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(De)colonial processes related to childhoods: playing outdoors in early childhood education

Processos (de)coloniais relacionados às infâncias: o brincar ao ar livre na Educação Infantil¹

Procesos (de)coloniales relacionados con la infancia: el juego al aire libre en Educación Infantil

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Abstract

The article discusses the adult-centric (de)coloniality on young children during play. This is an excerpt from research that sought to understand colonial and decolonial processes related to childhood, through the analysis of the children's relations with peers and with educators, established in the outdoor spaces of a CMEI in a rural community. To achieve this objective, we opted for a qualitative approach, with ethnographic inspiration, combined with the conceptions of research methodologies with children, using participant observation as a methodological procedure. The data obtained was organized into three categories, two of which are discussed

¹ This article is the result of ongoing doctoral research "Decoloniality, Cultures of Childhood and Early Childhood Education", developed at the Graduate Program in Teaching, Philosophy and History of Sciences, at the Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

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in this work: Coloniality and outdoor play and Aspects that contribute to the construction of decolonial processes. Among the results and conclusions presented are: the existence of multiple dimensions that affect, positively or negatively, decolonial processes related to childhood and playing in Early Childhood Education; the presence of colonial-adult-centric acts by educators; the occurrence of (re)production of these acts also by children; and the verification that they use decolonial strategies, while playing and producing cultures.

Keywords: Adult-centric coloniality. Decolonial processes. Infancy. To play. Early Childhood Education.

Resumo

O artigo discute a respeito da (de)colonialidade adultocêntrica sobre as crianças pequenas durante o brincar. Este é um recorte de uma pesquisa que buscou compreender sobre processos coloniais e decoloniais relacionados às infâncias, por meio da análise das relações de crianças com seus pares e com educadoras, estabelecidas nos espaços ao ar livre de um CMEI em uma comunidade do campo. Para alcançar esse objetivo, optamos por uma abordagem qualitativa, com inspiração etnográfica, aliada às concepções de metodologias de pesquisas com crianças, tendo como procedimento metodológico a observação participante. Os dados obtidos foram organizados em três categorias, das quais duas são discutidas neste trabalho: Colonialidade e o brincar ao ar livre e Aspectos que contribuem na construção de processos decoloniais. Dentre os resultados e conclusões apresentados estão: a existência de múltiplas dimensões que afetam, positiva ou negativamente, os processos decoloniais relacionados às infâncias e ao brincar na Educação Infantil; a presença de atos coloniais-adultocêntricos das educadoras; a ocorrência de (re)produção desses atos também pelas crianças; e a verificação de que elas se utilizam de estratégias decoloniais, enquanto brincam e produzem culturas.

Palavras-chave: Colonialidade adultocêntrica. Processos decoloniais. Infância. Brincar. Educação Infantil.

Resumen

El artículo discute la (de)colonialidad adultocéntrica en niños pequeños durante el juego. Este es un extracto de una investigación que buscó comprender los procesos coloniales y decoloniales relacionados con la infancia, a través del análisis de las relaciones de los niños con pares y con educadores, establecidas en los espacios al aire libre de un CMEI en una comunidad rural. Para lograr este objetivo, optamos por un enfoque cualitativo, con inspiración etnográfica, combinado con las concepciones de las metodologías de investigación con niños, utilizando la observación participante como procedimiento metodológico. Los datos obtenidos se organizaron en tres categorías, dos de las cuales se discuten en este trabajo: Colonialidad y juego al aire libre y Aspectos que contribuyen a la construcción de procesos decoloniales. Entre los resultados y conclusiones presentados están: la existencia de múltiples dimensiones que inciden, positiva o negativamente, en los procesos decoloniales relacionados con la infancia y el juego en la Educación Infantil; la presencia de actos coloniales-adultocéntricos por parte de educadores; la ocurrencia de (re)producción de estos actos también por parte de niños; y la constatación de que emplean estrategias decoloniales al jugar y producir culturas.

Palabras clave: Colonialidad adultocéntrica. Procesos decoloniales. Infancia. Jugar. Educación Infantil.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to address children, their childhoods, playing and cultures in the context of early childhood education. For this purpose, we present an excerpt from a study that aimed to understand colonial and decolonial processes related to childhoods, by analyzing children's relationships with their peers and teachers, established in the outdoor spaces of an Early Childhood Education Center (CMEI, in Portuguese) in a rural community. The data that emerged from the research was organized into three categories of analysis, namely: 1) Coloniality and playing outdoors; 2) Aspects that contribute to the construction of decolonial processes; 3) Children's decolonial strategies. Each category was subdivided into subcategories that allowed a more in-depth analysis. In this text, we will discuss the categories 1 and 2.

This research process began with the following questions: Who are these children? What wishes do they express? What do they usually do? What kinds of playing and cultures do they produce? Are deprivations and colonial- adultcentric impositions perceived during their playing?

