CULTURAL PEDAGOGIES AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDREN'S IDENTITIES: REFLECTIONS FROM PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes playing in Early Childhood Education as a cultural pedagogy, that is, a set of practices and discourses that teach and shape ways of being and acting. Cultural pedagogies are present in various social contexts, including school, and influence the construction of children's identities, especially with regard to gender and sexuality norms. This article derives from a master's research, with the objective of understanding children's conceptions about gender and sexuality from playing in the context of Early Childhood Education. The methodology is part of the qualitative approach, characterized as participatory research. The subjects of the research were children from an Early Childhood Education class. For data generation, participant observation was used, as well as pedagogical workshops, and the findings were analyzed through the Nuclei of Significance. It was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee. The results indicate that toys and games play a central role in the reproduction of sexist and sexist norms and practices. However, it was also observed that, when playing, children challenge and resignify these norms, demonstrating the possibility of new ways of being and acting in relation to gender and sexuality issues from early childhood.

Keywords: Cultural pedagogies. Early Childhood Education. Play. Gender and sexuality.

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INTRODUCTION

When addressing the subjects of Early Childhood Education and their identities, it is essential to understand the historical, social and cultural interconnection of the conception of childhood. Conceptions about childhood are not universal, they were built over time from changes in the context and in the social routine. Thus, children have not always been at the center of research, public policies and educational discussions.

Reflecting on childhood requires, before any action, an analysis of the historical context of contemporaneity, seeking to overcome differences, inequalities and exclusions. Conceptions of childhood go beyond care and assistance, emphasizing the need to consider the child in connection with the world around him. This understanding must include playful and creative experience, regardless of the social class and culture in which it is inserted.

Historically, childhood has been seen as a "natural" phase of human growth and development, tied to a biological idea and characterized by fixed and unchanging stages. However, for authors such as Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (2001), this conception transcends biological aspects, and is also a social and historical construction. In this sense, the child came to be recognized as a socially active subject, breaking with the vision of a merely preparatory phase for adult life.

The influence of social and cultural aspects on child development is undeniable. As Pozas (2011, p. 23) points out, "the child must be studied in his relations with the environment, within the context in which he lives". This perspective reinforces the existence of children's cultures that permeate multiple spaces and influence the way children perceive reality, collaborating for the formation of their identities as social subjects.

For Stuart Hall (2011, p. 9), cultural identities emerge from the individual's belonging to a certain social context. However, the conditions of contemporary society are "fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality that in the past had provided us with solid locations as social individuals." In view of this, it is essential to understand how childhood is crossed by such fragmentations and how this impacts the construction of children's identities within the educational space.

When it is recognized that the constructions of the various identities occur through the child's interactions with the social environment, starting in the family context and expanding to the school, the child's entry into Early Childhood Education is valued, which presents itself as a social universe distinct from that of the family, capable of contributing to

new interactions and expanding their knowledge about themselves and others. The "collective spaces of education and care have shown that young children from 0 to 6 years old are capable of multiple relationships, are bearers of history, are producers of children's cultures, are subjects of rights" (FARIA, 2006, p. 285), pointing out that childhood permeates the age of Early Childhood Education, seen as a phase as fleeting and concomitant as the other phases.

Accepting all existing cultural diversity, Sarmento (2005) highlights the need to analyze the social conditions of children by times, regions and contexts, since new modes of interpretation emerge, pointing out that, in Early Childhood Education, what dominates in political thought and in the pedagogical act continues to be the ahistorical, universalized and socially emptied view of the education of children in preschool situations.

In daily work, one should "incorporate the discourse of differences not as a deviation, which is the place where the different has been placed, but as a motto of our practices and relationships between children" (ABRAMOWICZ, 2001, p. 32), since, in social life, children build their identities, learning, from an early age, their meanings and experiencing, in the daily relationships of the Nursery and Preschool, the social condition of being a child (FINCO; OLIVEIRA, 2011).

