think, how they feel, what they learn and what they desire; about their learning processes in a world that they share and from the places they occupy in the relationships they establish. After being invited by the children, the teacher engages with them, starting off with a dialogue as defined by Freire (FREIRE, 1987), to inquire on what *they* are revealing as pertinent to *their* experiences, considering their infant subjectivity. In this encounter, time as experienced by the infant extrapolates adult-centered logics and incites reflection on the thoughts of each child while weaving their learning and also on the meanings attributed to what they produce and to the conclusions that emerge in their production.

Teachers' knowledge about the place where play and interactions take place – when children are actually learning, dialoguing with the movements revealed in the scenes – produce clues on how to move ahead with planning for, and with the children. The practice of evaluation integrates with planning when it offers hints on the paths to tread in order to amplify what is announced as possibility. In this process, the multiple records taken by both adults and children gain meaning when they are accepted as expressions of “critical and creative observation of activities, the games and the interactions among children, in their day to day” (BRASIL, 2010, p. 29, our translation). Close observation and careful registration require sharp listening and the participation of children. We understand that “listening” can take on two different meanings: a methodological meaning and a political meaning – to be addressed further in the article.

In order to approach the former, let us refer to the work of Rocha (2008). According to this author, when it comes to research involving children, listening goes beyond hearing or paying attention to, because listening always involves interpretation. She highlights how much the intentions put forward in communication may go beyond verbal language, to include the “bodily expressions, gestures and faces” of the child (ROCHA, 2008, p. 45, our translation). Considering this, how should one understand Enzo's and Sofia's gaze at Isabel's writing? What about Sofia's look at her name written conventionally on the file, and its further dismissal?

Observations and notes – permeated by listening – are indispensable for evaluation practices that are sensitive to children's processes. However, studies show that they cannot by themselves guarantee separation from their classificatory and selective biases, modeled from abstract and idealized “children” (HOFFMANN, 2009; ESTEBAN, 1993) and deployed as verification of the child's acquisition of contents listed in prescriptive curricula, guided by

preconceived answers according to fixed learning standards. It is important to break from the principles that regulate the processes by which children are made subordinate, assigned a civic status as underage and made invisible in the public scene – with consequences such as having fewer rights, including the rights relative to their participation in planning, conduct and evaluation of school activities (SARMENTO; FERNANDES; TOMÁS, 2007).

This is the framework in which the above-mentioned authors determine the political significance of the act of listening to children. They argue that listening to children on decisions regarding aspects of the school's routine can contribute to making them active throughout the entire process. Making children co-evaluators of their own learning in the contexts in which they are inserted endorses their power and grants consequence to the idea of childhood as a generation constituted by active subjects, with rights of their own (SARMENTO; FERNANDES; TOMÁS, 2007) and as a plural experience of transformation and creation (KOHAN, 2007). A school intended to be democratic needs to affirm the rights of children and infant acts.

Understanding the processes experienced by children requires overcoming certain movements that reduce children's education. This in turn entails the need to integrate them with evaluation proposals that are connected to processes that can rescue their childhood experiences and that are capable of empowering the teaching activity. This integration lead to the constitution of contexts for co-construction of evaluation practices. We propose conceiving evaluation as a practice of investigation (ESTEBAN, 1999), which takes as reference the plural learning movements and not univocal teaching objectives. In this perspective, evaluation makes no sense as production of a narrative on the child being evaluated, but rather as a movement carried out by sharing narratives that make evident what is interweaved in the *learn-teaching* relationship (ALVES; GARCIA, 1999) so as to foment the permanent widening of knowledge in school routine. Therefore, it makes the teacher reflect on different processes going on among children, where this relates to the proposition by Hoffmann (2009), and converse with them in order to capture hints of their learning, their interpretations and possibilities of teaching actions. When fomenting teaching practices that investigate into the teacher's own practice, evaluation is also conducted as a bet on a formative process that is articulated by the practice that is experienced and reflected upon, both individually and collectively.

In this movement, children's interpellations in their expressive manifestations – gestures, absences, silences, actions, looks, discourse, movements and others – question teachers in their posture, their understandings and pedagogies, mobilizing a displacement of their adult understanding, to the limits of their comprehension. Children are included in the process as active

subjects, empowering their own capacity to reflect on what they experience and on how they comprehend their processes. When invited to participate in the evaluation process, they cause a rupture with the classificatory root which often times supports it. The presence of children reconfigures the pedagogical dynamics and places it as part of a wider movement for reconstruction of the meaning of schools, aiming to make them more democratic.

