

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION OF BABIES IN EDUCATIONAL-PEDAGOGICAL ACTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The article in question aims to analyze the non-verbal communicative resources that the baby uses to demonstrate his social participation in pedagogical activities that are proposed to him. The subjects of the investigation are fifteen babies, aged between six and twenty months, members of the age group called nursery I of a municipal institution of Early Childhood Education in the city of Aracaju/SE. This is an intervention-research, in which the data were produced through photographs, records in field notes and described in interactive situations. The children's social participation was observed during six pedagogical activities planned and directed by the researcher, held weekly in the babies' reference room. The results showed that the socio-communicative resource frequently used by babies to demonstrate their interest in the proposals addressed to them was the direction of the gaze, followed by the use of the body in movements, gestures, postures, smiles and rapid vocalizations. The results are in line with data from other studies that confirm the socio-communicative power of babies and reveal their social protagonism in the (re)actions in which they expressed their preferences or rejected the pedagogical practices that were directed at them.

Keywords: Babies. Early Childhood Education. Sociocommunicative Resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on the educational potential of babies have been consolidated over the last decades in Brazil. The results of research from the most different areas, especially Sociology of Childhood and Developmental Psychology, have allowed us to consider the child as an active subject, with different socio-communicative capacities to relate, participate in cultural events, create and recreate meanings, be a subject in research, even without having consolidated oral language.

By bringing the perspective of the child, as a subject of rights, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) legitimize the presence of these subjects in educational institutions, due to the benefits that these experiences can provide them (Brasil, 2009). In addition, the recognition of education as a human right (Brasil, 1990) allows children, from infants, to be included in Early Childhood Education environments, enjoying all the rights inherent to this stage and qualified professionals to serve them, always considering the greater interest of the child.

This whole context of positioning the baby as a powerful subject brings new perspectives on the social participation of babies in the institution of Early Childhood Education, as well as on the contributions of different areas of knowledge about the role of communication in educational-pedagogical actions in the context of Early Childhood Education.

In this scenario, much more than an extension of domestic chores, the role of the Early Childhood Education teacher is premised on making use of theoretical, methodological and relational knowledge that allows him to share, welcome, observe and listen to these children. Seeking, through the interlocution between theory and practice, to evaluate and adapt their proposals considering the needs and potentialities of babies (Barbosa, 2010).

According to the literature review study carried out by Anjos *et al.* (2004), the first records of studies carried out in Brazil on the interactive capacity of babies date back to the 70s. In addition, throughout history, there has been a greater interest in investigating the interactional processes of babies with partners of other ages, especially their mothers, than with their peers.

This initial interest in research was transformed and (re)configured due to the social, political, cultural and economic changes that made the entry of children into the collective



space of education occur earlier and earlier, and the research also began to investigate the interactions of babies with their peers.

Thus, from the 80's onwards, with the inclusion of new observation instruments, such as video recording, researchers were allowed to obtain a better detail and refinement about the interactions of babies with their peers, as well as the very concept of interaction was modified. As stated by Carvalho *et al.* (1996, *apud* Anjos et al., 2004, p. 514), video recording resulted in new advances for research, since it "enables the preservation of the phenomenon, providing repetition of observation and more time for reflection on it, enabling the enrichment of its analysis".

The literature review on this theme (Anjos et al., 2004) also points out that the concept of interaction, such as doing something together, was transformed during the observation process with the babies. In this way, much more than doing something together, the interaction with babies and their peers encompasses the regulation of behaviors, even at a distance and even if the baby does not know that he is regulating the behavior of the other.

Based on this initial survey and considering the communicative power of babies in collective education environments, we carried out a mapping in the databases of *Lens* and the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), seeking to identify how the literature has been dealing with this theme in our country in recent decades. The search in the databases was carried out using the following key terms "Early Childhood Education" AND babies AND interaction AND communication, in this order, in the two databases.