These concerns, combined with the awareness that there is a limited number of studies on childhood within the decolonial framework², encouraged the research to be carried out. Therefore, the theoretical constructions that support this work were developed from the relationship between two spheres: young children in Early Childhood Education and their playing cultures; and decolonial studies.

The condition of subalternity, due to the coloniality of Latin American peoples, also affects the children of these peoples. Their logics, knowledge, cultures, playing, subjectivities and actions are affected by the colonial relationship, which persists and is reproduced on them even by the adults of these subalternized peoples. In this context, adultcentrism, which, according to Santiago and Faria (2015, p. 73), "is one of the prejudices most naturalized by contemporary society" (translated by the authors), is the main instrument of the coloniality of childhood.

Defined by Quapper (2012) as a sociocultural process centered on the adult, who is considered to have the capacity to decide and control over everyone else, adultcentrism, although not a form of subordination exclusive to Latin America, in this scenario plays a crucial role in strengthening and reproducing coloniality, since by positioning the adult as the undeniable authority, it reinforces the subordination of children.

This characteristic of adultcentrism limits the possibility of an education that values children's voices, knowledge, cultures and experiences, which is essential for countering coloniality. In this way, coloniality, combined with adultcentrism, generates a dynamic of continuous oppression. It is therefore essential to adopt educational practices that challenge the colonial-adultcentric logic, promoting a more inclusive, respectful and empowering education for children. In this sense, Oliveira (2021) stresses the importance of paying attention to the adultcentric relationship in the process of decolonial struggle, considering this a fundamental aspect for confronting the coloniality of childhoods.

In view of this, this article is a theoretical-practical study on this subject, first presenting the theoretical basis of the work, then the methodological approaches and foundations, and then discussing some of the results achieved.

Colonial and decolonial processes: childhood and early childhood education

The discussions related to colonial pedagogies are the main theoretical references guiding this research. In this sense, decolonial studies, which are concerned with an education centered on adultcentrism and other forms of coloniality of childhood, are essential for thinking about an Early Childhood Education in which children are truly seen, heard and respected.

² This perception arose through the theoretical research carried out during the doctoral process that resulted in this article.

Decolonial studies emerged in Latin America, mainly through the discussions and investigations carried out by the Modernity/Coloniality group. Authors such as Aníbal Quijano (1992, 2005, 2009), Walter Dignolo (2003, 2017), Edgardo Lander (2005) and Catherine Walsh (2013) sustain their discussions on the understanding that colonialism in Latin America is the beginning of a continued system of coloniality, which, combined with modernity, dominates and oppresses the various domains of Latin American peoples' lives.

Such an oppressive system is maintained by multiple policies, philosophies and actions, so studies that seek to uncover and combat this subjugation include discussions on the colonialities of power (Quijano, 2009), of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), of knowledge (Lander, 2005), among others.

In this context, although still incipient, debates involving the (de)coloniality of childhood and children's education have provided a framework for conducting investigations that seek to deepen the discussion. It is following this path that this research is positioned, considering adultcentric coloniality as an issue that needs to be uncovered.

Play, childhood cultures and (de)coloniality

The coloniality of childhood constitutes forms of oppression, domination and subjugation of Latin American children, in which Eurocentric and adultcentric standards are imposed on them, denying their ways of being, living, knowing, thinking and feeling. Play, as a child's main activity, is highlighted in the colonial and decolonial processes of childhood, since play can be both a victim of adultcentric coloniality and a powerful decolonial instrument used by children (Silva, 2007).

Brougère's sociocultural perspective indicates that play is closely related to the social and cultural context. "Play is a process of inter-individual relations, thus of culture" (2007, p. 97, translated by the authors), it is a social activity, which arises from social learning and involves negotiations and conventions between the participants.

While playing, children learn about the culture in which they live, and also enrich that culture. For Brougère, there is "a ludic culture, a set of rules and meanings specific to the play that the player acquires and masters in the context of their play" (1998, p. 107, translated by the authors). The author defines ludic culture as the set of experiences acquired and accumulated by the child from the first playing activities learned as a baby and evoked in their play (Brougère, 1998).

In this sense, studies in the sociology of childhood have provided important contributions by demonstrating that children are social actors who produce their own cultures. Authors such as Corsaro (2011) Sarmiento (2001, 2002) Qvortrup (2010) understand that children, especially while playing, produce cultures in relationships with their peers. These childhood cultures are related to the cultures of adults; however, they are adapted, resignified and modified, thus constructing cultures that are peculiar to childhoods.

The act of playing freely and producing cultures with their peers during play allows children to question and challenge, with their multiple languages and movements, the adultcentric colonialities to which they are submitted. In this sense, Salva, Scrütz and Mattos (2021, p. 70) speak of the child's ability to "play a leading role in processes of micro-revolutions" (translated by the authors).