Our studies into teachers' experiences point to the importance of the institutional scope when making decisions regarding evaluation practices. They signal teachers' movements of record keeping and personal ways of collecting, systematizing and interpreting information on children's learning and development. These movements articulate with teachers' subjective conceptions of constructs such as Early Childhood Education, childhood, learning, development, curriculum, evaluation and others. All of them concur to fundament and guide an understanding of *what is* an evaluation, *what it is used for*, as well as *how* and *why* evaluations are used in this first stage of basic education.

Considering this set of connections, we understand that it is important to keep the following question alive: How can preschool children take part in their own evaluations? It is also important to ask: What type of evaluation can we propose after assuming that the infant condition as such bring vitality to schools and that children do not conform – but differ?

For an infant way of teaching

Maria Luiza brings her dad by the hand. Enzo, Sofia, Nicolas and Isabel share the table where they draw. Casual, trivial scenes that invite us to come a little closer to the children and to the teacher too, so as to articulate with the work done with the children. We are constantly seeking for this encounter so that we can move on together, questioning evaluation practices in the daily pedagogical work and expanding our reflexive exercise on evaluation a little further, as a means to inquire into its constitution, its processes and its results. These are movements that affirm the role played by dialogues and reflections in the composition of experiences and learning that are meaningful to the children; movements that can only take place when the teachers taking part in them are also learning; movements that constitute their daily practices.

This makes us think about the force of continuous evaluation for continuing teacher education. Although teacher education is widely discussed in the literature on Early Childhood Education, there are insufficient studies addressing

school evaluation as a mobilizer of teacher education, as we have pointed out. However, this is highlighted in studies conducted by Esteban (2020); Fernandes (2018); and Louzada (2020), and stress the need to regard teacher education as a way to allow dialogical, reflexive evaluations based on participation and as an opportunity to articulate formative processes.

Considering an interlacing of experience, teaching actions and teacher education we have devised the idea of infant teaching based on our dialogue with issues that are present in the work of Kohan (2007, 2019). Kohan argues that childhood consists in a plural type of experience, filled with knowledge and questions. Infancy relates to making oneself present in the world, it characterizes human life for its capacity to transform what seems definitive and constitutes itself as a force, so that all lives are true lives of joy, curiosity and love.

Although undisputed, the connection between childhood and child, the infant experience expands beyond age limits. Childhood is therefore a chronological matter and a matter of experience: a possibility that constitutes the human being. In this sense, it is also “a condition for living through school life that is sensitive to self-inquiries, to engagement with a pedagogical act at once restless and creative” (KOHAN, 2019, p. 188-189, our translation).

With the force of this condition, we teachers revive within ourselves our experiences as educators of children, and we feel our numerous dialogues with peer educators resonate within us – in an exercise of *sentipensante*. Fals Borda (2009) calls “sentipensante” those who can combine reason and emotion, to create and recreate culture and develop denser knowledge on reality, linking art and science. In their encounters with children, adults feel their own condition as infants mobilized. This interaction makes emerge the multiple elements in which this infant condition interweaves with teaching, bringing the teacher face to face with her own astonishment. She is surprised and she formulates questions, she experiences something new. She can then problematize what is expected of educating infancy, in the terms introduced by Kohan:

Childhood is not something to be educated but something that educates. In a political education, it is not only about (or above all) molding childhood, but about listening to it, caring for it, keeping it alive, experiencing it. Childhood remains present throughout a person’s life, bringing curiosity, joyfulness, vitality. Political education is education within childhood: In its attention, sensitivity, curiosity, restlessness, in its presence (KOHAN, 2019, p. 161, our translation).

Facing the challenge of assuming the connections between education and childhood in the sense proposed by this author, and supporting the idea that childhood is something that educates, we propose the idea of infant teaching. A way of teaching articulated in a vigor produced in the relationships between adults and children in school routine, when they are open to encounters and curiosity, to pursuing knowledge in its complexity, to loving and enchantment, to interpellating others. Teaching that educates when it becomes real *within* and *for* dialogue, where the subjects participating in the pedagogical process are assumed as partners in the school dynamics, considering all the specifics of their age range.

The routine shared among children and teachers brings to the teaching occupation the movements and enchantments present in childhood – sensitivity, restlessness, constant inquiring, creativity – as a condition for human experience and evidence of its unfinishedness. This unfinishedness is for Freire (1987) articulated with the existence of education a humanization project. Infant teaching summons one’s encounter with the other so as to make education possible; it also problematizes the educational act as action by one (adults) onto one other (children) and interrupts – even if circumstantially – the adult-centered discourse that upholds, structures, orders, classifies and defines. The infant condition stamps on teaching the permanent possibility of doubt and interrogation, of search and admiration, mobilized by interpellation and transformation of both subjects and acts – which simultaneously mobilize infant gestures in teachers’ actions and bring new meaning to them.