In the *Lens* database , 7 (seven) academic works were found, from two areas of knowledge, education and psychology. In BDTD, 21 academic works were found, of which 18 dissertations and 3 theses. As inclusion criteria, studies that dealt with the theme of babies' communication were listed; that were carried out in a collective environment of education. The exclusion criteria were studies involving older children; that were not carried out in a collective context of education; that did not specifically address the sociocommunicative resources used by babies in Early Childhood Education.

In general, studies point to the importance of professionals' recognition of babies' communicative power in contexts of interactions as an important element for the baby's integral development. Different studies reveal that babies, despite not having an established verbal language, have different languages and socio-communicative resources to reveal



their motivations, affections, frustrations when participating in the actions of daily life in the context of Early Childhood Education (Ramos, 2010; 2012; 2018; Silva, 2022, for example).

In this context, this study aims to analyze the non-verbal communicative resources that babies use to demonstrate their social participation in planned pedagogical practices in an Early Childhood Education institution located in the municipality of Aracaju-SE. Considering the modes of social participation of babies as the focus of this study, the analyses presented in this work prioritize reflections on the importance of interactions as one of the constitutive axes of Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2009), in addition to recognizing, through the description of socio-communicative resources, the power of babies in the actions that are proposed to them.

This is a qualitative research, of the research-intervention type (Damiani *et al.*, 2013), in which the researcher planned activities to be developed with the babies, in order to capture their communicative power during the proposed activities. Data were collected from participant observation, photographs, records in field diaries and described in interactive situations.

The children's social participation was observed during six pedagogical activities planned and directed by the researcher, carried out weekly, between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., in the babies' reference room. The subjects of the investigation are fifteen children, aged between six and twenty months, members of the age group called nursery I of a municipal institution of Early Childhood Education in the city of Aracaju/SE.

In order to capture the socio-communicative resources used by babies during educational-pedagogical practices, we opted for the use of photographs as a privileged resource to capture the children's actions. The records made during the activities had the collaboration of another student linked to the research group that integrates the authors of this text. After initial analyses, we gathered the interactive situations for the analysis, which were also triangulated with records in a field diary and description of the interactive situations.

The use of photography allowed a more detailed analysis of the interactions that took place during the proposed activities. For Guimarães (2011, p. 107), "the act of photographing freezes moments, cuts the flow of history, builds a possible version of it. The eye of the camera produces realities that are different from those that the eye of the researcher could capture alone." In this sense, the concern was to use an instrument that



would express the children's responses to the activities in the best way, since, due to their age, they do not yet express themselves through structured words and phrases.

In this way, Guimarães (2011, p.110 and 111) adds, "photography works as an encounter between non-verbal and verbal, which shows how it is a rich resource in research with babies who are on the border between communication and expression through the body and sensations. The construction of the photographic records was based on the relationships established with the children, between them and their peers, and between the children and the available toys. Records of the children's individual activities were also made. The photographs were taken in the sequence in which the interactions took place, based on the activities aimed at the children. In this way, a database was constituted that allowed us to later group the figures into moments that we named as interactive situations.

The results of this study are in line with data from other studies that confirm the socio-communicative power of babies and reveal their social protagonism in the (re)actions in which they expressed their preferences or rejected the pedagogical practices that were directed at them.

THE BABY IS AN ACTIVE INTERLOCUTOR: DIALOGUES AND RESEARCH ACTIONS IN THE TRAJECTORY OF DATA PRODUCTION

The significant increase in babies in collective education spaces reveals the need to build environments that allow qualified care for babies, considering their specificities and potentialities. Although we have achieved the necessary legal milestones for the implementation of the daycare center as a space intended for the care of children from 0 to 3 years of age, we still seek to overcome the stigma of this environment as a welfare and childcare institution (Kuhlmann, Jr, 2015).

The most recent research adds to the fact that babies were for a long time considered incapable of carrying out activities planned by the educator, who was only responsible for taking care of basic needs such as food, hygiene, health, etc. However, the studies carried out from the perspective of the Sociology of Childhood brought a new look at the child and his childhood in society. The child is seen as a social actor, a citizen with rights and the capacity to exercise them (Belloni, 2009).