(De)colonial early childhood education

Early childhood education is a privileged space for the construction of childhood cultures, as it has fairly stable children's groups, a characteristic that, according to Corsaro (2011), contributes to this process. However, the adultcentric coloniality, which seeks to colonially suffocate, shape and pedagogize children and their childhoods, is harmful to these cultural constructions.

Colonial adultcentric pedagogy imposes universal ways of being, knowing, playing and feeling on children, based on adult and Euro-American standards, denying and combating the particularities of

children, not considering them as historical, cultural, creative individuals with rights, with multiple belongings and knowledge, capable of constructing worldviews and acting effectively in the society in which they are inserted.

The proposal for a decolonial Early Childhood Education opens up spaces for children to be the protagonists and to have their positions, desires and knowledge taken into account in the educational process. Recognizing children as social actors is the first step in this transformation, because “a decolonial pedagogy for childhood starts from the necessary uncovering of the various colonialities of life and, at the same time, the fight against excluding, discriminating and subalternizing practices” (Macedo and Faria, 2022, p. 104, translated by the authors).

Based on what Catherine Walsh (2013) calls decolonial pedagogy, decolonial Early Childhood Education attempts to build pedagogical practices that oppose and resist colonial-adultcentric forms of teaching, looking at and listening to children in order to rethink pedagogical practices with them. Macedo and Faria (2022), reflecting on the decolonial proposal for Early Childhood Education, explain that its foundation resides “in the establishment of dialogues ‘with others’ and not ‘in the name of others’, as well as in the pursuit of recognizing diversity as constitutive of the human, that is, not as a problem to be solved, but as a space that expands the participation of different collectives (...)” (p. 104, translated by the authors). In this sense, the authors emphasize the importance of stressing “politically, pedagogically and epistemologically the debates and practices experienced in early childhood education institutions” (Macedo and Faria, 2022, p. 104, translated by the authors).

An approach that can contribute to the construction of a decolonial Early Childhood Education is to consider children's play as an object of observation and analysis of who children are, how they live their childhoods, what are their knowledge, cultures, positions and interests, in a manner that allows rethinking pedagogical practices.

Early childhood education in the decolonial field

Early childhood education in the decolonial field has specificities that involve the subjects of the countryside and their ways of life, which are distinct from urbanized ways of life. In this sense, “the countryside education movement is an important counterpart with whom we can dialogue about decolonial pedagogies” (Zeferino, Passos and Paim, 2019, p. 30, translated by the authors). In addition to the requirement for schools to be located where people live, countryside education has emerged to resist urbanized teaching processes. For this reason, true countryside education values the ways of life of people living in the countryside, contributes to the right of countryside inhabitants to remain in the countryside and collaborates in their production of life. Like decolonial pedagogies, countryside education includes a formation conceived with the community, in opposition to countryside education with urbanized characteristics. Therefore, the claim for a specific educational project for people living in the countryside places them and their ways of life at protagonists. This is also a proposition of decolonial pedagogies, which intend to think about education from other logics, which are invisibilized by the colonial way of thinking.

In addition to the subjugation of children who live in urban contexts, children from the countryside suffer an adultcentric coloniality that also involves the condition of being subjects from the countryside. In this sense, Dias, Soares and Oliveira (2016, p. 391) explain that, in relation to “countryside childhoods, the process of subalternization is twofold: by the hegemonic adultcentric urban culture and by the processes of silencing and invisibilization that also occur in their own countryside territories” (translated by the authors).

Proposing a decolonial countryside Early Childhood Education involves the recognition and the legitimization of the “multiplicity of times-spaces, places and territories in which these children and their childhoods are constructed” (Dias, Soares and Oliveira, 2016, p. 388, translated by the authors). It must start from understanding the specificities of countryside children, recognizing and valuing their cultures and knowledge.

Paths inspired by ethnography and research methodologies with children

In this section of the article, we describe the paths taken to carry out the research and our perceptions of the locus of the study. It is worth highlighting that this is qualitative research, inspired by ethnography, combined with the methodological conceptions of studies with children.

The option for ethnographic research was due to the need to be immersed in the children's space-time, during their outdoor play at the school where the research was carried out, seeking to get closer to the social and cultural relationships they establish in this place of play with the teachers and their peers. Ethnography is "an effective method for studying children because many features of their interactions and cultures are produced and shared in the present and cannot be easily obtained through reflective interviews or questionnaires" (Corsaro, 2011, p. 63, translated by the authors). The use of the term ethnographic inspiration to define this type of research is due to the fact that we didn't have such a long time to carry out this immersion.

During the research, we assumed the role of researchers-militants who wanted to highlight the voices and cultures of young countryside children. To do this, we decided to associate the ethnographic inspiration with research methodologies with children, which are theoretical-methodological constructions that seek to place children as the main subjects, valuing their multiple languages, their knowledge, their ways of being and living, because, as Martins Filho and Barbosa (2010) point out, the time has come for these two different logics - those of adults and children - to enter into dialogue, away from the prism of submission, building forms of communication, interaction and negotiation with children.

