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Between Disputes and Discoveries: Situations of conflict in young children's plays in Early Childhood Education¹

Entre disputas e descobertas: situações de conflitos nas brincadeiras de crianças bem pequenas na Educação Infantil

Entre Peleas y Descubrimientos: Situaciones de conflictos en los juegos de niños en la Educación Infantil

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Abstract

This study, an excerpt from a completed research project in the field of Early Childhood Education, aims to describe and analyze the relationships of conflict amongst young children during play. Initially, it is presented a discussion on Childhood Sociology and childhood cultures, highlighting their connections to the studies of playing from a social and cultural perspective. Then, the methodological configurations of the research are detailed. The participants are 25 three-year-old children of both genders, enrolled in a municipal Early Childhood Education school. The data collection was based on the contributions of Childhood Sociology and conducted through an ethnographic approach. For this purpose, techniques such as participant observation, field diary records and video recordings were employed, enabling an in-depth analysis of the interactions and conflicts in play. The results indicate that, within the investigated group and context, situations of conflict and their forms of mediation are essential elements of childhood cultures. In these interactions, children learn to manage disputes and disagreements based on collectively constructed and shared rules, which contribute to the strengthening of

¹ Study conducted based on the database of the Master's research titled "Ways of Playing in Early Childhood Education: what do children say?", presented to the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Sergipe. Available at: <https://ri.ufs.br/handle/riufs/4829>.

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interpersonal relationships and the organization of social groups. This process points to the development of fundamental social and interpersonal skills in the constitution of their identities.

Keywords: Plays. Conflicts. Childhood cultures. Young children. Early Childhood Education.

Resumo

Este estudo, recorte de uma pesquisa já concluída na área da Educação Infantil, tem como objetivo descrever e analisar as relações de conflito entre crianças pequenas durante as brincadeiras. Inicialmente, apresenta-se uma discussão sobre a Sociologia da Infância e as culturas infantis, destacando suas conexões com os estudos do brincar sob uma perspectiva social e cultural. Em seguida, são detalhadas as configurações metodológicas da pesquisa. Os participantes são 25 crianças de 3 anos, de ambos os sexos, matriculadas em uma escola municipal de Educação Infantil. A geração dos dados foi fundamentada nos aportes da Sociologia da Infância e conduzida a partir de uma abordagem etnográfica. Para tanto, foram empregadas técnicas como observação participante, registros em diário de campo e gravações em vídeo, possibilitando uma análise aprofundada das interações e conflitos no brincar. Os resultados indicam que, no grupo e contexto investigados, as situações de conflitos e suas formas de mediação são elementos essenciais das culturas da infância. Nessas interações, as crianças aprendem a gerenciar disputas e desentendimentos com base em regras coletivamente construídas e compartilhadas, o que contribui para o fortalecimento das relações interpessoais e a organização dos grupos sociais. Esse processo aponta para desenvolvimento de competências sociais e interpessoais fundamentais na constituição de suas identidades.

Palavras-chave: Brincadeiras. Conflitos. Culturas da infância. Crianças bem pequenas. Educação Infantil.

Resumen

Este estudio, recorte de una investigación ya concluida en el área de la Educación Infantil, tiene como objetivo describir y analizar las relaciones de conflicto entre niños durante los juegos. Inicialmente, se presenta una discusión sobre la Sociología de la infancia y las culturas de la infancia, resaltando sus conexiones con los estudios de los juegos bajo una perspectiva social y cultural. A continuación, son detalladas las configuraciones metodológicas de la investigación. Los participantes son 25 niños de tres años, de ambos los sexos, matriculados en una escuela municipal de Educación Infantil. La generación de los datos fue fundamentada en los aportes de la Sociología de la Infancia y conducida a partir de un abordaje etnográfico. Para eso, fueron empleadas técnicas como observación participante, registros en diario de campo y grabaciones en video, posibilitando un análisis aprofundado de las interacciones y conflictos en los juegos. Los resultados señalan que, en el grupo y en el contexto investigados, las situaciones de conflictos y sus formas de mediación son elementos esenciales de las culturas de la infancia. En esas interacciones, los niños aprenden a gestionar conflictos y peleas con base en reglas colectivamente construidas y compartidas, lo que contribuye para el fortalecimiento de las relaciones interpersonales y la organización de los grupos sociales. Ese proceso apunta al desarrollo de competencias sociales e interpersonales fundamentales en la constitución de sus identidades.

Palabras clave: Juegos. Conflictos. Culturas de la infancia. Niños. Educación Infantil.