The institution of Early Childhood Education, as an educational and socialization space for babies, is pointed out as an environment conducive to the development of



pedagogical activities in partnership with children (Delgado and Muller, 2005). In this sense, there is a need to analyze how these activities are organized and how babies participate.

Interactions are elements frequently pointed out in research on young children in collective education environments (Ramos, 2006; 2010). This occurs mainly in communicative processes, in which children use different languages and interact in different ways (Elmor, 2009). The mediation of the adult, in this case, is recognized as fundamental in the process of building a socializing environment that respects the "speeches" of the babies (Guimarães, 2011).

Researchers (Elmor, 2009; Ramos, 2006; 2010, for example) point to the need to observe and listen to children, because even before the construction of structured verbal communication, they are already able to express their actions through non-verbal communication carried out through gestures, smiles, cries, etc.

According to Tristão (2005, p. 39), "professionals who work with babies in early childhood education institutions must become literate in the different languages of young children, seeking to understand them and, in a way, listen to them". In this way, the more the teacher enables moments of interaction and communication with/between the children, the higher the quality of her work will be and, consequently, the pedagogical actions will be better understood and accepted by them.

However, for this to happen, it is necessary that there be sensitivity and adequate training of the educator to work with babies, since "approaching the children's universe requires a look of revelation that needs to be open to novelty, to unusual events, which only becomes possible without the ties determined by predictable knowledge and truths" (Redin, 2009, p. 118).

It is in contact with the other that the child learns and develops (Vigotski, 1989). Therefore, the presence of the educator as a mediator of the social encounters provided by the collective environment of the nursery is important. The educator, then, comes to be seen by babies as a reference adult, as someone with whom, even outside the home environment, they can feel safe and confident (Guimarães, 2011).

In order for interaction to become a pedagogical practice of the nursery routine, it is also necessary to have a solid education of the education professional, so that he realizes that the professional practice of the educator of babies is built daily, in the very movement of living with the children (Tristão, 2005). Thus, the knowledge that teachers acquire in



working with babies greatly helps the reflection of theory on practice, facilitating an "effective constitution of childhood pedagogy" (Ibid., p. 58).

Another important element when considering the organization of pedagogical practice with babies is emotion. The relationships established between adults and children and between peers are fundamental for the cognitive development of babies. In this regard, Tristão (2005, p.50) takes the position that "it is the channel of emotion that guarantees the response of the adults who take care of the baby". In addition, it is necessary to break the stigma that, to be a good daycare professional, it is enough to be a good mother. "Being a mother and having experience in domestic work are experiences that constitute the daycare professional" (Guimarães, 2011, p. 53).

All these aspects mentioned above reveal the importance of developing research that understands the baby as an active interlocutor. Based on this premise, we initiated the first approximations in the investigated context, based on the authorization of the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Sergipe (No. CAAE 0211.0.107.000-11), followed by the consent of the families of the babies who are part of the observed context and educators responsible for the education and care of the children, as detailed below. The initial meetings during the course of investigation were limited to the observation of the daily practices of the group, without interventional proposals, as we believe it is an important moment of social approximation with the investigated context.

We also used these initial moments to get closer to the children, observe the nursery routine and perceive how the educators organized their educational-pedagogical practices. Before entering the field of investigation, we presented to the educators and the pedagogical team of the institution how the meetings held with the children would be, the days and times of permanence in the class.

The pedagogical activities of the research were developed over six meetings, once a week, on Wednesdays and in the morning shift, occasions in which children were more receptive to the activities, since, in the other shift, they slept and, when they woke up, they waited for their parents to arrive to leave.

The initial meeting yielded many discussions with the educators about the inseparability between caring for and educating the child. In the opinion of the educators participating in the study, structural and political issues end up contributing to them not carrying out educational-pedagogical activities, especially with regard to the lack of toys for children and a fair salary floor for nursery educators, since they, despite their higher



education, were hired as social educators. a position that took place through a public tender for people who had only completed high school.