A major challenge in research methodologies with children is to move away from the place of adultcentric colonizers, deconstructing certitudes and seeking to understand the various situations from the perspective of the children themselves. In this sense, we take epistemological and methodological care not to label or classify children's speech, silence, expressions, actions and interactions, cries, times, play and cultures with our adultcentric point of view.

The research was carried out in a CMEI, located in the countryside of a municipality of Bahia, considering outdoor areas as research spaces. The outdoor space was chosen because it is the institution's environment where children, despite being under the control of adults, usually carry out activities more freely, thus providing an excellent opportunity for the production of childhood cultures. This outdoor space is a large area with trees, bushes, herbs and flowers; park rides; a large sandpit; a soccer field; a covered area with other park rides and other spaces that can be used in different ways.

The institution looks after children from 2 to 5 years old, but it doesn't have enough classrooms or the right size of classrooms to cater for all early childhood classes, so it uses a rented space for the 4 and 5 year old classes, called the Extension. When we started the research, we realized that we also needed to understand and observe the children's play in the space that is used for outdoor play at the Extension, because the children at the Extension use the outdoor space at the main building (described above) only once a week, and on the other days they only spend fifteen minutes outside the small reference rooms of the groups, in a small and inadequate space in the Extension itself, which is used for free play and meals.

Given the reality of the places and the theoretical-methodological frameworks of the research, we chose the participative observation as our data construction instrument. We observed children aged between 2 and 5 years old for a period of three months, during the morning shift. The research was carried out in the morning, because the children use the outdoor space in the school (the main observation site) more during this shift. The registers were made using audio recordings, photographs and video recordings.

Before starting the observations, in addition to requesting permission from the educators who work at the institution and from those who are responsible for the children, we carried out an activity with the children to ask for their own agreement, since we understand that even young children need to be listened

to and their choices respected. For this purpose, we presented a children's story with visual resources and language appropriate to the children's age group.

In the data analysis process, which used content analysis as proposed by Bardin (2011), units of analysis were constructed and organized into three categories, with subcategories that contributed to a better understanding of the research object. The table below shows two of these analytical categories with their respective subcategories:

Table 1 - Research categories and subcategories³

Analytical Categories	Subcategories
Coloniality and playing outdoors	Colonial aspects in the organization and structure of the institution. Colonial attitudes of the teachers. Colonial attitudes of the children.
Aspects that contribute to the construction of decolonial processes	The outdoor space at the institution's main building. Playground time. Physical distance from the educators. Freedom in contact with nature. Children's ludic cultural productions.

Source: Own authorship.

(De)coloniality in early childhood education and playing outdoors

The evidence of colonial and decolonial processes related to childhood will be discussed from two categories that emerged in the research. In this context, some elements will appear in more than one category, however in different contexts of analysis based on the aspects discussed.

Coloniality and playing outdoors

Although the expression playing outdoors refers to freedom, autonomy and spontaneity, even the open spaces of an early childhood education institution can be environments in which adultcentric coloniality persists over children.

During the investigation, we noticed colonial aspects in the organization and structure of the school, colonial attitudes among the teachers and colonial attitudes among the children themselves.

1. Colonial aspects in the organization and structure of the institution

As the research observations took place only in outdoor spaces, it is from this place that some organizational colonial aspects are evaluated.

- There is no evidence of the development of pedagogical projects or proposals related to life in the countryside at the institution.

Although the school is located in a countryside area, the educational activities have urbanized characteristics. Even though it has a very suitable outdoor space, there are no vegetable gardens or plants commonly cultivated in the community. We didn't see the use of toys or moments of play or exploration of the area as a way of bringing the school closer to local values and realities, or any activities involving people from the community, i.e. the institution didn't propose any activities related to the local community.

Looking from the perspectives of subordinate peoples is an essential stage in the construction of a countryside decolonial education starting in Early Childhood Education, providing an opportunity to make visible the cultures produced in everyday life by common people who have been silenced in the colonial process. Batista and Euclides (2020) highlight the importance of rejecting Eurocentric principles that value

³ The table shows two of the three research categories.

the knowledge and experiences of central contexts and dominant countries, disregarding other ways of being and living, such as those of countryside people. This urbanized way of considering countryside education is linked to the pursuit of overcoming its countryside cultures, considered as archaic.

- Conventional toys⁴ that don't relate to the lives of children in the countryside and don't represent who they are.

In addition to the large park rides, few conventional toys are found in these play spaces. However, those that are offered to children do not represent the country life or the physical appearance of most of them, such as white dolls with straight hair, especially the Barbies⁵.

One way of colonial-adultcentric control of childhood is through the culture of play. When adults decide which toys to make or give to children, they are directing what and how they should play with (Monteiro and Delgado, 2014). The Barbie doll is a toy created in a country that exercises colonial domination, with a standard of beauty that is not the Latin American standard. It “presents a female body image built according to hygienist and Eurocentric patterns, educating for a kind of beauty considered hegemonic” (Cechin and Silva, 2012, p. 631, translated by the authors). Although today there are these dolls with different appearances and representing other peoples, in a commercial attempt to convey a vision of diversity, the main doll that dominates the whole context of the “Barbie world” is the white one with straight, blonde hair.

