

A man in daycare as a teacher in early childhood education: Teacher yes, uncle no



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ABSTRACT

The considerations that I weave here are fruits of the records of my observations, during my first experience as a man, and my first year, as a teacher of 11 babies, (3 girls and 8 boys), whose ages ranged from 04 months to 07 months, when I received them in the nursery, at the beginning of the 2019 school year, in a daycare center, of the Municipal Public Education Network, in the interior of São Paulo, in a city of approximately just over 200,000 inhabitants. Having said that and when experiencing teaching in early childhood education, in stage I, it is essential to point out that coexistence occurs with babies, subjects already constituted,

who form a group for which we teachers are responsible, including for us men who when working in early childhood education, exercise professional activity in a universe almost exclusively, occupied by women. The prejudices and stigmas originating from ideas that see the teaching profession as if exclusively female are evident. Body care was an attribute of women; The proximity between a man dealing with the body of babies provokes conflicts, doubts, questions, stigmas, and prejudices. However, the choice to work with babies starts from the privileged space, not only assistentialist, but also of emotion and creation, whose challenges lead to the conquest of knowledge, learning and doing, aligned in the teaching activity, eminently relational, culminating with the achievements and participation of babies in relation to learning. Thus, teaching in early childhood, linked to an attentive and thorough look, results in the exchange of experiences that is consolidated in the will to continue.

Keywords: Baby teacher, Early Childhood Education, Non-welfare space, Eminently relational activity, Municipal Public School System.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE NURSERY, THE TEACHER, AND THE BABIES

The considerations that I weave here are fruits of the records of my observations, during my first experience and my first year as a teacher of 11 babies, (3 girls and 8 boys), whose ages ranged from 04 months to 07 months, when I received them in the nursery, at the beginning of the 2019 school year, in a daycare center, of the public school system, in the city of Rio Claro - SP, a city of approximately just over 200,000 inhabitants.

The city has 68 Municipal Public Schools, offering Early Childhood Education (EMEI) and Elementary Education (EMEF). The State and Private Schools are responsible for High School. Of the 68 units of the Municipal Network, 70% of them offer daycare centers, whose enrollment covers students from 04 months to 3 years of age, respectively.



In the unit in which I work, one of the oldest in the city, the enrolled students are aged between 04 months to 3 years. The daycare center is located in a neighborhood on the outskirts and serves lower-middle-class families. Babies and children are welcomed at 7 a.m. and remain in the Unit until 5 p.m., as parents work outside all day.

Having said that and when experiencing teaching in early childhood education, in stage I, it is essential to point out that coexistence occurs with babies, subjects already constituted, who form a group for which we teachers are responsible, including for us men who when working in early childhood education, exercise professional activity in a universe almost exclusively, occupied by women.

Here it is worth remembering that the image of the man, of the teacher, especially in the Crèches, is a very recent image, but it is based on the understanding that the Crèches are a space not only "assistentialist", but of "learning", "experiences" and "welcoming".

Thus, the teaching practice is so clothed with a commitment to this first stage, this "early childhood", guiding the teacher's gaze to the sensitivity of listening and details in his relational practice, in an attempt to deconstruct the adult-centric vision, sometimes impregnated in each one of us and that, most of the time, it ignores childhood, especially the developmental period of each baby.

It is in this sense that we can consider the daycare center a very valuable space, especially for those who want to know in depth the "children's universe", as mentioned by Sarmiento (2003). Only the attentive and refined look will make us realize what each of these babies has of more valuable and particular, for each teacher to exercise his pedagogical practice, developing it in such a way that not only respects the individuality of these little ones, but, above all, differentiates itself from ours as adults.

However, how can we learn more about babies? In contact with other colleagues, nursery teachers, it is noticeable the fact that they notice the richness of the way of being childish. In the conversations in the café or even during lunch at the daycare I notice the affectionate way in which each one comments on the way each baby likes to sleep, what they most enjoy eating, their favorite toys, which are more quiet or agitated. They also record the different forms of communication of these babies, such as, for example, looks, touches, babbling, crying, smiling, so closely linked to the exercise of daily teaching activity.