Introduction

This study is the result of a completed master's research, whose objective was to understand how very young children experience and construct their cultures through free-choice play in an Early Childhood Education institution. The investigation was based on the foundations of Sociology of Childhood, especially the understanding of childhood as a social construction and the child as a social actor, historical and cultural subject.

Throughout the investigative process, peer play was not merely a context for observation but became the central object of sociological analysis, as it reveals the ways in which children produce and share their childhood cultures, as pointed out by Borba (2005). In this sense, play presents itself as a privileged space for the emergence of multiple forms of social relationships, in which children not only mobilize imagination and creativity but also construct, negotiate, and resignify social bonds. These interactions demonstrate that play constitutes an important field of cultural production in childhood.

From this perspective, such premises allow us to delve into the debate, seeking to discuss the conflictual relationships among very young children during play, with the aim of capturing and understanding the meanings attributed to social relationships in educational contexts. What is aimed for in this fragment is to describe and analyze the conflict relationships among young children during play, highlighting that conflict situations are fundamental elements of peer cultures, being actively produced and shared by children in interaction with their peers.

The article is organized into four sections, besides this introduction. The first section presents theoretical reflections on the Sociology of Childhood and children's cultures, contextualizing the conceptual field that supports the research. The second section addresses play as a social and cultural practice and discusses the conflict situations that emerge among children in this context. The third section describes the methodological design of the investigation, detailing the procedures adopted for data generation and analysis. The fourth section presents the analysis of conflict situations observed during play, highlighting the relational dynamics between peers. At last, the final remarks are presented, in which the main findings and their implications for childhood studies and Early Childhood Education are revisited.

Sociology of Childhood and Children's Cultures: Some reflections

Children's cultures have been a widely discussed topic by various researchers in childhood studies since the undertaken movement, more specifically by Sociology of Childhood, which proposed the resumption of children from psychological perspectives, centered on the notion of development, which reduced them to a state of immaturity and incompleteness and conceive children as beings who develop independently of their historical-social construction. (Sarmento, 2005.)

Sociology of Childhood has broken many paradigms regarding the way of perceiving the child, by conceiving them as a social actor, and consequently, as a producer of culture; the child is no longer seen as an isolated subject and begins to be seen as a social subject, who learns in relationships with their peers (Corsaro, 2009). It is proposed to "[...] reveal the child in their positivity, as an active being, situated in time and space, neither a copy nor the opposite of the adult, but a participating subject, an actor and also an author in the relationship with themselves, with others, and with the world around them (Oliveira; Tebet, 2010, p.49, author's translation).

The studies of Willian Corsaro, north-american researcher, and his relations to the concept of socialization were fundamental for understanding the assumptions of peer cultures. Corsaro (2003) presents relevant contributions by proposing the concept of interpretive reproduction as a critique of the socialization theory proposed by developmental psychology and Durkheim's conception, presenting, contrary to these

theoretical premises, a perspective that children do not merely reproduce the values and norms transmitted to them by adults, but reinterpret them in a creative and renewed way.

Corsaro's proposal is to present a new idea of socialization, valuing the collective participation of children through a movement of production and reproduction of their own culture and in the participation of societal cultures. Thus, in place of the traditional concept of socialization, the author clarifies it as a process of interpretive reproduction. In the reproduction bias, it points out how much children are constrained by the social structure of various cultural, social, and political institutions. The interpretive bias, on the other hand, grants children active participation, as by internalizing the culture they come into contact with, they actively contribute to social and cultural change through processes of re-elaboration and reinterpretation.

According to Corsaro (2003, p.72), interpretive reproduction entails three types of collective action: "creative appropriation of information and knowledge provenient from the world by children, the production and participation of children in a series of peer cultures, and their contribution to the reproduction and extension of adult culture. (author's translation)" In this perspective, the author comprehends socialization as a process of appropriation, reinvention, and active reproduction carried out by children in interactions with their peers. This interpretation aligns with the idea that children do not receive an already established culture, but rather that they operate transformations within that culture, creatively appropriating information from the adult world to produce peer cultures.

Interpretive reproduction is one of the central elements of the theory of Corsaro and this concept has been contributing to the reflections on peer culture, defined "as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values and interests that children produce and share in interaction with their peers" (Corsaro, 2009, p. 32, author's translation). The mentioned author presents children's cultures as structuring the daily lives of children, in a process produced and shared through social experience, revealing themselves in ways of feeling, acting, thinking and interacting with the world and the subjects that children actively engage with.