Thus, colonial thinking, which hierarchizes peoples according to race and considers white superiority to be natural, continues to be fostered through the celebrity and superiority of the blonde Barbie. Indeed, the Barbies that the children played with at the institution had this pattern. On one occasion, a five-year-old girl approached, combing the long blonde hair of a Barbie, and said with a pleased smile: “-When I untangle her hair, it becomes straight.” So, I asked: “-Do you prefer straight or curly hair?” She answered, as if it were obvious: “- Straight.” (translated by the authors).

This leads to a reflection on a phrase that has become the slogan of some social movements: “representativeness matters!”, which highlights the necessity of representations that question the colonial images of white superiority, the result of the colonality of power that established race and racial identity as “instruments of basic social classification of the population” (Quijano, 2005, p. 130, translated by the authors).

In this sense, a decolonial Early Childhood Education is committed to the diverse representativities of subjugated peoples, seeking, for example, to “resignify and build positive representations of black people, their history, their culture, their corporality and their aesthetics” (Gomes, 2003, p. 81, translated by the authors).

- Inappropriate use of the Extension's outdoor physical space.

A structural and organizational aspect concurring with coloniality is the Extension's outdoor physical space, where 4- and 5-year-old children are cared for. In this space, they are enclosed, distant from the natural world and pruned, due to its inadequate size for the number of children who use it.

In this sense, Tiriba, Santos and Schaefer (2023, p. 21) inquire about walling in, understanding it as a strategy “of the dominant social forces to maintain the principles, values, modes of social functioning and individual behavior that sustain and perpetuate modernity/coloniality relations even today” (translated by the authors).

In this space of the institution, due to its small size, children get hurt easily. With this in mind, the teachers control their movements excessively. The control of children's bodies is a colonial-adultcentric aspect that regulates and even prevents free play, the production of peer play cultures and children's autonomy.

Beyond a structural aspect, the use of this space for “free play” reveals an organizational dimension that follows colonial principles, rejecting other possibilities, such as using the community square in front of

⁴ The term *conventional toys* is being used to designate those that have been created with the aim of actually being a toy, differing from the use that children make of various artifacts as toys, adapting them for that function.

⁵ Barbie is a doll created in 1959 in the United States by the Mattel company.

the institution or making more use of the outdoor space at the main building of the school. The walling in of Early Childhood Education is a colonial approach and the “freedom of the body is a requirement of decolonial methodologies” (Tiriba, Santos and Schaefer, 2023, p. 21, 22, translated by the authors). A proposal that tries to leave the four corners of the institution to be closer to community life or that explores other spaces and times beyond those conventionalized by capitalist urban thinking offers decolonial ways of educating.

- The organization of the teachers' work in the playground shows a lack of appreciation for children's outdoor play.

Usually, the teachers don't accompany the children in the daily activities in the playground, and this role is assigned to the monitors. The teachers only participate with the children in this space of recreation when it is an extra activity to the routine. This happens on Fridays, with the kindergarten classes, when the children are taken from the Extension to the outdoor space at the main building of the school, and with the 2- and 3-year-olds, occasionally.

The daily playtime is the moment that teachers use to rest. Although the need for a few minutes of rest during an exhausting work shift as an Early Childhood Education teacher is understandable, the choice of this break, on this occasion, demonstrates the place that free play has in the institution, reflecting a modern, colonial, capitalist, adultcentric conception that play, being a specifically childish activity, is not very relevant, as it opposes the logic of work/market.

By positioning free play as an activity that doesn't require the presence of teachers, the school disregards its importance in children's education and as a manifestation of their ways of being, living and learning. Teachers accompanying children's play enables them to learn about who they are, their desires, fears, knowledge and difficulties, contributing, as Vera Bacelar (2009, p. 58) states, to making “better decisions in their pedagogical practice” (translated by the authors). In addition, these moments enable teachers to assume decolonial positions, by relating to the children at a time governed by them, thus helping the adult to exercise a non-adultcentric position and the children to experience a turn of position in their relationship with the adult in charge of their education.

2. Colonial attitudes of teachers/educators

One of the main colonial aspects found in schools is linked to the adult-child relationship. Adultcentrism in education seeks to suffocate children's protagonism, as it is “based on assumptions created by adults, labelling and normalizing children's productions, behaviors and languages” (Santiago and Faria, 2015, p. 74, translated by the authors). Despite this, children resist these impositions and mobilize multiple strategies and languages to build and express their perspectives and ways of being in the world.

However, the permanence of adultcentric attitudes in pedagogical practices ultimately compromises this movement of child affirmation, since it denies children the possibility of being recognized as competent subjects, capable of interpreting, questioning and transforming the world around them.