In this sense, it is essential that the professionals who work with the babies are instrumentalized in the different languages of the little ones, in order not only to understand them, but also to listen to them. Knowing the baby and building an eminently relational bond with him, the teacher will be able to perceive the small child, in order to respect it and interact with it as an effective social being, and not only as a body to be bathed, fed or exchanged.



Although there is an accurate perception in relation to each of the babies, the daily life of a group of little ones in some institutions of collective education, is characterized by being constituted of "gradual and routine" moments, which are witnessed by some teachers without an understanding that considers the ends and intentions. Many of the actions performed by teachers in the daily life of some daycare centers end up being automated and, not being contemplated as relevant, go unnoticed, not revealing the richness of daily life.

That said, I allow myself to say that the teaching activity with babies is characterized by the details of daily practices, that is, the pedagogical activities proposed by the teacher to the babies, such as playing with objects of different materials and sizes in which the movements of grip and tweezers are possible, experimentation with boogers, materials of different textures, sensory carpet, manipulation of different objects, with different textures, consistency, flavors etc; music, storytelling, call with photos of the babies, among other activities that are essential in the configuration of the teaching performance, since being relational is also humanizing, since they extrapolate the routine, not least, but only assistentialist of the day to day, such as bathing, changing diapers and feeding babies.

I believe that these "humanizing moments" are essential and essential so that adults, that is, teachers and educational agents become protagonists of educational relationships, considering the uniqueness of each baby. These are, according to Musatti (1998), the "subtlest and necessarily most complex roles."

Although the simultaneity of the actions that happen in a nursery, where there are specific needs and desires (one cries, another wants to sleep, one wants to lap, another wants to play, one is in a dirty diaper, another has fallen etc.), with babies there are situations that happen very slowly and not immediately evident.

For example, there are babies who are slow to feed, while there are others asking for food; or even, there are times when it takes months for them to acquire some affective, motor, cognitive or social achievements. On the other hand, there are several situations that occur so quickly that if they are not documented and perceived as constitutive experiences of the educational context of a nursery, characterized by the details of the actions that compose them, they end up being lost in the troubled daily life.

In the nursery, or even outside it, listening to the gaze of each of the teachers will be the indicator for everything that happens to the little ones. It seems to me that a determinant for teaching practices to take place in one way or another is how much each teacher knows each of the babies, recognizes their multiple languages, values their gestures, expressions, silences, looks, thus demonstrating how much they are available to perceive each of them, often giving up the repertoire of concepts (and pre-concepts) that they have built throughout their professional activity.



I want to emphasize the importance of baby teachers looking, listening, and feeling these little subjects for whom they are responsible, understanding their rhythms so as not to be carried away by the mechanicalistic of a routine that automates actions and homogenizes individuals. I return to the issues of the pedagogical action that perceives each of the babies as a singular being and that, as a subject, is already constituted. After all, taking for themselves real knowledge of what each baby has of most valuable, the professionals of Education will have subsidies to plan and detail their daily lives.

In pointing out the idea of "planning" I wish, here, to express that I do not understand this as a list of actions that, perhaps, must be performed by a collective of babies. If we conceive that planning is simply listing activities to be carried out during the day, probably aiming at the production of something that simply emerges in the final result, it will certainly be very difficult to organize the daily activities in a general way and, in particular, of the nurseries in a specific way.

I believe that when planning the daily life in early childhood education we must think about time, spaces and relationships. So does the organization of my living room space allow babies to do what I perceive them to be telling me? Does the arrangement of furniture, toys and other materials facilitate or hinder the relationships between babies and babies, babies and teachers, babies and families, families and teachers?

Such reflections can be woven about the "time" of the daycare. This means that if we know what babies are indicating, we can perceive in the subtleties of the observations that a particular baby is better during the day if he takes a bath in the middle of the morning on a hot day, or that he needs a little sleep in the middle of the afternoon to be in a good mood.

Thus, if there are singularities in the way of being of each baby, there must also be space for their differences, times, rhythms and cadences to be at least taken into account. However, such a feat will only be achieved if we learn to see and hear, from the pedagogy of listening and looking, the notes of the indications of these babies.

