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Continuing Teacher Education: space-time in preschool

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ABSTRACT – Continuing Teacher Education: space-time in preschool. Focusing on the teacher education in the space-time of preschools, this paper seeks to investigate and understand how teacher education and the daily life of early childhood schools have been thought out. Based on a qualitative and exploratory approach, the research uses data collected by interviews with school teachers and aides. Foucault (2021; 2014), Freire (2019), Rousseau (2004), Santos (2018), Vigotski (2000), among others make up its theoretical background. The growing social changes generated by globalization lead us to reflect on this age group, which is often ignored within these transformations.

Keywords: Continuing Education. Early Childhood Education. Space-time.

RESUMO – Formação Continuada de Professoras: o espaço-tempo da escola infantil. A formação docente no espaço-tempo das escolas infantis é o tema central deste artigo, que objetiva questionar e compreender a maneira como vêm sendo pensada a formação das professoras e o cotidiano das escolas infantis. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa, exploratória e de levantamento. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de entrevistas com as professoras e auxiliares da escola em estudo. As principais fontes teóricas utilizadas foram Foucault (2021; 2014); Freire (2019); Rousseau (2004); Santos (2018); Vigotski (2000), entre outros. As crescentes mudanças sociais geradas pelo processo de globalização levam a refletir sobre essa faixa etária, que muitas vezes acaba esquecida dessas transformações.

Palavras-chave: Educação Continuada. Educação Infantil. Espaço-Tempo.

Introduction

Currently, doubts and concerns lead us think and reflect on ways to intervene in reality not only to transform it, but to understand the conditions and possibilities that lead to the conduct of practices in the daily life of institutions responsible for early childhood education (Foucault, 2014). Research interest regarding the education of Early Childhood Education female teachers¹ stems from our belief in the possibility of transforming educational practice, envisioning a preschool that ensures dignity for both educators and learners. This research perspective seeks to understand the relationships established in the school context and the conditions offered so that female teachers can continue the education process concerning the teaching practice. It also seeks to understand the importance attributed by female teachers to education and how they produce the spaces-times of school routine amid the power and knowledge relations that make up educational institutions.

Given the vast number of studies concerned with problematizing the everyday life of preschools, this work becomes unique by involving the subjects in the research. Entering this context revealed new reflexive perspectives on the developing topic. Cultural diversity permeates the school routine and reveals the impossibility of conceiving, in our society, the supremacy of a culture or a childhood, as one is immersed in 'cultures and childhoods' that hold very different perspectives of life and space-time.

Methods

This research adopted a qualitative approach, most indicated for field studies such as this, since there are no ready-to-follow formulas or recipes. Data analysis in qualitative studies borrows heavily from the researcher's style. It is also an exploratory research, seeking to provide familiarity with a research problem. As such, we drew upon bibliographic surveys and interviews. Its survey portion used a sample of the study population, with data collected by interviews (Gil, 2008).

Among the many methodological procedures possible, we chose one capable of favoring the search for answers to the questions raised. Importantly, the interviews were conducted with all female teachers and clerks of the school, not limited to only one class. After approval by the Research Ethics Committee, the research process began in 2015. All necessary authorizations were requested from the Municipal Department of Education. Authorizations were granted in October 2005, when contacts and interviews at the school started.

Interviews were concluded at the end of December 2005, beginning the process of transcriptions and analyses, a phase in which the researcher's seriousness and ethical commitment was reinforced, aiming at the possibility of contributing significantly to those involved with socio-educational issues. The Early Childhood Education School under study will be characterized below.

The Early Childhood Education school

The Early Childhood Education School, or kindergarten, under study is located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and belongs to the municipal school system. Field research was carried out in 2005², when the institution had 51 children aged 0 to 6 years, fulltime.

Its physical space was organized as follows: the entrance hall had a small room for storing teaching materials, followed by the principal's office and the adults' bathroom. Following the corridor, we see a larger uncovered space where the children played when was not raining, and the bathrooms for their hygiene. Around it were the four classrooms, divided into: daycare (0 to 2 years old), with 16 students and 2 aides per shift; pre-kindergarten A (2 to 3.5 years old), with 20 students and 2 aides per shift; pre-kindergarten B (3.5 to 4.5 years old), with 17 students, 1 aide and 1 female teacher (only in the morning shift); and kindergarten A (4.5 to 6 years old), with 18 students, with 1 aide in the morning shift and 1 female teacher in the afternoon shift.