According to the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Education institutions must provide opportunities for elements of culture that enrich the development and social insertion of children, through diversified learning, carried out in situations of interaction, pointing out identity as:

> [...] a concept that includes the idea of distinction, of a mark of difference between people, starting with the name, followed by all the physical characteristics, ways of acting and thinking and personal history. Its construction is gradual and occurs through social interactions established by the child, in which he/she alternately imitates and merges with the other to differentiate himself from him/her, often using opposition (BRASIL, 1998b, p. 12).

Through social interactions, the process of identity occurs gradually, and playing is presented as one of the fundamental activities for the development of identity and autonomy. The framework also presents two possible problems for the construction of the child's identities: "one of them refers to some children who may manifest a lack of confidence in themselves or exhibit attitudes of self-devaluation", and "another refers to manifestations of prejudice and discrimination directed at some children" (BRASIL, 1998b, p. 69). The highlights are considered correct, at the same time that the need for

educational mediation is reintegrated in the sense of valuing self-image, collaborating with the manifestation of multiple cultures – this is only possible if we commune with the perspective of the DCNEI, which conceives the child as:

> [...] The center of curriculum planning, it is a historical subject with rights that develops in the interactions, relationships and daily practices made available to it and established by it with adults and children of different ages in the groups and cultural contexts in which it is inserted. (BRASIL, 2013, p. 86).

Thinking of the child as a unique subject opens space to reflect on the desired Early Childhood Education model, the one planned and built in the child's daily life, which respects the child and provides discoveries of himself and the world that surrounds him, making him the protagonist of his life, social and cultural learning. Since "each child has his own rhythm and way of placing himself in relationships and interactions, of manifesting emotions and curiosity, and elaborates his own way of acting in the various situations he experiences" (BRASIL, 2013, p. 88).

Although the organic dimension is present for the development of the child's abilities, "they are not universal constitutions biologically determined and waiting for the moment to mature. They are historically and culturally produced in the relationships they establish with the material and social world mediated by more experienced partners" (BRASIL, 2013, p. 88).

In this sense, Carla Rinaldi (2020, p.155-156) emphasizes the importance of the image one has of the child to define their identity, in which "many different images would be possible: highlighting what the child is and has, can be or can do, or, on the contrary, emphasizing what the child is not and does not have, cannot be and cannot do".

Through the multiple images that adults build of children, it is possible to recognize their potential and interpret their expectations, providing contexts that value them or not. This then becomes "a determining factor in the definition of their ethical and social identity, their rights, and the educational contexts that are offered to them" (RINALDI, 2020, p.156). The trajectories experienced by the child in school spaces in the interaction with adults and their peers expand new possibilities of learning in development.

Articulating the construction of knowledge, the development of skills and the formation of attitudes and values, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) presents among the general competencies of basic education:

> Exercise empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution and cooperation, making oneself respected and promoting respect for others and human rights, welcoming and valuing the diversity of individuals and social groups, their knowledge, identities, cultures and potentialities, without prejudice of any kind (BRASIL, 2018, p. 10).

Interactions and games are also pointed out as guiding axes of practices in Early Childhood Education, and, among the Learning and Development Rights in Early Childhood Education:

> To know themselves and build their personal, social and cultural identity, constituting a positive image of themselves and their groups to which they belong, in the various experiences of care, interactions, games and languages experienced in the school institution and in their family and community context (BRASIL, 2018, p. 39).

For the child, the right to know oneself is fundamental in the construction of identity and social formation, through the experiences provided, participation and interactions, and it is up to Early Childhood Education to promote learning for the development of children, providing recognition, respect and appreciation of multiple identities and their own identity.

It cannot be forgotten that the world of the contemporary child, which also permeates the school space, is marked by distinct realities and peculiar cultural conditions, which produce different ways of constructing their identities mediated by the multiple languages, signs and symbols present in everyday life, constantly seeking to announce that "meanings are not given forever, they are always transitory, surmountable, because they are constituted in the daily fabric of history" (BUJES, 2003, p. 4).