According to Faria (2001):

The fact that we do certain activities every day, such as sleeping, eating, bathing, etc., does not authorize the early childhood education professional to do them every time, but rather to challenge to fulfill these rituals, with intentionality, in the set of educational actions. (p.71)

It is the interventions rethought in pedagogical practices that will allow the little ones the opportunity not only to relate, but also to recognize themselves as constituted representatives of the human species. In this sense, I agree with Musatti (1998) in pointing out that "young children are not indifferent to the feelings of other children"; and that "bonds and woven links can be built and developed" (UNGER, 2001). And that "the educational project for young children must have bases and objectives structured in relationships and solidarity" (SPAGGIARI, 1998).



Promoting education to a baby means enabling the integral growth of the individual, as well as developing solidarity, the ability to see and understand the other. Many of the acts of violence occur because of a lack of respect for human life. We live in a period of barbarism of Modernity, in which ethical and moral values were (or are) in disuse, in this way, a generation of young people has been created who cannot respect the human being, simply because they do not see others as their fellow beings.

In this sense, I share the opinion of Unger (2001) when he affirms that the moment is serious, in a more essential way, because man has forgotten the richness of what it can mean to be a human being.

Faria (2001) points out that early childhood education institutions, as well as other educational institutions, coexist with the binomial "attention x control". This is defined as the necessary attention offered by the adult to the little ones and the equally necessary control so that they learn to live in society.

In such a way that:

It is important to ensure that the balance shifts towards "attention" and "control" should be turned, not to individualism and submission, but to the true learning of life in society: solidarity, generosity, cooperation, friendship (FARIA, 2001, p.72).

Reflect on leftovers to educational intentions I refer to the words of Charlot (2000) when referring to the importance of education for "hominization" or to become a man.

To be born means to see oneself subjected to the obligation to learn. Learning to build oneself, in a triple process of "hominization" (becoming a man), of singularization (becoming a unique exemplar of man), of socialization (becoming a member of a community, sharing its values and occupying a place in it). Learning to live with other men with whom the world is shared. Learning to appropriate the world, a part of that world, and to participate in the construction of a pre-existing world. [...] To be born, to learn, is to enter a set of relationships and processes that constitute a system of meaning, where it is said who I am, who the world is, who others are (p.53).

2 THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE WITH BABIES: THE BNCC AND THE FIELDS OF EXPERIENCE

Part of the work of our work, as an educator, is to reflect, select, organize, plan, mediate and monitor the set of practices and interactions, ensuring the plurality of situations that promote the full development of babies. Still, it is necessary to follow both these practices and the learning, observing the trajectories of their achievements, advances, possibilities, and learning.

Through several records, made at different times by us teachers (such as reports, portfolios, photographs), it is possible to evidence the progression that occurred during the observed period. It is about bringing together elements to reorganize time, spaces and situations that guarantee the learning rights of all babies.



Considering that, in Early Childhood Education, the learning and development of babies have as structuring axes the interactions and play, assuring them the rights to coexist, play, participate, explore, express themselves and know themselves, the curricular organization of Early Childhood Education at BNCC is structured in five fields of experiences, within which the learning and development objectives are defined.

The fields of experiences constitute a curricular arrangement that welcomes the concrete situations and experiences of everyday life. Considering this, the fields of experience in which BNCC is organized are:

- **The self, the other and the we:** it is in the interaction with peers and with adults that babies constitute their own way of acting, feeling and thinking. As they live their first social experiences (in the family, in the school institution, in the collectivity), they build perceptions and while they participate in social relations and personal care, they build their autonomy and sense of self-care, reciprocity and interdependence with the environment.
- **Body, gestures and movements:** with the body (through the senses, gestures, impulsive or intentional movements, coordinated or spontaneous), babies, from an early age, explore the world, space and the objects of their surroundings, establish relationships, express themselves, play and produce knowledge about themselves, about the other, about the social universe. In Early Childhood Education the body of these babies gains centrality, because it is the privileged participant of the pedagogical practices of physical care, oriented to emancipation and freedom, and not to submission. Thus, the school institution needs to promote rich opportunities for babies to explore and experience a wide repertoire of movements, gestures, looks, sounds and mimes with the body, to discover various modes of occupation and use of space with the body (such as sitting with support, crawling, crawling, slipping, walking leaning on cribs, tables and ropes, balancing, stretching, etc.).
- **Traits, sounds, colors, and shapes:** living with different artistic, cultural and scientific, local and universal manifestations, in the daily life of the school institution, enables babies, through diversified experiences, to experience various forms of expression and languages, such as: painting, melecas, music, storytelling, manipulation of objects, among others. Based on these experiences, they express themselves through various languages, creating their own artistic or cultural productions, exercising authorship (collective and individual) with sounds, traces, gestures, mimes, staging and songs. These experiences contribute to babies developing knowledge of themselves, others, and the reality that surrounds them.
- **Listening, speaking, thinking and imagining:** from birth, babies participate in everyday communicative situations with the people with whom they interact. The first forms of interaction of the baby are the movements of his body, the look, the body posture, the