The spaces were all well organized and clean, but some legal aspects, regulated by Opinion no.398/2005 issued by the State Council of Education (Rio Grande do Sul, 2005), regarding class organization in Early Childhood Education deserve more attention. Item 5 of the opinion establishes a maximum number of students per teacher, which was not respected by the school. In this same item, the opinion states that "no class can operate without the presence of a qualified teacher, according to the law" (Rio Grande do Sul, 2005, p. 4).

They did not yet have a playground for students to play in. The school's surroundings have room for the construction of a playground, but while it was not built, playtime was held in a square in front of the school, belonging to the neighborhood. As much as this square brought many benefits to the children, Opinion no. 398/2005, in its item 8.2, clause X, clearly establishes "a playground provided with protective fence for the exclusive use of this age group" as one of the minimum requirements for offering Early Childhood Education (Rio Grande do Sul, 2005, p. 7).

Reflecting on the need that human beings must persist and believe in school as an institution capable of recreating itself, Fensterseifer (2005) asks:

Why do we need institutions? Risking an answer: because we need certainty and they objectify it. But why do we need certainty? Because we are uncertain beings and this uncertainty is the 'spirit,' the anima (soul) of institutions that survive because they are never entirely calcified (they remain because they change) (Fensterseifer, 2005, p. 155).

As such, the school is considered a privileged place for knowledge production, where people interact. It is this process of multiple cultural socialization that allows us to think of the school beyond its physical space, seen as the result of certain decisions involving power relations

and interests. Surrounded by boundaries (walls, bars, and gates), the whole school environment presupposes knowledge that, while bringing some security, also leads to uncertainties and doubts that incite research in search of answers capable of satisfying personal and social expectations.

In its daily activities, early childhood schools are not outside a context of power-knowledge relations that constitute the subjects. According to Foucault (2021), power is not a natural object, but a social practice and, as such, is historically constituted. Consequently, early childhood school is the place where, historically, discourses about children's education have been and are being reproduced.

These writings correspond to readings of a particular and unique educational reality, but they also contribute to reflecting on contemporary institutions of early childhood education, considering the similarities that may contemplate the representations of children and childhoods within schools, families, and the social environment.

Female teachers: education under discussion

To speak of a school for early childhood education is to think about subjects who interact mediated by toys, games, and by people. So, to understand the educational relationships that are established in a given school context, we must know the education and organization of the school's human resources. Regarding the teaching staff, we should highlight some particularities concerning the education required to develop activities with children in daycare centers or preschools in the municipality under analysis.

For many years, the selection, carried out through public competition, required of the competitors a minimum level of education. To apply for the position of daycare aide, for example, the requirement was secondary education; for the teacher competition, the minimum requirement was high school education from a normal school. That is how the teaching staff of many preschools was organized, and not only in the municipality under analysis, for this structure encompass the whole state and, perhaps, the country.

As we can see, the faculty is divided between female teachers and aides. Just as words express differences, so the actions reveal the division of activities they perform in everyday school life. Aides are present in greater numbers and spend more time with the children. At the time of the research, the aides were called attendants, because they participated in the competition to become 'daycare attendants' and lack the required education to act as teachers. In this respect, the municipality already started reorganizing the criteria for holding public competitions in the area of early childhood education and is currently seeking to meet the legal requirements established by the National Education Bases and Guidelines Law (Brasil, 1996), which establishes the minimum level of education as a teacher qualification from a normal school.

The position of daycare attendant was extinguished by municipal law, but the professionals who had been hired had their rights maintained and guaranteed until retirement.

Interestingly, the lower the level of education of aides, the younger the age of the children under their care. For example, nursery children, in the morning, are attended by two aides who do not have complete secondary education; in the afternoon, only one has a teacher qualification. As children get older, so does increase the level of education of those responsible for them. Only Kindergarten A has, in the afternoon shift, a female teacher with a degree (Pedagogy).