Borba (2005) amplifies the argument by contributing and stating that children are inserted in an adult world structured by material, social, emotional and cognitive relations that systematize their actions and their relationships with the world. Thus, they "build processes of subjectivity in the framework of the symbolic construction of their ways of life, establishing interactions with the adults that lead them to reproduce the societal cultures and recreate them in peer interactions" (p. 180; author's translation).

The studies of Manuel Sarmento (2003), one of the most important Portuguese references in the Sociology of Childhood, were also fundamental for understanding children's cultures. The author points out that childhood cultures are integrated by play that children produce, as well as the specific ways of being and communicating within peer groups. Sarmento understands play as one of the pillars of childhood cultures (Sarmento, 2002) and defends the idea that childhood cultures are peer cultures, meaning that by acting collectively, children become social beings, creating their own ways of being and acting in the world and develop a feeling of belonging to the group.

As social actors, active subjects in society, children not only reproduce the adult culture, but with their own potentialities "formulate interpretations of society, of others and themselves, nature, thoughts and feelings, and do so in distinct ways to deal with everything that surrounds them" (Sarmento, 2005, p. 373, author's translation).

In Brazil, the movement of Sociology of Childhood is grounded as a very close field to Early Childhood Education, even though they are theoretical areas with their own specificities. In this context, many researchers of Early Childhood Education, specifically around the 1980s, while the field was being established as a theoretical reference, were influenced by the field of Sociology of Childhood, providing significant elements to think of the child, childhood, children's cultures and socialization, as stated by Abramowicz; Moruzzi (2016). In this movement, the term children's culture has been increasingly discussed and explored by academics and researchers of the brazilian Sociology of Childhood and at the same time, has been gaining space in Early Childhood Education research. The connection between Childhood Sociology and Early

Childhood Education can be perceived as Sociology of Childhood turns its gaze towards children and their cultures, and Early Childhood Education focuses its attention on the child's experience in spaces and times dedicated to their integral development (Alonso, 2021, author's translation).

The research of Florestan Fernandes, the main Brazilian reference in the field of Sociology of Childhood, is the foundational landmark in the elaboration of several productions and research on childhood and children as producers of culture in our country. The work "Trocínhas do Bom Retiro", published in 1947, brings a significant contribution to the folkloric and sociological studies of children's cultures. In the author's words, "there is a childhood culture - a culture constituted of cultural elements almost exclusive to the immature and characterized by their current playful nature" (Fernandes, 2004, p. 215, author's translation). Florestan attributes a particular character to the children's culture and proposes that this culture is produced from the insertion of "[...] elements of adult culture, incorporated into childhood culture through a process of acceptance and maintained within it over time" (Fernandes, 2004, p. 215, author's translation). The mentioned author argues that the child does not passively internalize the culture transmitted to them; rather, they actively contribute to the production and cultural changes, creating their own culture, the childhood culture.

The studies on childhood cultures have grown significantly in the Brazilian research landscape and complement each other regarding interests in children and childhood. However, as Moruzzi (2011) points out, although the theme of childhood cultures is widely discussed in works produced in English and French, in Brazil, despite Florestan Fernandes' works being a reference, we still need studies that promote the perception of children as social actors. In a large part of Brazilian research, play became the focus of many researchers and academics, for being considered the most relevant way of understanding the ways of being a child and their relationships with other subjects, with objects and with nature around them (Borba, 2005, Francisco, 2005, Pereira, 2011; Campos, 2013). These works highlight the relevance of playing in the construction of children's cultures and emphasize the importance of considering children as active participants in their educational processes.

Play and situations of conflict amongst children

Borba (2005) states that it is through play that children's cultures have been investigated, whether by identifying the ways of playing and the ways that children organize and develop play, expressing childhood cultures, or by analyzing the social relationships between children in the development of ludic practices, configured as a privileged way of comprehend how children participate in processes of cultural appropriation and creation and as a space that is understood for investigating other aspects of childhood.

In Brazilian studies, there seems to be an agreement on the relevance of research that highlights the articulations that play establishes with the complex field of investigations of children's cultures. Another point of agreement is the location of development of this research. Many of the analyses were developed in school contexts, since, as various authors point out (Faria, 2007), school presents itself as a privileged space for children to meet, and consequently, for the production of childhood culture.