After the first days of participant observation of the practices and the context investigated, we requested the parents' authorization for the filming and photographs of the babies, through the Informed Consent Form (ICF), which was carried out during the entry of the children's families into the institution. At the time, we also explained to parents how the research would be carried out and committed to using the children's images only for academic purposes. Some parents inquired about the objectives of the research, while others only signed the authorization.

The entry into the field of research and social approximation with the babies in the study was made by inviting the children to participate in the games, many of them mediated by objects present in the activity room, such as the mobiles that are attached to the ceiling. Music was also an element that facilitated the researcher's contact with the children.

The use of photography allowed a more detailed analysis of the interactions that took place during the proposed activities. For Guimarães (2011, p. 107), "the act of photographing freezes moments, cuts the flow of history, builds a possible version of it. The eye of the camera produces realities that are different from those that the eye of the researcher could capture alone." In this sense, our concern was to use a device that would express the children's responses to the activities in the best way, since, due to their young age, they still do not express themselves through structured words and phrases.

The photographs were taken in the sequence in which the interactions took place, based on the activities aimed at the children. In this way, a database was constituted that allowed us to later group the figures into moments that we named as situations. Initially, the photographs were grouped into folders with the days of the activities carried out. Then, the photos included within the day's folder were divided into subfolders that contained common activities.

The categories of analysis of the data produced by the study were not chosen a *priori*, but constructed throughout the investigation process. In the first observations, we noticed the absence of toys that could provide moments of interaction and play among the children. Thus, toys and activities compatible with the age of the babies were purchased and taken to the nursery environment. Hide-and-seek, imitation and ball activities were proposed, and the children participated, demonstrating interests and motivations.



We agree with Nicolau (2003) when he argues that toys become a fundamental element in the process of appropriation of culture, as they enable the integral development of the child, since he is affectively involved, lives socially and operates mentally. All this facilitates contact with new experiences that help the child to build their autonomy.

The active participation of children in the educational-pedagogical practices carried out reveals the importance of pedagogical planning, considering the child as a partner in this process. Children not only suggest the activities they want to participate in, but they also reject those they don't like.

It should be noted that the choice of photos that were part of the situations to be described and analyzed was based on the actions that were closest to the object of study, according to our interpretation. It was then, through this selection, that we began to realize how much the baby has a rich and wide range of communicative elements and uses them on a daily basis to relate. There was the construction of interpretations of these data and the selection of interactive situations that give visibility to the findings of the present investigation and that will be presented below.

DIFFERENT SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE CAPACITIES OF BABIES IN DAYCARE

In order to present the results of the study, we divided the social encounters that occurred through the interactions between the researcher and the babies into actions organized within a temporal sequence – which we call *interactive situations*. In them, we describe the relationships established between adult and child – with a beginning and end determined by the researcher (Pedrosa, 2005).

In view of the data, numerous socio-communicative resources used by babies in the different activities proposed were observed. With the selection of the moments, it was possible to verify that the babies in question frequently used the direction of the gaze to express themselves and the smile as a means of establishing social interactions with their interlocutors, these two socio-communicative resources being used by all the babies throughout the observations.

Then, the use of the body was quite evident through movements such as, in this order: addressing someone, pointing, extending legs and arms, stretching the body, handing the toy to the adult, holding the adult's hands. Although imitation is considered a non-verbal expressive resource widely used by children, functioning as a context and vehicle for apprehending meanings, it was little used by babies during observation periods.



With regard to the gaze as a vehicle of communication, we verified what Guimarães (2011) identified while conducting a research with babies in public daycare centers in Rio de Janeiro. According to the author, babies look to the adult with their eyes to feel safe and, when they feel safe, they address them through body expressions, such as moving, going to meet the adult when requested and touching the adult's body, for example. In addition, the aforementioned author defends the importance of the experience of gaze as something that strengthens the affective bonds between adult and children.

It is also perceived that the dialogues were essentially mediated by the direction of the gaze, when the adult placed himself in the position of the child's partner. In addition, other types of language sustained the social relationships between babies and adults, such as touch, imitation, adult speech, and the child's smiles and babbling. Thus, once again, the importance of the look as an element in communication between partners is highlighted.