Preschool plays a decisive role in the development of children's social, affective, emotional, and motor skills. These are moments when the stimuli and interaction with other children and adults enable the child's understanding of the world around them, favoring their learning. Vygotsky (2000) published a series of studies on the development of thinking and speech, demonstrating that the processes that culminate in concept formation begin in the earliest stages of childhood, stating:

The most recent research – that of C. Buhler and others on the child's first forms of social behavior and his reactions in the first year of life, and the research of C. Buhler's colleagues (i.e., Gettser and Tudor-Gart) on the child's early reactions to the human voice – has shown that the social function of speech develops extensively during this pre-intellectual stage. [...] Laughter, babbling, pointing, and gesture emerge as means of social contact in the first months of the child's life (Vigotski, 2000, p. 130).

Particularities of the teaching staff perceived within this educational sphere reveal the need to reflect on how this space-time, in which children spend most hours and days, is organized. We should also consider that even with little knowledge and without the certification required to work in daycare centers and preschools, aides assert their place as educators due to the know-how developed by their experience over time. Conversely, the initial and continuing education of those responsible for children in preschools is of paramount importance, considering that the activity is developed with and by subjects.

Preschool: educators, female teachers or *tias*?

The predominance of women in schools is a fact, especially when it comes to early childhood education. As such, the knowledge needed to educate and care for children in schools may seem inherent, given the role played by women on a daily basis, seen as mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. Thinking about these issues and about the relations and roles assigned to men and women, reflections regarding gender seem to better explain the social place assigned to each one. In discussing the concept of gender, Louro (2004, p. 23) states:

The concept now requires that one thinks in a plural manner, emphasizing that projects and representations about women and men are diverse. Conceptions of gender differ not only between societies or historical moments, but within a given society, when we consider its various (ethnic, religious, racial, class) groups.

This concept allows us to understand the amplitude of factors involving the representation of women in the labor market and how the roles and images that establish standards, distinguishing and separating men, women, and children, has been historically construed and accepted. School is precisely the space-time where the differences of all genders are felt and experienced, from the way teachers, children and families, that is, the subjects that make up the educational process, are conceived. According to Louro (2004, p. 94):

If, on the one hand, teaching practices and arrangements suggest some continuity in the school educational process; on the other, certain changes indicate possible discontinuities or disruptions. Teaching and school, as social activities or institutions, change throughout history. The subjects who circulate in this space became diverse and the institution is perhaps, in many ways, another institution. Among the changes that most clearly mark this transformation process is the *feminization of the teaching profession* (emphasis added).

Historically, women were educated to be wives and mothers, taking responsibility for domestic activities; while men, as the provider, were responsible for supporting the family, so much so that, according to Louro (2004), the school was primarily male and religious. Women have not always occupied the position they currently have in schools, an accomplishment that has slowly been recognized. Despite the many changes occurred on how we think about women's role in society, some questions regarding language and the conception of professionals directed at those who work with children in preschools persist. The issue is to problematize the discourses that permeate the representations of educators, female teachers, or *tias* (how aides are commonly addressed in the studied school) and end up informing the ins and outs of the teaching profession.

The Aurélio dictionary (Ferreira, 2010, p. 614) defines a teacher as "one who teaches a science, art, technique; master." Educator, as defined by the same dictionary, is a synonym of educate, which means: "to promote the development of oneself's (or someone's) intellectual, moral, and physical capacity. To instruct. Educator" (Ferreira, 2010, p. 271). The dictionary definition of one and the other term shows particularities, as it defines teacher by relating it to art, science, technique. Based on this definition, we realize that to be a teacher one must have mastery over a particular area of knowledge and also to have the sensibility and capacity to reflect on the cultural diversities that permeate the educational routine. Conversely, there is no need for specific skills and abili-

ties to be an educator, in the sense of morally instructing someone, as ethical and moral values are learned from childhood within the family. Paulo Freire (2019) reveals several factors that contemplate the teaching profession, such as:

When we live the authenticity required by the teaching-learning practice we participate in a total, directive, political, ideological, gnosiological, pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical experience, in which beauty must go hand in hand with decency and seriousness (Freire, 2019, p. 24).

Based on the concept of 'to educate' developed by Freire (2019), we can call into question the educational practice based solely on knowledge of the experience or transmission/reproduction of cultures, without reflecting and contextualizing the place and moment experienced by the subjects that make up the educational practice.