Consequently, childhood experiences, even within the same context, manifest themselves in different ways. Stuart Hall (2006, p. 11) pointed out that "the subject still has an inner core or essence that is the 'real self', but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the 'outside' cultural worlds and the identities that these worlds offer". Thus, children's identities are multiple and dynamic, being built in the interaction between different social positions and different contexts, resulting in new ways of being and recognizing oneself in the world.

Thus, understanding childhoods and the construction of children's identities required recognizing that these processes were dynamic and crossed by the sociocultural context. Children, immersed in culture, thought, acted and developed in a unique way, and the time and space of play played an essential role in this process, allowing them to know and transform the world around them (CORSINO, 2008). In this sense, play is not an isolated or natural act, but a socially constructed process, in which the child interacts with cultural

contents, resignifies them and transforms them (BROUGÈRE, 2010). When playing, they express themselves, experiment with roles, expand their experiences and establish relationships with the environment and with others. Play is, therefore, a central element in the constitution of children's identities and in the way children perceive and participate in the world.

Thus, situating play in Early Childhood Education requires a broader understanding, considering it as a process of cultural and social interaction. The child, from birth, is inserted in a context that influences his playful experiences, making playing an instrument of learning and construction of meanings. In this sociocultural perspective, play presents itself as an artifact that allows the child to appropriate culture and resignify it, consolidating itself as one of the main forms of expression of childhood and integral development (SAVIO, 2017).

Based on these assumptions, the following reflections deepen the role of play in Early Childhood Education, analyzing its influence on the construction of children's identities and on the development of children in the multiple spaces in which they are inserted.

METHODOLOGY

This research was inserted in the perspective of Cultural Studies, which encompasses categories such as gender, sexuality, national identity and race (NELSON; TREICHLER; GROSSBERG, 2013). This methodological approach was characterized as a bricolage, being pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflective. Cultural Studies presented itself as interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, rejecting fixed definitions, as it analyzed culture as a dynamic and changing phenomenon.

In the field of Cultural Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies questioned the social constructions of femininities and masculinities, rejecting an essentialist view of men and women (FÉLIX, 2019). Gender relations were understood as culturally influenced, establishing distinct and unequal roles between men and women.

The research adopted the methodology of participant research, as it was more adequate to the proposed objectives. This approach allowed the active involvement of the participants in their own reality, promoting interaction between the researcher and the investigated population. Brandão (1999) highlighted that, in this type of research, the researcher worked with the interest group, participating in its political practice.

Participatory research was understood as a practice connected to historical praxis, using scientific knowledge to intervene in reality, without compromising methodological rigor (DEMO, 2000). This approach revealed hidden aspects of the theories, considering practice as an essential means of understanding, requiring the involvement and commitment of the researcher (BRANDÃO, 1999). Three fundamental elements characterized this methodology: the production of knowledge by popular groups, the definition of the use and political destination of the knowledge produced, and the participation of scientific knowledge in the work with the community (BRANDÃO, 1999).

The role of the researchers was that of mediators, enabling reflections for the subjects involved. In addition, to encourage participants to identify, analyze and solve problems, making them co-responsible for the knowledge produced, and not mere task executors (LE BOTERF, 1999). Schmidt (2006) highlighted that this interaction between researchers and participants requires intellectual, cognitive and affective effort, favoring the negotiation of themes, reciprocal understanding and the clarification of obscure aspects.

THE LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH

The research was carried out in a private educational institution, with 25 years of existence, which served from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School. The subjects of the research were children in the last year of Early Childhood Education, aged between 5 and 6 years. Ethical guidelines were followed, including the Informed Consent Form (ICF) for guardians and the Informed Consent Form (TALE) for children. According to Fernandes (2016), informed consent required an explicit act, understanding of the research, voluntariness and the possibility of giving up at any time. Sigaud et al. (2009) highlighted the importance of allowing children to express their consent through words or gestures, ensuring security and freedom of choice.

Adherence to the research was not total, as two guardians refused authorization, despite the children's interest. Justifications included the need for further reflection and disagreement on the topic addressed. Research involving gender issues often faces resistance, as demonstrated by Garrido (2017), who found difficulties in addressing the topic in the school environment. Guizzo, Zago and Santos (2016) emphasized that, even with the child's consent, the final decision was up to the parents, according to the regulations of the Research Ethics Committee.