During the observation at the institution, some colonial-adultcentric approaches were perceived, which are briefly described below.

- The occurrence of threats, shouting, embarrassing words and punishments.

This sort of attitude, which sought to control the children's actions, occurred significantly during the research. One example: a group of children arrive to play, *Peu*⁶ runs off to the playground toy called *park*⁷ (it seemed that they had made an agreement in class with the teacher that they would not go to this playground toy), an Educator starts shouting: “- *Peu! Peu!*”. She adds grumbling: “How tiring *Peu* is, you see”. She continues: “*Peu*, if you stay there, I'll be there to get you out”. Her voice gets even louder: “*Peu*, come down!”. She approaches the playground toy and, slamming her sandals on the floor, says very vehemently: “- Get down, *Peu!!!* Come on, get down, *Peu!!!*”

⁶ This and the other names used for the research participants are fictitious.

⁷ The term *park* is used in the institution both to define the outdoor playground as a whole and to denote the largest playground toy in the environment.

There were also threats and punishments that involved children not taking part in play in the playground, having their toys taken away, not going outdoors or being grounded by sitting down.

This kind of attitude demonstrates how adultcentrism restrains children's ways of playing, moving and acting in the world, according to what the adult thinks is most convenient and appropriate. This promotes a colonial Early Childhood Education, or in the terms used by Schlesener (2021, p. 423), an education with a “repressive perspective”, which presents itself as “a form of training for a certain behavior” (translated by the authors), using rewards or punishments.

- The park close rule.

The presence of the park close rule for children 2 and 3 years old was a way of preventing them from playing in the playground toy that required the teachers to be more attentive and closer to them. Therefore, the children were allowed to play in that playground toy for a few minutes, usually for around 5 to 10 minutes. After that time, the teachers used to say: “The playground is closed”. This expression meant that the children could no longer play there.

There is a centrality of the adult revealed in the existence of such a rule, since it is related to what is most convenient and comfortable for the educators. It is a kind of posture that seeks to adapt children, from Early Childhood Education onwards, to the interests of adults (Schlesener, 2021). One of the main characteristics of colonial-adultcentric pedagogical approach is the refusal to accept children as social actors who have the right to make choices, not even respecting their choices when they are playing “freely”.

- Various prohibitions.

Other prohibitions surrounded the moment of free play, most of which demonstrate the adult's fear of the children injuring themselves and the educators' desire to sit back and watch from a certain distance. In this context, adults are those who hold power, who command, order and must be obeyed. Children are the ones who must follow orders without question, “before adults who have the power to command, reward, punish, classify - this is a power relationship that is exercised through daily practices which operate on the body and on desires” (Oliveira, 2015, p. 145, translated by the authors).

It is necessary to analyze the manner and reason for depriving children, because “an extreme emphasis on supposed vulnerability can be used by the more powerful segments as a pretext for silencing and marginalizing children” (Qvortrup 2014, p. 34, translated by the authors). Imposing rules to reduce exploitations perceived as dangerous is easier than accompanying children closely, helping them overcome difficulties and guiding them through the necessary precautions so that they don't get hurt.

3. Children's colonial postures.

Sometimes children challenge and resist adultcentric coloniality, as observed in the research⁸, but the adult-child power relationship in Early Childhood Education is very unequal, so that boys and girls often reproduce the teachers' colonial postures and support this type of imposition on their peers, as observed during the research.

There were reproductions of the teachers' colonial postures by the children. The children reminded their classmates of what the teachers had ordered, as a way of restraining them in their actions, such as: “- Auntie⁹ said the playground is closed”, “- Auntie said you can't do...”.

On some occasions, they repeated the classifications given by the educators to their classmates, according to whether they were behaving in the desired way or not, such as, for example, in a play situation with a child I said: “Vin's a good guy, right Vin?”. A classmate joined the conversation: “- He's disobedient,” and added: “- But auntie has already talked to him.” I asked: “- Why did auntie speak to him?”. The child replied: “- Because he was messing up”. The adult custom of classifying children into those who obey and those who disobey is now used by the children themselves.

⁸ This discussion is in the category of analysis that we have not presented in this excerpt of the research.

⁹ A term that reflects an affective way of addressing Early Childhood Education teachers in Brazil, although it has been criticized because it refers to a family relationship and disregards the teaching professionalization.

Another way in which the children reproduced the colonial attitudes of their teachers was by referring to prohibitions as a means of repressing their classmates. Here are some examples:

A girl was playing on a swing, another child came up to her, put the hands on the waist and said: “- What did your father say, Gab?”.

In another circumstance, a child was kicking the ball hard, so that it rose to a height that the teacher found inappropriate, which led her to take the ball from the child. A few minutes later, another boy was holding the ball, as the teacher had given it to him. The child from whom the teacher had taken the ball went up to the boy with the ball and asked to play with him. His classmate replied: “- You were kicking too high!”, using a similar tone to the one used by the teacher a few minutes earlier.