The activity carried out in early childhood education schools does not escape the requirement for authenticity, decency, seriousness, and professionalism from those responsible for caring and educating the children. Anyone can be an educator; to be a teacher, however, one must have the adequate education and training required to carry out school and classroom activities. Besides, one must be in a constant learning process, combining research with practice.

This is another assumption of "being a teacher" brought by Freire (2019, p. 29): "There is no education without research, and no research without education." In early childhood education, specifically, one must also understand how the child's development occurs and everything involved in this phase of socialization and discovery. The way of proceeding, of speaking, of conducting the school routine requires the teacher to produce knowledge that grounds the educational practice in line with the student's needs.

As for the preschool in question, its particularities reveal the clash between scientific knowledge and experience. In this school space-time, experience is seen as the foundation of educational practice. The years of experience of the aides, coupled with their advanced age, demonstrated established know-hows. As one participant points out: "For me the word teacher does not strokes my ego. I see myself as an educator and not a teacher. I see myself as an educator because I always teach what should and should not be done, imposing limits" (Teacher qualification³).

Their years of experiences is what allow such assertion. Most of the school's employees are mothers and some are even grandmothers. This experience with children outside the school context allows considerations and certainties regarding how children should and should not be treated in the school environment. Similarly, this popular/common knowledge about the students' education needs to be considered, but it is not limited to this. School, as the place where knowledge is produced, needs to go far beyond transmitting everyday knowledge: its function is to combine scientific content and knowledge with non-scientific knowl-

edge that is related to the culture and social interactions experienced by students outside school.

Importantly, the statements reveal discomfort about the ongoing changes in how society conceives the 'teacher.' They also show the professionals' difficulty in understanding the theory studied in university and, mainly, articulating it with their daily lives. We see a lot of resistance towards theory and an exacerbated appreciation of practice.

At the time I passed the competition, no education was required. At most, they asked for a complete lower secondary education. I learned a lot, not at the normal school – it helped me to define some aspects, of course –, but with practice itself. But these days, if you don't have a degree you are nobody. They should prize people's experiences, the baggage they bring (Teacher qualification).

The teaching experience allows a greater understanding of daily practice at school, but the years of activity are not enough to understand the complexity of being a teacher. The challenge is to combine practice, which is a knowledge produced in/by everyday life, with theories that underpin and justify pedagogical practices. When an opportunity to study presents itself and, especially, when there is a desire to continue one's studies, one realizes that the school is not limited to the neighborhood where it is located, the city to which it belongs, but is part of a broad and diverse social context. This explains the need to innovate educational practice and, above all, to be willing to review certainties and truths that permeate the school routine. One can no longer be consistent with the simple and repetitive reproduction of cultures that no longer fit the current social reality. As Tardif (2005, p. 15) states:

Teachers' knowledge is always linked to a work situation with others (students, colleagues, parents), a knowledge anchored in a complex task (teaching), situated in a work-space (classroom, school) rooted in an institution and in a society.

The constant transformations in space-time show that reproducing or merely transmitting knowledge no longer meets the students' expectations, as access to information is increasingly facilitated by the media. We are living, according to Castells (1999), in the midst of the "information society" and school is no longer the only place to access knowledge. But this institution continues to play a fundamental role so that the knowledge learned by students, inside and outside it, can be systematized.

Being a teacher is a task that, besides the necessary training, demands availability, will, dedication, and time. Alongside these aspects is the meaning attributed to this constant learning process, because when the study is not meaningful for those who teach, it will never be for those who are willing to learn, considering that teacher and learner are engaged in a constant process of interaction. Once again Freire's (2019, p. 23) considerations prove pertinent: "There is no teaching without learning; the two explain each other and their subjects, despite the

differences that mark them, are not reduced to objects of each other. He who teaches learns by teaching, and he who learns teaches by learning.”

Tied to the experience are specialist professionals such as: psychologists, nutritionists, and physicians. On one occasion during field work, while the municipal nutritionist measured and weighed students attending the municipal daycare centers, noting the information on a monitoring spreadsheet, someone commented that: “This helps to control de children’s development” (Pedagogue). As Foucault (2014) states, the thorough control of the body and its movements pervades the school environment: gestures, actions, and speech. All movements are subtly controlled and limited by discourses produced in the intersection between the school employees’ know-how and the “mechanisms” of power-knowledge imposed by society and reproduced by the school to remedy the teacher education gap.