Gaze directing is a way of transmitting socially relevant signals, behaviors that are considered non-verbal. The gaze is not considered simply vision. Sustained gaze often indicates potential social interaction. Throughout the first year of life, children learn that the way other people look usually transmits important information and eye contact is an essential tool for establishing communication between human beings. (Elmôr, 2009, p. 27).

Children, in general, used to be interested in the social movements that occurred in the reference room and demonstrated this with attentive eyes. However, it was not very common to perceive the appropriation of the educators in relation to these moments as opportunities to relate to the children.

In addition, we witnessed moments of great body movement of children, which indicates that the proposals planned for babies need to consider the intrinsic need for movement. Babies communicate intensely with adults, expressing their interests and motivations: "it is a wordless, singular communication, in which crying, laughter and babbling serve as a means of social contact, of diffuse communication with other people" (Tristão, 2005, p.39).

The communicative body resource used by babies on interactive occasions reveals the conception used by researchers who analyze the Sociology of the Body, as a field of study that defends the body as an expression of feelings. In this sense, the body is seen not only as a biological dimension in itself, but as a vehicle of contact with the world and with the other (Le Breton, 2009). Thus, for the aforementioned author, the processes of appropriation of time and space are constituted from bodily movements.



To exist means in the first place to move in a given space and time, to transform the environment thanks to the sum of effective gestures, to choose and attribute meaning and value to the innumerable stimuli of the environment thanks to perceptual activities, to communicate the word to others, as well as a repertoire of gestures and mimes, a set of rituals implying the adhesion of others. (Idem, 2009, p. 8).

Thus, the movements performed by babies allow us to agree with Le Breton (2009) when he states that the body produces meanings and actively inserts the subject in a certain social and cultural space.

In the interactive situation described below, it is possible to reflect on the importance of directing the gaze and using the body as a means of contact with the other and that provide us with some reflections.

INTERACTIVE SITUATION 1: YASMIN TALKS TO THE RESEARCHER

The researcher stops talking to Yasmin and looks at other children. Yasmim produces sounds that guide the attention of the researcher, who starts talking to the girl again. Yasmin laughs and gets close to the researcher, putting her hand on her face. (Field Diary)

In this interactive situation, we perceive the child's initiative to remain with the dialogue without words. While the researcher observes the other children returning from the bath to their cribs, Yasmin begins to babble and, thus, catches the attention of the researcher, who is socially responsive and resumes the dialogue with the girl. The exchange of glances and conversations directed to the child sustain this interactive moment.

Yasmin smiles, babbles, supports herself with one arm in the crawling position, and with the other touches the researcher's face, in response to her social advances. These different ways that babies use to communicate demonstrate the idea that the "development of the child's socio-communicative skills begins to take place from the moment the child is born, when he encounters a world of social relations and penetrates it through his social interactions" (Ramos, 2006, p. 25).

This search for physical contact with the adult, presented by Yasmin from the touch on the researcher's face, was analyzed by Guimarães (2011) in a study with babies. The author realized that the child was primarily looking for the adult's gaze. After looking, when he already felt safe, the child performed the bodily action of going to meet the adult, either



by asking for the lap or by touching. Thus, physical contact is analyzed as a way to feel present and seek an affective relationship. In addition, "it is an experience of confirmation and acceptance, food for dialogues mediated by the body and for subsequent explorations" (Guimarães, 2011, p. 183).

In addition, we verified in this interactive situation that the baby uses the socio-communicative resources available to get closer to the researcher, even though she was located inside a crib. All this was possible because the researcher was attentive to the baby's gestures and placed herself in the position of an adult who welcomes, respects and validates the child's communicative power. In this way, we perceive the relational capacity of children and how socially competent they are to establish bonds with others, with the resources they have (Ramos, 2006; 2010).

In order to broaden the understanding of the study in question, we present the interactive situation called "Once upon a time...". The following interactive sequence demonstrates the babies' participation in collective reading activities. Thus, we perceive different reactions in relation to the invitation to participate in the activities that were addressed to them.