The research highlighted the complexity and challenges of investigations with children, requiring caution, flexibility and respect for the peculiarities of childhood (DELGADO & MÜLLER, 2005). The involvement of the participants and the interaction with the school community were fundamental for the construction of knowledge and the understanding of social and cultural dynamics in the context of Early Childhood Education.

CHARACTERIZING RESEARCH INTERLOCUTORS

After a few visits to the school environment and the building of bonds of trust, it became essential to ensure the active participation of the children in the research. Considering the importance of child protagonism and the visibility of the child in the investigative process, it was proposed, in dialogue with them, that they choose a fictitious name "for play" for their identification throughout the study. This initiative aimed not only to preserve their identity, but also to strengthen their connection with the research, allowing them to recognize themselves in the constructed narrative.

In this sense, Sônia Kramer (2002) points out that, although children's reports are frequently transcribed in research, children often do not recognize themselves in these records, do not access the reading of their own testimonies, nor do they see themselves as authors of their productions, remaining on the margins of the process. Thus, by adopting strategies that favor their effective participation, we seek to break with this invisibility, valuing their voice and agency in the construction of knowledge. The author Zeila Dermatini (2009, p.8) points out that, when working in research with children, it is necessary to "initially unveil the history of each child, of the group to which this child belongs and of the group to which he or she is linked at the time of the research". That is: which institution he belongs to, with which group he relates, or even individually. In this research, we tried to offer the possibility of autonomy for children, however, it was necessary, at all times, to maintain the "description" and "protect" the children, even if they spoke for themselves through the terms of assent.

Also from this perspective, Zago, Guizzo and Santos (2016, p. 200) defend the ethical challenges of research with children, highlighting those involving gender and sexuality that "if it is true that anonymity is required to protect participants, it is also verifiable that anonymity can mean the reification of certain stigmatizing relationships", betting on the political involvement of the researcher and his/her position as a subject and in relation to the participants.

By explaining that they could choose how they would like their name to appear in the research, opting for the choice of any name or real names, the children were given the opportunity to perceive themselves in the research as fundamental protagonists.

Next, we describe the gender identified in the enrollment form, followed by the name adopted by the child participating in the research, its inspiration and justification for the choice.

Chart 6: Participants in the Research

Gender	Fictitious name	Inspiration	Justification
Male	Pinocchio	Inspired by the children's tale Pinocchio	*"I'm going to be Pinocchio, I've already watched his movie."* Pinocchio
Female	Elza	Character from the movie Frozen	*"I want to be Elza because she looks like me."* Elza
Male	Captain America	Superhero from comic books, cartoons and movies.	*"I want to be Captain America, he's a superhero."* Captain America
Female	Valeria de Carrossel	Character in the children's soap opera Carousel.	*"Auntie, I want to be Valéria de Carrossel".* Valeria de Carrossel
Male	Luccas Neto	Luccas Neto[3] has the largest children's channel on *Brazilian YouTube*.	*"My name will be Luccas Neto, because he is very good, famous on the channel".* Luccas Neto
Male	Flash	Character of a fictional team of superheroes – the Justice League.	*"I want to be the Flash, super fast."* Flash
Female	Barbie	Barbie is a doll produced by Mattel.	*"I want to be called Barbie aunt, because I have a lot of her dolls."* Barbie
Male	Sônic	A hedgehog, SEGA's mascot and one of the greatest icons of video games	*"My name is going to be Sonic, I like his movie."* Sônic
Male	Player	The player is a professional soccer athlete.	*"Player. [...] because I want to be the best football player like Neymar."* Player
Female	Luluka	Luluka[4] has the largest children's channel on *Brazilian YouTube*.	*"I want to be Luluka, did you know I'm a fan of hers? She has a channel."* Luluka
Female	Cinderella	Fairy tale princess.	*"I'm going to be a princess, let me choose [...] Cinderella".* Cinderella