Low schooling facilitates the internalization of discourses that often do not befit the school’s actual needs. In such cases, knowledge systematization ends up being insufficient to understand the social events that directly influence the life of educational institutions. Since the guidance of the psychologist and other specialists is insufficient, female teachers and aides’ resort to other means to justify their actions, according to the statement:

I don’t like to read a 200/300-page book; reading makes me sleepy. I prefer magazines and short stories. As we don’t have many training courses, and when they take place in the afternoon we don’t participate, I like to watch TV Senado, or educational TV that always has information. I like to watch things: I’m not reading, but listening. Obviously, that, if I’m interested in something, I research about it in newspapers and magazines (Teacher certification).

Importantly, the new technologies that make countless information possible in a short span of time are allies in the teaching-learning process. To disregard its importance is to disregard the social advances that transform the environment and interpersonal relationships, a new way of communicating made possible by an interactive and dynamic language that ends up involving and seducing people. This language cannot be ignored, but the challenge is to understand to what extent and how it can be used to benefit school learning.

To value the students’ childhood is to leave them under the care of people qualified to perform this activity. Likewise, valuing and recognizing those who dedicate years of their lives to education in daycare centers and preschools is a must. Responsibility, commitment, and ethics permeate (or should permeate) the everyday teaching practice. Louro (2004, p. 108), discussing the plurality of the teaching subjects, corroborates this understanding:

Who is a good teacher, or more simply, who is a teacher is a question that can undoubtedly hold many and various descriptions. The idea of a single, coherent, stable identity does not fit here (in fact, it cannot fit any subject or

situation). There is no such unitary identity, both because there is not just one ('true') representation of this subject, and because they are not just a teacher.

What is at stake is not only the most convenient word to use to define the teaching activity, but the discursive effects that permeate its constitution and representation. There are big differences between being a *tia*, an educator and a teacher, but to whom do these particularities matter, in what contexts were they generated? Someone who works with students in a preschool can in no way be confused with a *tia* [aunt], because this connotation refers to a degree of kinship that supposedly does not exist between teacher and student.

Another important aspect is that, differently from what the cited statements affirm, being a teacher involves countless situations, commitments, and knowledge that an educator does not necessarily need to possess. But, as Louro (2004, p. 108) stated, "[...] there is not just one representation of this [teacher] subject," therefore, the various interpretations and connotations gain space and strengthen the discourses because they do not generate uneasiness. Consequently, the '*tias*' and 'educators' constitute the educational spaces simply because they do not cause indignation and discomfort, for in this educational reality the outdated education itself guarantees and reinforces this way of representing the educating subject.

Rousseau (2004) contributes significantly to reflecting on the issues related to being a teacher and being an educator. According to the author:

Moreover, this word 'educatio' had with the ancients another meaning that we no longer give it – it meant 'nurture'. *Educit obstetrix*, says Varro, *Educat nutrix, instituit paedagogus, docet magister*⁴. Thus, education, discipline, and instruction are three things as different in their purpose as the nurse, the preceptor, and the master. But these distinctions are undesirable, and the child should only follow one guide (Rousseau, 2004, p. 15).

It is these differences brought up by Rousseau (2004), taking as an example the preschool in question, that demonstrate the misunderstandings also generated when distinguishing between educator and teacher. For the teacher, professionalization becomes a fundamental and decisive issue for the children's education. When Rousseau (2004, p. 15) asserts that "[...] these distinctions are undesirable and the child should only follow one guide," he is drawing attention to a reference, that is, someone capable of educating, caring and instructing the student in line with their family and social context. At school, this is one of the teacher's roles: to be the reference that will guide the child towards scientific learning and life in society.

Considering the various issues that permeate the constitution of educational space-times, from the organization of children's routine, school architecture, the meaning of this school time and childhood, we

seek to reflect on school's interior. Based on the problematizations and conceptions suggested by the educational reality in question, entering this space-time allows us a better understanding of the beauties and disillusionings generated by this daily life.