In this scenario, play has been widely studied for its importance in the comprehension of childhood and its relationships with other subjects, objects and the surrounding environment. It is a privileged space to investigate how children actively participate in culture. By interacting with their peers in ludic contexts, they creatively appropriate social practices and ways of social action, developing knowledge about themselves and the world (BORBA, 2005). In this process, children not only assimilate, but also build their own culture: the peer culture.

The social studies of Childhood indicate that one of the central principles of peer culture is the joint engagement in activities that capture children's interest, with play being one of the most engaging for them (Corsaro, 2011). By analyzing interactions between young children, we can identify a complex universe of

social relations, as highlighted by Corsaro (2003). His ethnographic studies, grounded in the principles of Sociology of Childhood, demonstrate that, from early childhood, children already actively engage in structured social interactions, opposing the vision that this engagement occurs only in the later stages of child development.

Borba (2005) points out that the very organization of the school favors the formation of groups, once that the daily activities in Early Childhood Education motivate children to associate to complete tasks and achieve common goals. Group identity is a central element in peer culture (Corsaro, 2011) and, in the contexts of collective life in Early Childhood Education, the desire of children to establish social contacts, share experiences and actively participate in their ways of being, feeling and doing, becomes evident.

Sarmento (2003, p.12) states that "playing is a condition for learning, and, consequently, for learning sociability" (author's translation). In this context, by gathering to play, children create bonds, organize actions, create rules of social coexistence, and in this process, collectively institute a social order for the group (Ferreira, 2004) that leads to the relationships of sociability between peers. However, within this dynamic of interaction, conflicts also emerge as a natural part of relationships among children.

According to Corsi (2011), the studies on conflict among children adopt two distinct perspectives. The first one considers conflict as something dangerous, associated with a negative vision. The second, on the other hand, comprehends it as an essential process to the constitution of the subject. Research that adopts the second perspective considers conflict as an essential element in the constitution of subjects and their identities, playing a fundamental part in the social and psychic development (Wallon, 1995). Most of the studies in this area are grounded in the field of Psychology, with observations made in educational contexts. Besides, most of this research focuses on older children, under the premise that they have more developed strategies to the resolution of conflicts than young children (Corsaro, 2003).

However, despite being scarce, research from the perspective of childhood social studies that investigate conflicts among young children has been gaining ground, highlighting the importance of these interactions to the development of social abilities from the earliest years of life. These studies show that, even in early childhood, children already demonstrate capacities of negotiation, cooperation and construction of strategies to solve conflicts between peers (Corsaro, 2003; Pereira, 2011).

In the contexts of collective life in Early Childhood Education, the situations of conflicts among children often disturb adults and lead them to interfere in the relationships in an attempt to solve them, as it is believed that children are not able to resolve their conflicts without adult intervention (Borba, 2005). According to the comparative studies of Corsaro on children's cultures (2003), conflict plays an important part in social organization of peer groups, in strengthening friendships, in reaffirming cultural values and in the construction of identities of the subjects. To the author, when an adult interferes in a situation of conflict, they prevent children from developing opportunities for argumentation, reflection and negotiation regarding the experienced situation, thus limiting a broad opportunity for experimenting within social dynamics.

In their studies on disputes and conflicts among children during playtime, Singer and Haan (2008 apud Pereira, 2011) define as the moment of play in which the relationship is put to test, not configured as a negative aspect in relationships, but rather, as an opportunity to develop new abilities. From conflicts, children learn how to deal with group rules and how to behave in different situations.

Motta (2009) supports this reflection by analyzing the behavior of children when faced with conflicts and the way they use strategies of power to reaffirm themselves, at the same time that they reflect on authoritarian practices and subordinate relationships, the author emphasizes the importance of these interactions in the construction of identity and social learning of children. For Barrière, Bonica, Goma and Whitaker-Ferreira (1984 apud Pereira, 2011), conflicts among young children must be understood as challenges that lead them to seek strategies of resolution, playing a fundamental part in the development of new abilities.

Methodological Outline

This study was focused on children's play, conducted in a municipal Early Childhood Education institution that accommodates babies and children from 0 to 3 years old. The participants of this research were 25 3-year-old children, who belong to the children's group III-B. The investigation adopted a perspective of "data generation", as per Graue and Walsh (2003), who argue that data are constructed through interactions between researcher and study field, rather than just collected.