Source: Own archive, 2021.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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[3] Luccas Neto is a *youtuber* on the Luccas Toon channel. Available at: https://www.encurtador.com.br/wxO59
[4] Luluka is a *youtuber* who owns the channel: Growing with Luluka. Available at: https://www.encurtador.com.br/jDXZ8

The workshops as instruments of data generation can provide those involved with spaces for negotiation, awakening the critical potential of producing collective meanings. Mary Spink, Jane Menegon and Vera Medrado (2014, p. 33) argue that:

> The workshops are configured as privileged ethical-political tools, as they provide the creation of dialogical spaces for symbolic exchanges and the co-construction of other possibilities of meanings about the themes discussed, whose effects are not limited to the uses that researchers can make of this material, but also alert to potential transformations in the discursive practices generated in that context. in an inseparable fusion between what is conventionally called 'information collection and information production' (SPINK; MENEGON; MEDRADO, 2014, p. 33).

Thus, in order to enter the "world of the child", some pedagogical workshops were held, which allowed us to respond to the objectives of this research**.** From pedagogical workshops, it was possible to enter the children's context, so that, as a participating researcher, we conducted the discussions, allowing the sharing of experiences and reflections mediated by the interaction between the subjects. We sought to listen to the children, accept their narratives, listen to their speeches, recognizing them "as social actors in their own right, from their own field" (SARMENTO, 2006, p. 1), since the child has desires, talents, capacities, dreams and, above all, an opinion about everyday events.

Carla Rinaldi (2020, p. 236) points out that children need to be seen as active, capable and strong beings, excluding predetermined visions, as delicate, needy and impossible, making the pedagogy of listening an instrument for the adult. Therefore, "listening means being open to differences and recognizing the value of the other's point of view and interpretation."

According to Cecília Warschauer (2001), talking, in addition to developing the capacity for logical argumentation, provides physical contact, alluding to relational skills, emotions, respect for the other in listening and speaking, waiting for one's turn, inserting oneself in dialogues and facing differences, placing oneself in the other's point of view, among other skills.

The pedagogical workshop "Buying toys" aimed to identify gender and sexuality pedagogies from children's toys and games. To carry out this workshop, the children were invited to sit on the floor of the classroom in a circle, when they were presented with some pamphlets with images of toys, as shown in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1 – Pedagogical Workshop: Buying toys

Source: Own archive, 2021.

When talking about the pamphlets, we asked if the children knew the images. Immediately, most of the children raised their hands, and the first lines appeared: *"I've seen it in a store"* (Luluka); *"I've seen it on television"* (Luccas Neto). Subsequently, the necessary dialogues were held to generate the data.

In the second moment of the workshop, the children, randomly grouped at the tables, received an A4 180kg sheet, glue and scissors. From the pamphlets, they were asked to cut out the images of toys they liked or would spend playing with and to build a pamphlet of their preferences.

Figure 2 - Pamphlets produced by the children

Source: Own archive, 2021.

When each child finished his pamphlet, everyone returned to the center of the room, in a circle, so that the children presented their pamphlets, stimulating dialogue, a stage in

which they began to narrate their desires and, at times, aversion to certain toys. Once the dialogue was concluded, the posters were collected.

In the third moment of the pedagogical workshop "Buying toys", several toys, new and used, were made available in the center of the room (Figure 3), considering the preferences of the children, who could play both individually and collectively. Euphoria took over the space as the children handled the toys, opened the packages and started spontaneous interactions. Their statements, such as "auntie, can you open the toy?", "I'll take it home" and "can you choose more than one?", constituted the pre-indicators, which were grouped into indicators and transformed into nuclei of meaning for the analysis. The children's joy was evident, reflecting their enchantment with the activity.

Figure 3 - Toys made available in the Pedagogical Workshop: buying toys

Source: Own archive, 2021.