Preschool: a time and a place

In preschool, adults and children coexist. Many social changes have transformed our way of thinking about school and early childhood education, and it is no longer possible to conceive of a childhood space-time decontextualized from the world in which it is inserted. According to Santos (1996, p. 252), "each place is, in its own way, the world." The author's words lead us to reflect on some of the school's standings: if, on the one hand, the school is not distant from the global context, on the other, it creates its own world; and, in a way, it is the daily relationships established in this particular world that ensure its continuity. The author contributes to reflections on these issues that, in the school's routine, reveal themselves to be conflicting:

In fact, globalization also leads to the rediscovery of corporeality. The world of fluidity, the vertigo of speed, the frequency of displacements, and the banality of movements and allusions to distant places and things reveal, by contrast, within the human being, the body as a materially sensitive certainty, before a universe that is difficult to grasp (Santos, 1996, p. 251).

The changes that take place in the world take a long time to reach the school routine and end up not generating significant developments on how the institution construes its spaces and its often rigid, closed, and bureaucratic organization. This characteristic marks not only educational institutions but many others, whether they are school institutions or not.

Faced with so many challenges, how can the school think about this time that affects the lives of many people? Students and teachers; children, young people, and adults pass by, leaving and bearing marks. When reflecting on the meaning of the experiences that are made possible daily, we must highlight the following statement:

School time is crucial, I get involved with them. That time is too short, I think, it flies by too rapidly. We have to live this time; the time spent learning with the children is wonderful, we learn things for life, if I were somewhere else I wouldn't learn so much. This time is fundamental and needs to be valued (Teacher qualification).

Thinking of the preschool as a time of life, full of meanings, may seem a challenge, but the statements reveal that, despite the difficulties, the little training to develop activities with the children, and the daily setbacks, the time at school is seen as essential. I would add that it is a decisive time for students who frequent this environment. Hence, the need to have people prepared to interact with the students; it is not

enough to claim it as “a wonderful time” if, on a daily basis, we do not show sensitivity in these interactions. In this sense, a question arises: if this time with the students is so significant, why not continue one’s studies to learn more about the work one does? On the other hand, the statement below reveals a discourse that currently prevails in our society:

Teachers always take work home. The more things you have to do, the more time you have, the less things, the less time you find. I think teachers have time, they just have to want it; the more they do, the more time they will find to do it, the more things they will want to do because they will be excited. I think the professional must find the time (Teacher certification).

An institution of early childhood education does not live on excitement alone; often this lack of motivation is the big challenge. Accumulation of work, meetings, parents’ meetings, reports to deliver, classrooms to organize; in short, countless tasks that involve being a teacher. It is questionable to use as a parameter of time valuation the plus-plus theory raised by this testimony. For a school to meet expectations, it must have a certain organization and planning, considering that it is not desirable to do everything by any means, the important thing is to perform the activities with quality, meeting the students’ needs and guiding them in the production of knowledge and discoveries. And this organization depends on each teacher, based on reflections within the activities carried out in the classroom, on the subjects that make up the educational process, and on the goals to be achieved. In this sense, Santos (1996, p. 258) states:

In a place – a shared everyday life among a wide variety of people, firms, and institutions – cooperation and conflict are the basis of common life. Because each one exercises their own action, social life becomes individualized; and because contiguity creates communion, politics becomes territorialized, with conflicts between organization and spontaneity. The place is the framework of a pragmatic reference to the world, from which comes requests and precise orders for conditioned actions, but it is also the irreplaceable theater of human passions, responsible, through communicative action, for the most diverse manifestations of spontaneity and creativity.

This statement reflects perfectly what we wish to emphasize: there are several laws that delimit the practice, territories marked by orders, curricula to be fulfilled, etc. As the author states, “conditioned actions” and constant conflicts are characteristics that constitute institutions, among them, the school. An example is Law no. 11.114/2005, which establishes the expansion of Primary and Lower Secondary Education to 9 years. Consequently, Early Childhood Education now encompasses the age group from 0 to 5 years, and Primary Education is now attended by students from 6 years on. A change that, according to the Ministry of Education’s document (Law no. 11.114/2005), will bring

“benefits to basic education considering the opportunities to rethink educational practice, curricula and school programs, school time and the social quality of education” (Brasil, 2005).

We cannot uphold this reasoning. Once again the discourse is to “speed up time,” “move ahead of time” to, as Foucault (2014) states, “produce docile,” malleable bodies that meet the demands of the education system directly tied to a global system of economic-political-social subordination and control. We see many contradictory discourses about the needs of children. For example, the Ministry of Education’s document highlights the following issues as deserving consideration in this transition from Early childhood education to Primary education:

How do children interact with each other and with the various objects of knowledge to know and represent the world? What does written language mean to a six-year-old child? What conditions does the child have to appropriate this language? (Brasil, 2004, p. 19).