The attitude of snitching on their classmates when they didn't obey an order was very common in the research. The children seemed to understand that this behavior was correct and praiseworthy.

These children's colonial productions have, to some extent, legitimized colonial-adultcentric attitudes. One of the essential strategies of coloniality is the subjugation carried out in such a way that the subjugated person perceives it as natural and appropriate. And this “naturalization is what enables the reproduction of relations of domination” (Tonial, Maheirie and Garcia Jr., 2017, p. 19, translated by the authors).

With the naturalized distribution of power through classifications, even in terms of age (Quijano, 2009), coloniality becomes something that flows through society without many people being aware of the colonial process they are undergoing. In the context of Early Childhood Education, children not only become victims of adultcentric coloniality, but are also manipulated into collaborating with this process. In this way, the legitimization of adultcentric power in Early Childhood Education is a key element in the maintenance and reproduction of coloniality.

Aspects that contribute to the construction of decolonial processes

The research showed the existence of aspects that foster the construction of decolonial processes. Those aspects are linked to space, playtime, the teachers' usual position in the playground, freedom in the relationship with nature and the children's cultural play productions.

It is interesting to notice that some of these dimensions were presented above because they also had colonial aspects, such as the physical distance between teachers and children in the playground. These aspects appear here again because, from other perspectives, they were also decolonial aspects. This shows that, within the same category or positioning, contributions to coloniality can be included, as well as to decoloniality. This dialectic needs to be understood so that decisions regarding children's education can be more conscious of (de)colonial processes.

1. The outdoor space at the institution's main building.

Physical space in Early Childhood Education has a role that goes beyond that of a place where pedagogical work takes place. It is an important element in the constitution of educational activities. For this reason, it is seen by Maria das Graças Horn as a teacher's partner in pedagogical action and “as a curricular element” (Horn, 2003, p. 48, translated by the authors) and by Lopes and Vasconcellos (2006) as a factor structuring the construction of childhoods and their cultures. In this context, it was important to analyze the potential of the outdoor play space at the main building of the institution under investigation for the construction of decolonial processes in Early Childhood Education.

During the observation in this space, we realized that it is a propitious factor for the construction of decolonial processes, due to its spaciousness, the natural elements that integrate it and the playful and educational possibilities linked to life in the countryside that it provides.

The spaciousness of this area allows children to move around more freely, to find a place to play without being interrupted by disputes for spaces, and to organize and group themselves more easily. It also enables the children to use the strategy of getting out of the teacher's view to carry out forbidden adventures.

On several occasions, we saw the children move away from the teacher's sight to do something they had been forbidden to do. These subversive acts give the children the opportunity to practice decolonial postures.

Since it is made up of many different natural elements, this outdoor space encourages contact with nature. The trees, flowers, earth and sand, sun and wind, birds and insects that live and visit this space make the children's playtime more joyful, creative, connected to organic life and full of possibilities.

Furthermore, this connection with nature opposes the colonial/modern/capitalist conception. Societies that live a more integrated life with the natural environment are pejoratively called primitive, as they distance themselves from the Eurocentric standard. One of the keys to coloniality lies in the perspective of separation between subjects and nature, which should be used in the service of science and should not integrate the ways of life of different societies (Kuhn Junior and Mello, 2020).

Other possibilities of activities can be improved by being held in such a space. Storytelling, games and directed play, conversation circles, moments with music, visual arts, among other activities carried out under trees, can, for example, be encouraged by elements of this environment. On a few occasions these activities were carried out, but as the walled-in atmosphere is quite strong, these activities were occasional.

2. Playground time

The contribution of time to the construction of decolonial processes, as perceived during the research, is partial, for two reasons. Firstly, because this benefit only occurs in the outdoor space at the institution's main building, since in the Extension space the children only spend 15 minutes a day. Secondly, despite the extended time for outdoor play at the institution's main building, it is controlled by the educators.

The idea of compartmentalizing time at school follows the organization of "time as 'useful' and free according to the demarcation of industrial society". Thus, the chronological time for children's play is usually short, with the beginning and the end determined by adults based on a temporal logic opposite to the one of the subjects who play (Canda, Soares and Zen, 2018, p. 429, translated by the authors), in other words, based on an adultcentric logic.

However, when there is more time for this moment, this creates the possibility for the children to engage in many of their playing activities with an appropriate amount of time to their unfolding. It is in this sense that the organization of time in the outdoor space at the institution's main building contributes to decolonial processes. The youngest children, 2 and 3 years old, usually spend around an hour playing in the playground every day. The Extension children, aged 4 and 5, spend the same amount of time only on Fridays, when they go to the main building.

During the observation, we realized that this time allowed the children to construct make-believe plots with beginning, middle and end, to experience different play moments and to explore the playground intensively. The children usually left the playground close to mealtimes and, at this point, some of them were already hungry, which made this exit to wash their hands and eat very welcome for many of them.