At this point it is relevant to bring back the idea mentioned earlier, of evaluation as a process to generate inquiries, shared as a means to knowing and making decisions regarding planning and execution of pedagogical work, and link this idea to reflections on the teaching profession, since it is a process based on participation in which “young curiosity” (FREIRE *apud* KOHAN, 2019, p. 170, our translation) reinvigorates the restlessness present in the pedagogical relationship. Proposed as an investigative practice, evaluation is produced in synch with the pedagogy of questions (FREIRE; FAUNDEZ, 1985), a key construct to understanding the place occupied both by children during the emergence of questions in the pedagogical work and by childhood, so as to make it the key articulator of the process. The dialogue established with children’s actions offers teachers a powerful invitation to start asking themselves questions, or to think about the questions put forth by their pupils in a process likely to unveil curiosity, dreams and creation. In this encounter – mediated by a desire to know – lies the opportunity for infant teaching, in which one educates and transforms.

The experience as educators of children, some of which are composing this article, allied to field studies in the area of Early Childhood Education, produces this teacher who, touched by her pupils, finds her own childhood and opens herself to learning from the dialogue that entails. Thus, teachers also encounter what is unknown, the boundaries of their own knowledge, the obstacles set by their adult-centered posture. The childhoods dialoguing in this encounter will provoke other forms of inquiring about the world, of living it and understanding it; a new joy in the loving and transforming pedagogical act.

In infant teaching, evaluation as an investigative practice empowers the education of teachers-researchers (GARCIA, 1996), who problematize their experiences and make *asking* a significant thread for weaving knowledge in their praxis.

Teachers-researchers strengthen collective actions. Their questions, built within their evaluative practices foster debates on the guidelines provided for example in the political-pedagogical framework, and feed the development of a continuing teacher education program that is integrated to other school activities. Problematizing their daily practice brings about interpellations that motivate a search for theory and other types of knowledge that may seem relevant. The teaching experience becomes much wider in the sense that making room for childhood translates into creation and offers new meaning to the pedagogical practice.

Infant Paths

With daily scenes of children meeting with adults, we have brought into the evaluation debate aspects that have not been discussed sufficiently in the scope of the studies on Early Childhood Education. Moving down this path we signaled school routine as *spacetime* for learning, teaching and weaving knowledge starting from multiple epistemologies; *spacetime* where questions are formulated, turned to the *practicaltheoretical* dimensions of the work done together with the children, who deserve to be included within educational research (GARCIA, 2003). These questions, however, also require familiarity with what is presented as routine, often trivial and unimportant, but which guards relevant and enticing movements for understanding their weaving.

The encounters with the teachers and the children made evident the threads taken by us as mobilizers of the discussions among the authors of the present article, with the narratives of their experiences and with authors that dedicate

themselves to the study of childhoods and of evaluation, including evaluation in infant education. Immersed in so many challenges and opportunities, we ventured to expose an understanding of evaluation that is coherent with – on the one hand – assuming a child as the subject of rights, and – on the other – with regarding infant teaching as worthwhile bringing into the debate.

Evaluation appears as a significant practice for identifying such aspects, in a dialogue with children, regarding their perceptions as relevant for understanding their processes, reflecting on the results achieved and making decisions on the continuity of pedagogical work. In this article we focused on two school movements in which the evaluation of learning is articulated in Early Childhood Education: One of them turned to the understanding of children's processes, incorporating teachers' notes as documents that are central to the evaluation conducted by means of retrieving what has been experienced – including observations by the children of their own learning, reflections on it, interpretation of the information contained therein in order to develop an understanding of children's learning, of the paths that they have treaded and of their interaction with the pedagogical proposal. A conclusion that speaks of the child, based on what was accomplished together with him/her, and of the pedagogical work itself.

The second movement is supported by the understanding that this conclusion offers information that is indispensable to planning its continuity, which is why it should be appropriated by the teacher so that she can problematize her own praxis. Upon doing so, the teacher comes face to face with the limits of her own knowledge, which are precisely the indicators of new knowledge emerging as necessary and powerful to deepen her action in Early Childhood Education. These aspects point to continuing education as something inherent to the teaching profession.

Along all this interweaving we have drafted the idea of educating in infant teaching, retrieving childhood as one of the conditions of human experience. When it stresses the care, the presence and enchantment of knowing, infant teaching finds in evaluation as a practice of investigation a significant process for maintaining restlessness and creation as characteristics of the pedagogical process. With them we feel once again the power of walking hand in hand with children.

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