smile, the crying and other vocal resources, which gain meaning with the interpretation of the other. In Early Childhood Education, it is important to promote experiences in which babies can listen, enhancing their participation in oral culture, because it is in listening to stories, in participating in conversations, in descriptions, in narratives elaborated individually or in groups and in the implications with the multiple languages that they actively constitute themselves as a singular subject and belonging to a social group.

- **Spaces, times, quantities, relationships, and transformations:** Babies live inserted in spaces and times of different dimensions, in a world made up of natural and sociocultural phenomena. From birth they are in the most diverse spaces (street, neighborhood, city etc.) and times (day and night; today, yesterday and tomorrow etc.). They also show curiosity about the physical world, such as their own body, the possibilities of its manipulation, etc. Therefore, Early Childhood Education needs to promote experiences in which these babies can make observations, manipulate objects, investigate, attending to their curiosities. Thus, the school institution is creating opportunities for them to interact with the physical and sociocultural world, present in their daily lives, whether in the school institution (daycare) or outside it.

3 EXPERIENCE, EXPERIENCE, TASTE AND FEEL

If we imagine the role of the teacher not only as tutor of a pleasant, cozy, safe space, but also stimulating and challenging for each of the babies in the nursery; if we think that this same teacher respects the rhythm and cadence of the little ones; If we think that the foundation of the planning of this professional are not activities, but intense relationships between all those who make up a certain education community, we can affirm that the role of this teacher is to enable babies to "experience" in the context of daycare.

For Jorge Larrosa (2002) "experience is what passes us by, what happens to us, what touches us" (p.21). In the context of early childhood education many unusual situations happen in the daily lives of teachers and babies; But what really touches and transforms them?

In such a way that we must refer to the eminently relational practice in early childhood education, since we seek actions, whose process leads to emancipation and not to subalternity. In this way, we do not want our little ones to be content, to settle for little or almost nothing, since they have not had more for lack of opportunities. We do not want their childhood experiences to be marked by disaffection, hopelessness, neglect, humiliation, and neglect, which leave their scars and stigmas.

We do want babies to be able to go through various and rich experiences. In the first year of life the baby is discovering the world, everything for him is very new. In this period, he is having his



first impressions about what it is to "be" to be human and therefore the importance of fostering diverse and stimulating experiences.

Thus, it is essential that professionals plan the most diverse possibilities in order for babies to experience. But how do you capture all of this and make use of it to plan? This planning, as I refer to, should, rather, be planned in the light of records that take as a starting point the protagonism of each of the babies.

Knowing what touches and what transforms each of the little ones is a learning that takes place through listening and a delicate, subtle and attentive pedagogical look of the teachers to the signals that each baby emits. The registry, therefore, will be fundamental for the planning of these education professionals to be structured from what each baby, such as "being constituted" already "is", and not that it will come to "be".

That said, it is only by knowing each of the little ones, respecting their specificities and their singularities that teachers will not only be able to know what touches and what transforms each of the babies, but also what the experiences for each of them consist of.

That said, it is possible to criticize the current model of education, in which everyone must follow the same times, in the same spaces, following the logic of consensus that stagnates plurality and difference. The important thing is that the pedagogical acts produce meanings for the little ones so that they can extract meaning from the practice that is being provided.

This requires not losing sight of questions such as: what touches each of these babies? What makes sense for each of them? What do I, the most experienced representative of the human species, want for them? How does this contribute to its humanization? Is it important to them or is it just an activity planned by the teacher without considering the interests and ways of thinking and acting of the little ones?