Reflecting on these issues reveals something contradictory in the document itself: it affirms the legal decision as the best for the child, while also indicating that the focus of interest is not the child, but on accelerating learning to read and write as “code breaking,” which will guarantee, in the near future, qualified labor for the job market and not literate people who understand the socio-political-economic relations of the “globalized” world in which they live.

Often, knowing how to read and write may not mean understanding the world and the relations that constitute the space-time of today’s society. This place of experiences often disregards people who question certain impositions, who know the reality in which they live and discuss it, who seek to be informed about the events that concern their social context. People with these characteristics end up excluded, because they disturb a hierarchical system reproduced throughout the ages. Many young people and adults, after having dropped out for some reason, return to it seeking to fit into this system and the opportunity to feel like citizens, having a job that ensures dignity. In this scenario, schooling can be seen as a necessity for survival and not as something that develops the ability to question reality and reflect on world events.

Preschool, in contemporary times, contemplates a fundamental aspect of human sociability. In this perspective, all the issues that involve constituting its space-time deserve careful reflection, so that its subjects are not simply objects of manipulation, but have the opportunity to intervene, to participate in decision-makings that concern their educational routine. Once the subjects who make up the educational process lose the ability to be outraged by situations, and that laws, norms, and standards go unquestioned and unexamined, something is wrong.

Santos (2018) suggests that in order to intervene in reality, one must address the very roots of the crisis, invent or reinvent thinking and desire emancipation. That is, enable the school to survive by focus-

ing on the discovery and resolution of the problems that permeate its space-time. Thus, perhaps, it may have greater possibilities to intervene in the environment, giving people the courage to feel part of it and of the social relations that permeate its constitution. According to Callai (2002, p. 84):

We often know things about the world, we admire wonderful landscapes, are dazzled by distant cities; we have information about exotic or interesting events from various places that impress us, but we do not know what exists and what is happening where we live.

The enthusiasm and will to make the school a conducive environment for human development sometimes seems to be lost or forgotten. In today's society, the desires are different and are strongly linked to consumption, to satisfying the needs related to appearance – a major way to feel included in the globalization process. Such a globalization is questionable, since it fails to meet all the needs of countries and people. Despite the great growth concerning access to information and technological development, elementary problems such as hunger, poverty, housing, and education have yet to be solved. The great leap in technological development has been far removed from these issues. Even though it has provided significant and important advances for humanity, thousands of people still have no access to education and, in many cases, what to eat in their homes these are precarious living conditions that expose contradictions and go against the development. Despite the lack of faith in preschools and the problems they face due to lack of physical structure, human resources, and social recognition, they are still seen as a worthy space where the students' basic needs are met. In this regard, we highlight the statement of an aide:

This time here is very rewarding. There are children that I have taken care of since I started working, and now I take care of their children. It is very rewarding to see the children grow up; it is so good and it goes by so fast. I remember my first day on the job, I arrived at the daycare center and learned a lot because I had never taken care of small children before (Teacher qualification).

From generation to generation, the school ends up being a reference, both for the students and for those responsible for them. When the aide says: "[...] I learned a lot because I had never taken care of small children," she reveals that her own practice helped in learning how to care for children, suggesting that everyday experience teaches what is necessary to meet the students' needs. This way of thinking about education can be considered a key issue at the root of the practices, as Santos (2018) stated. Using the experience as the starting point for understanding all the relationships established with students within the school is questionable. Experience teaches a lot, but it is not the end-all be-all. Besides (or beyond) it is a whole context of problematizations, which are made possible by studying and adequate training. People immersed in a routine that has been reproduced for years end up not realizing that their knowledge is not unique and requires constant updating.

The diversity of relationships established in the school context must be considered and reflected upon by everyone involved with education. Only by guaranteeing access to the reflective dimension of educational practice can its decisive importance for the social development process be admitted. To work in education is to engage with the social issues that affect social actors. Likewise, to work with early childhood education is to engage with students, with the representation of their world, and with childhood, which does not cease to have meaning when it is considered, thought of, and questioned on a daily basis. Directly related to this sense of time is the organization of school spaces: architecture and routine are determining factors of the school constitution. In this sense, we couldn't help but question the architectural organization of the preschool in question.