3. Physical distance from educators.

The teachers usually sat in a group in the shade of a tree, which prevented them from seeing the whole space. This location allowed the children to carry out their adventures without the intervention of adults. They often went into forbidden spaces, played in ways that the teachers perceived as dangerous and behaved according to their interests without being noticed.

These breaches left by the distance from the teachers provided opportunities for the children to resist adultcentric coloniality. We witnessed several occasions on which the children broke the rules and exercised their decision-making power, based on their own logic, because they were not under the adult's gaze. Decoloniality occurs by means of "the production of spaces for the new social protagonists subalternized by colonization" (Faria et al., 2015, p. 13, translated by the authors). Consequently, even without the educators having this objective, space is being made available to the children in the institution where the research was carried out.

4. Freedom in contact with nature

When we mentioned the possibilities provided by the institution's outdoor space, we referred to the natural elements found there. However, it is not enough for such a space to exist, children must be given the freedom to explore it, because one of the many aspects considered in decolonial Early Childhood Education is the reconnection with nature, rebuilding, as Sauv   (2005) points out, a sense of belonging to it. To achieve this, children need to be recognized as citizens capable of connecting themselves with the environment, loving, caring for and preserving it. In other words, it is necessary to adopt a decolonial view of children and childhoods.

In the outdoor space of the institution where the research was carried out, the children play freely with sand, with leaves and fruit that fall from the trees, walk barefoot, touch plants and flowers, walk on tree roots, catch insects, most of the time without any impediment. During the research, it became clear how experiences in that space brought a special connection with nature: the admiration of the flowers; the enchantment of following the paths of the ants and listening to the birds singing.

5. Children's playful cultural productions.

All these aspects - space, time, the teachers' usual position in the playground, freedom with nature - provide opportunities for the children's playful cultural productions. These children's cultures are composed of understandings, feelings and actions that are peculiar to boys and girls. In this process, children test different forms of social relations, create strategies to protect their play from invasion - whether by adults or other children -, produce a series of meanings about their abilities and potential, which contribute to the construction of childhoods that oppose coloniality. As Corsaro (2011, p. 181) explains, "children try to gain control of their lives in various ways" (translated by the authors).

Make-believe play allows children to resist coloniality "through the unique, creative and often critical interpretations" (Sarmiento, 2002, p. 16, (translated by the authors) they make of social roles. The cultures of the children at the Institution investigated allowed them to exercise creativity and autonomy to assume different roles and to use the available elements in unconventional ways when playing house in the roots of trees in the roles of mothers, fathers and children, when making their own food using the elements of nature, when decorating their cakes, when holding birthday parties and when digging to find treasures.

Other cultures produced intensely by children were associated with adventure and challenge plays, a term we used to refer to plays that involved jumping, running, kicking, climbing, scaling and descending. It was in these activities that children's ludic cultures most expressed themselves as decolonial strategies, as they challenged what was imposed as limits through small, insubordinate actions.

Final considerations

The search for understanding about colonial and decolonial processes related to childhood, based on observations in the outdoor spaces of a CMEI in a countryside community, has shown us that children's relationships with their peers and teachers are involved in both colonial and decolonial processes. In addition, it was possible to identify colonial-adultcentric processes in children's play, but also to perceive the existence of aspects that favor the construction of decolonial processes.

As a conclusion, we understand that multiple dimensions affect, positively or negatively, the decolonial processes related to childhood and play in early childhood education, such as: structural and organizational aspects related to the space/time for play, teachers' attitudes and the freedom or not that children have to build their own games and cultures, experience challenges, relate to nature and explore the potential of their bodies. In addition, the research showed how intense colonial-adultcentric power is, to the extent that children begin to (re)produce it from an early age.

If we want to militate in this transgressive educational movement, we must no longer conceive that targeted activities are more important than play, we must no longer carry out pedagogical practices with a

focus on the adult, adapted to the system, that the child must become, but we must seek to protect them from the impositions that try to disqualify their childhoods, histories and identities.

In this process of legitimizing children's protagonism in educational processes - although children don't need this legitimization from adults to carry out their micro-revolutions -, educators need to look for other logics to produce their pedagogical actions, going against the colonial-adultcentric-market logic and proposing a decolonial Early Childhood Education, which considers children as social actors who not only can, but must actively participate in decisions regarding their educational experiences.

However, this is a complex process that requires the commitment of various sectors, such as basic education systems, spaces for teacher development and the formulation of public policies that promote a broader, more sensitive and plural view of children and their multiple childhoods. In this context, it is essential to rethink the spaces and times allocated to the ongoing teacher development, so that these programs become relevant moments for critical reflection on pedagogical practices marked by adultcentric colonialities. It is through this movement that concrete possibilities are created for making, producing and experiencing a decolonial Early Childhood Education, committed to sensitive listening, valorization of children's knowledge and collective construction of fairer, more ethical and emancipatory educational practices.

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