Is what I'm planning based on babies' ways of being and expressing themselves? Does the proposal intend to expand and enrich the cultural, kinesthetic, affective or relational repertoire of the little ones? Thus, experiences can only be fostered in the context of daycare if teachers learn to know what is really meaningful for babies who spend part of their childhood in that collective space. Thinking about planning for early childhood education groups implies reflecting on the specificities of this stage of education.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Early childhood education does not have the formal function of teaching something, but it is its role to increase the cultural repertoire, favoring learning. It is necessary to rescue learning for early childhood education. With the fear of schooling practices and instruction, we stopped talking about the



importance of learning. It is not the responsibility of early childhood education teachers to teach and transmit, in fact, this should not be characteristic of the work of any teacher.

However, they have a fundamental role, which I define as "subtleties of details" in the learning, for example, of babies in daycare. This can be characterized as a presence attentive and available to share the knowledge produced and accumulated by humanity throughout its history.

Therefore, it is essential to plan situations or the use of diversified materials in the daily work with the little ones, providing contact with different learning possibilities, which are, relational, affective, cognitive, expressive or artistic, because what characterizes the teaching role in practice with babies is the intentionality of these actions.

I also understand this "learning" in the way that Paulo Freire (1996) announced, being the ability to create, build, reconstruct or transform a given knowledge or a given reality, so that the little ones do not have the passive role of receiving what the adults transmit to them, but are active in the construction of this learning, which takes place through interactions, in relation to others.

I agree with Charlot (2000, p.70) when he states that: "learning can also be learning to be supportive, suspicious, responsible, patient; to lie, to fight, to help others; in short, to understand people, to know life, to know who you are."

In Freire's opinion (1996) one of the most important points of teaching is the critical reflection on the practice, so that "it is by thinking critically about the practice of today or yesterday that one can improve the next practice" (p.43-44).

That said, I raise some questions: what is extraordinary about early childhood education? Wouldn't the extraordinary be present in the possibility of reviewing concepts already crystallized in modern society about babies and about the ways of dealing with them? Does the adventure of these little ones' lives no longer bring with it the extraordinary? Is the extraordinary not in welcoming the uniqueness of each baby?

Is this extraordinary in the possibility of presenting to the little human being the riches of the world, of society, of culture and of the people around him? Is there something extraordinary about enabling educational contexts in which each baby can express themselves in different ways?

It seems to me that the possibility of perceiving the extraordinary, the exceptional, in the pedagogical work with babies starts from the subtle actions that characterize teaching with this age group, which should be marked not only by the promotion of intense and pleasurable relationships, but also of confrontation, which also bring with them the possibility of exchanges and non-consensus, by the attentive looks defined by curiosity, by astonishment, by questioning, by the humility of not knowing and not predicting, by the possibility of joint discovery, of shared experience. It is extraordinary to think that not everything is pre-established, that there are discoveries to be made along the way.



I conclude this article, taking for myself the notes of Kuhlmann Jr. (2001), when suggesting that the pedagogical path for the education of babies may lie in the posture of simplicity in dealing with them, in the "simply complex" and that here I tried to define as a subtle role in the pedagogy of sensitivity and details.

I refer again, too, to the challenge of having chosen to be a baby teacher. I reiterate that the male image in relation to teaching in early childhood, especially with babies in daycare centers, corroborates with the point that although we men, when choosing to act as teachers in Early Childhood Education, being part of a minority, in a universe historically occupied almost exclusively by women, we are welcomed by families and babies, supporting our pedagogical performance only in assistentialism, but above all in learning and experiences there.

The prejudices and stigmas originating from ideas that see the profession as eminently feminine are evident. Body care was an attribute of women; The proximity between a man dealing with the body of the little ones provokes conflicts, doubts, questions, stigmas, and prejudices.

However, the choice to work with babies starts from the privileged space, not only assistentialist, but also of emotion and creation, whose challenges lead to the conquest of knowledge, learning and doing, aligned in the teaching activity, eminently relational, culminating with the achievements and participation of babies in relation to learning.

Thus, teaching in early childhood, linked to an attentive and thorough look, results in the exchange of experiences that is consolidated not only in the desire to teach, but also in the desire to continue.



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