Moving towards a conclusion

To enter the children's world is to feel that we still have a chance and that we need to continue to reflect, seeking intervention possibilities to ensure quality of teaching and the dignity of the subjects involved in the education process. Choices are made individually; likewise, the consequences of these choices will also be experienced and felt on an individual basis.

However harsh and cruel reality may be, it is preferable to seek to understand it, not to transform it, but by unveiling the everyday situations of life, which are still related to professional choices, one can interfere in one's own way of thinking, acting, and reacting to the beauties and disillusionments which certain situations may reveal. It is impossible to reflect on the issue of educational relations between teachers and students and, more broadly, on human relations themselves, without taking power and knowledge relations as a basis. In general, the relationship between knowledge production and the resulting power is inherent to the human being.

The path taken in this approach outlines that one cannot talk about educational action without understanding that, between the lines of the whole educational and social system and pedagogical practice, are the teacher's personal interests, as a professional inserted in the labor market and as an agent of social change. In their interactions with colleagues, students, the school community, and society, the teacher is not without power—but while exercising it, they also suffer its action.

The debate on the care provided to students from 0 to 5 years of age in daycare centers and preschools has been gaining social space for reflection, especially regarding the education of those responsible for the students in the school routine. This research reveals some of what is experienced in and thought about early childhood schools in times of profound changes in how we conceive childhood and the teacher who work with this age group. At the time of analysis, the teaching staff of the school studied consisted of 10 aides and 3 female teachers, and they were unanimous in considering continuing education important, but

the question is how they conduct this process, considered fundamental for the development of all those involved in education.

For the group in question, studying does not translate the needs of the students' education but keeping up to date about new teaching methodologies and developing more efficient pedagogical practices are some of the main challenges for teachers. Completing a degree is just one step in the long training process, which cannot be interrupted as long as there are people willing to learn. Consequently, continuous learning is fundamental and can focus on two pillars: the teachers themselves, as an agent, and the school, as a place of permanent professional growth.

The concern with the teacher is central to educational and pedagogical reflection, because continuing education depends on each one's work. In this perspective, more important than educating is educating oneself; all knowledge is self-knowledge and all education is self-education. That is why the pedagogical practice includes the individual, with their singularities and affections. Education belongs to the subject themselves and is inscribed in a process of *being* (our lives and experiences, our past) and in a process of *becoming* (our projects, our idea of future).

We must offer teachers basic structural conditions, with career incentives. It is in the concrete space of each school, around real pedagogical or educational problems, that the teacher's education process is born. It should also be pointed out that universities play an important and decisive role in the successful application of theoretical and methodological plans at the service of learning.

Continuing education is a must for all teachers who develop activities with children; it is directly related to the teaching activity and is emphasized in teacher training courses. But it is not just a matter of participating in courses, workshops, or lectures; one must also engage with research that leads one to reflect on and seek solutions for the problems affection the school's everyday life. All knowledge produced is only effective if teachers manage to include it into their personal dynamics and articulate it with their development process.

With this research, we want to instigate, question, lead to reflection; it is not our intention, to borrow from Foucault (2021), to clarify the role of theory, nor to make people instantaneously change their way of perceiving events. We wish to incite doubt, which may (or may not) lead teachers to question their practices. Continuing education can be seen as a personal choice, and even a life choice. The 'why' of it all is only felt by those who dare to enter this world of infinite possibilities and interpretations and let themselves be carried away by this adventure of travelling down known and/or unknown paths. At this point, therefore, the goal is not to "finish or conclude" this study, but to socialize it, make it public and expose it to criticism, which may allow us to continue this adventure.

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Notes

- 1 As most participants were women, the text will use 'female teachers' when appropriate to specify its research subjects.
- 2 Despite having been carried out in 2005, the data collected in this study are still relevant for discussing the current scenario.
- 3 Following the recommendations of the ethics committee and the ethical precepts, the research subjects will have their anonymity preserved. Thus, each statement will be identified only by the individual's educational background.
- 4 Author's translation: The midwife draws forth, the wet nurse nourishes, the tutor trains, the teacher teaches.

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