The following scenario describes the observations and notes in the Field Diary during a time when the children played freely with various toys. During the 20 minutes established for the activity, they began to open the toys, share, group together and establish their own negotiations of exchanges and rules. One of the most prominent observations was that of Sonic, who, in other situations, showed resistance to the rules, but, at this moment, was by Barbie's side, helping her to tidy up her dollhouse. The observer was attentive, discreetly, and noticed that Sónic began to play with Barbie, making food with the "pink" pots, while Barbie played at changing the doll. Barbie said: "I'm going to take care of my daughter, she already has a full diaper, I'm going to change it", and they continued the game. Then, Sônic warned: "The food is ready", and the game of exchanges continued until Flash, who was playing with the Batman doll, called Sônic to play with the Iron Man doll. Quickly, Sónic changed the game, starting a puppet fight. Meanwhile, Barbie remained playing and interacting with other girls. At the same moment,

Pinocchio chose the red kitchen kit as his favorite toy and spent all his time playing with it, sometimes alone, sometimes with Luccas Neto, Luluka and Cinderella.

The situation described is related to the propositions that, in certain spaces, children play spontaneously with toys chosen without constraints. Boys participate in games seen as women's functions, and children play by exchanging male and female roles during the game (FINCO, 2003).

Pinocchio**'s choice** for the kitchen kit is associated with his professional choice in the pedagogical workshop "Playing with professions", considering that, through play, the child tries to represent, understand and resignify his social and cultural experiences. I included, in the methodology used, the possibility of dramatization, based on the evidence of Willian Corsaro (2009, p. 36), who, when reporting his ethnographic research with children, presents numerous observed situations in which the culture of the context is immersed in play and vice versa. The dramatization game "[...] In the sociodramatic game, children enjoy the assumption and expression of power", in which they reorganize the adult "models" to meet their interests, assuming different social roles, such as mother, father, daughter/son, professional, etc.

In the analysis of the nuclei of signification, cultural pedagogies in the construction of gender identities were evidenced, influenced by several artifacts that reinforced binary characteristics. It was observed that elements such as the color pink, dolls and household toys, such as pots and makeup, were often associated with the feminine. Blue, on the other hand, was attributed to toys such as superheroes, cars and animals, identified as belonging to the male universe. These social standards about what was considered appropriate for "boys" or "girls" were manifested in children's toys and games, delimiting spaces and contributing to the education of subjects within these norms.

It was also found that, during the games, the choice of activities was influenced by the cultural pedagogies of gender, although there were situations of rupture and resistance. The analysis of another core of meaning revealed that the Early Childhood Education environment investigated was crossed by cultural pedagogies that restricted children in the experimentation of other ways of being and being in this space. However, in the interaction with their peers, the children demonstrated the ability to transgress socially constituted norms, evidencing other possibilities of masculinity and femininity. This context indicated a more flexible dynamic of acceptance in relation to gender and sexuality positions, even if culturally naturalized**.**

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The pedagogical workshops developed throughout this research proved to be valuable instruments to understand cultural pedagogies and their impacts on the construction of gender identities and sexuality in childhood. Through the observation of children's interactions, discourses and choices made by children, it was possible to identify both the reproduction of conventional social norms and moments of rupture and transgression of these norms.

Toys and games were configured as central elements in the production of meanings about gender and sexuality. The children, when interacting with different types of toys, demonstrated preferences that, in many cases, reflected cultural and binary impositions, but also evidenced spaces for negotiation and resignification of social rules. The observations pointed out that, although the school environment is impregnated by cultural pedagogies that reinforce distinctions between boys and girls, the interaction between children allows the expansion of possibilities of expression and experimentation of different social roles.

Another relevant aspect identified was the importance of attentive listening and recognition of children as active subjects and producers of culture. The workshops allowed them to express their desires, feelings and opinions, favoring a space for dialogue and expansion of repertoires. In this way, the research contributed to reaffirming the need for pedagogical practices that respect and value child diversity, promoting a more inclusive and equitable education.

In summary, the findings of this investigation reinforce the relevance of an education that questions gender stereotypes and allows children to explore their preferences and potentialities freely. By creating spaces that enable reflection and reconstruction of the social meanings attributed to gender and sexuality, it contributes to the formation of individuals who are more aware and respectful of human diversity.

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