INTERACTIVE SITUATION 2 - ONCE UPON A TIME...

Guilherme walks around the room and picks up a book he found on the floor. Then the boy sits down, begins to observe the pictures in the book and leaf through it. On the other side of the room, there was the researcher, interacting with other children. When she notices the boy's interest in the book, she goes to him and verbally invites him to read it. Guilherme stands up, resting one hand on the floor and holding the book with the other. Then he goes towards the researcher, who offers the boy her lap. The boy sits on her legs and both begin to experience the moment of reading the book. It is perceived that the child is totally involved in the story, with his gaze fixed on the images, attentive to what is being told and points out whenever an image appears that he finds interesting (Field diary).

In the flow of events in the episode, the social contacts between Guilherme and the researcher begin when she notices that the boy holds a book in his hand and invites him to sit on her lap to read. The boy shows acceptance of the invitation promptly when he gets up and takes the book to the researcher, sits on her lap and remains paying attention to the reading until the end of the story that is being narrated, indicating, through gestures, his interest in participating in that moment.



Guilherme's interest in what was proposed by the researcher can also be verified moments later, when the boy picks up the book again and shows the pictures to the researcher, indicating sharing. Another issue to be observed is in relation to the initiative of the invitation, which arises first from the researcher's observation of the child.

However, after some time, it is the child himself who offers the book and points to the figures, actions that were interpreted by the researcher as an invitation from the boy for her to restart the story she had already read to him. In this case, we can see that communicative initiatives arise from both partners involved in the interactive situation. In this sense, Guimarães (2011, p. 188) points out that "it is common for children to offer objects and point to things. These are forms of construction of social relations mediated by objects".

Guilherme's interest in the book instigated us to bring other books, other stories, to the nursery room. In this way, we chose a date to introduce children to the story of the animals at the bottom of the sea. The organization of the favorable environment for the development of storytelling had the participation of the educators, who collaborated by reorganizing the arrangement of the cribs, so that the space for the children's movement was expanded.

The educators also participated in the sense of getting involved in the activities proposed by the researcher and with the children. Thus, at the same time that the book used provided the child with the opportunity to contact the object, it enhanced new relationships between adults and with age peers (Pereira., 2019).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the observed interactive behavior, the children did not passively participate in the pedagogical activities that were directed to them. They also indicated, through their body resources, which activities they wanted to participate in and rejected those they did not like, demonstrating their social protagonism since they were babies.

From the research, we visualized the different communicative means used by the babies during the investigative course, a fact that helped us to understand the importance of the educator as an adult in whom the child can trust and to whom he can turn to build safe social relationships.

Thus, it is perceived that babies have a communicative power that needs to be valued and stimulated in the nursery environment, since the construction of language takes



place from the stimulation of these first initiatives of the child, such as pointing, touching, looking, extending arms, crying, smiling, among others. Therefore, "the child's language production presents itself as a continuity of something that sprouted before, provoking resonance in subsequent productions, connected in the collective" (Guimarães, 2011, p. 179).

Contrary to what the history of childhood tells us, it is necessary to build a school that is truly capable of welcoming and respecting the child who is there. In addition to defending the construction of an early childhood education school that contemplates the specificities of children in this age group, respecting the inseparability of caring/educating. However, this change in conception requires effective public policies, training of teachers and managers, partnership with families and valuing the baby as an active, participative, autonomous subject.

As a result, the complexity of the pedagogical work with babies increasingly requires continuous training of professionals, contextualized in stimulating and challenging activities for them. It is not, however, a matter of accelerating the process of schooling babies, but rather of proposing activities that respect and boost the social and communicative potential of children.

This whole panorama supports and appreciates our work on the importance of ensuring quality education for children in the nursery of the daycare center, who have been waiting for this for a long time. Thus, we defend the argument that it is no longer appropriate to continue underestimating the capabilities of babies. They "know many things that we do not recognize because we are not yet able to see, understand, analyze, that is, recognize it as knowledge" (Brasil, 2009, p. 29).



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