The research followed an ethnographic approach, using participant observation with field diary records, photographs and video recordings of spontaneous play of children in spaces such as the playground, the reference room and toy library. The participant observation allowed for the recording of social and cultural situations of children's play, while the notes on the field diary enabled reflections on interactions and relationships established among children. The audiovisual recordings captured details of the social dynamics of play, and the records were subsequently analyzed through the microgenetic approach (Pedrosa; Carvalho, 2005). Photographs extracted from the videos were used to complement the analysis.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee (Protocol CEP/CCS/UFS/CAAE nº 51979915.2.0000.5546) and received authorization of the Municipal Department of Education, the institution's administration, teachers and parents or guardians of the children, through the Informed Consent Form. However, we recognize that ethical matters involved in research with children go far beyond formal institutional procedures. Ethics, in this context, is not exhausted in obtaining documentary authorizations, but rather manifests itself, above all, in the relationship built daily between researcher and participants. It is a relational and situated ethics that is built on dialogue, attentive listening and respect for the voices and rhythms of children throughout the entire investigative process.

Based on the contributions of Childhood Social Studies and anchored on the methodological-theoretical frameworks that guide this work, we seek to establish a processual and sensitive approach with the group of children that participate in the research. This approach was guided by the recognition of childhood as a social construction and children as active subjects, producers of culture and meaning. By adopting a research perspective that recognizes and values children as participatory subjects, one of the most significant challenges was to obtain permission from the children themselves, considered co-authors in the investigative process. According to Alderson (2005), authorization of the adults is not enough; it's essential that the children comprehend and agree to their participation.

Throughout the investigative journey, we remained attentive to the multiple languages expressed by the children - verbal, corporal, gestural and symbolic - as well as their reactions to our presence. We comprehend that entering the children's context is configured as a continuous movement of negotiation and construction of confidence, in which the researcher is not a mere external observer, but an interlocutor that needs to conquer, ethically, their place. This principle is aligned to the dialogical ethics proposed by Spink (2000), that emphasizes the importance of interaction between the researcher and the participants throughout the investigation.

In this direction, we bring the contribution of Graue and Walsh (2003), who emphasize that the ethical behavior in research is deeply related to the position taken by the researcher on field and their interpretation of the events experienced. To the authors, "entering the lives of other people is being an intruder. It is necessary to obtain permission, that goes beyond what is given in the consent form. It's the permission that permeates any relationship of respect between people" (Graue; Walsh, 2003, p.76, author's translation).

In this sense, the inclusion of children as co-participants was promoted through the explanation of goals and procedures of research and attentive listening of their voices. This process allowed the construction of relationships of trust, fundamental for the children to see themselves as protagonists of the study. Regarding anonymity, it was decided to identify the children by their real names, considering that research recognizes them as social subjects and authors of culture, aligning with Kramer's (2002) perspective. Since the

data did not expose the children in a negative way, it was understood that maintaining their identities was a form of recognition of their authorship.

Among the social relationships that emerged from the social dynamics shared by the group of children in the context of play, some situations of peer conflicts stood out. To exemplify these dynamics, episodes and excerpts from the field diary were analyzed, illustrating how conflicts arise, how the children negotiated and sought to resolve conflicts among themselves, sharing social meanings during play, demonstrating autonomy in resolving their impasses.

Situations of conflict among very young children: what do the analysis reveal to us?

Conflicts are central elements in peer culture, they emerge naturally in the children's interactions with their peers (Corsaro, 2011). Motta helps us to think about this context: "conflict is an integral part of the children's relationships and contributes to the social organization of the group, to the construction of identity, to the appropriation of cultural values and to the definition and strengthening of friendship bonds" (2009, p.189, author's translation).

In the context of the research, conflict relationships were present on many occasions. The most common causes of the conflicts were the entry of children into ongoing games, the possession of toys/objects of play and the definitions regarding roles and actions in the games. Besides verbal conflicts, I observed conflicts promoted by the action of intentionally or unintentionally hurting a peer, such as fights, shoving, kicking and even biting. In most of the situations, it was possible to notice attempts of resolution without resorting to an adult, however, when it was not possible to resolve the issue, it was brought to the adult's attention for resolution. Motta's reflections to this comprehension are fundamental, in which she states that:

[...] the presence of the adult, however, remains necessary for overcoming conflicts that children still can not solve on their own. Autonomy can not be seen as a function of withdrawal of those responsible for care, even if their effective action is not always necessary. (2009, p. 189, author's translation)

However, even aware of adult authority, the children rarely sought to resolve their conflicts with adult mediation. In most of the situations, it was possible to see that children tried to solve their conflicts among themselves, without adult intervention, thereby exercising the capacity of negotiation.

Below, I present an episode to illustrate a conflict scene occasioned by the dispute over an object.

Episode: Fighting over the string

Location: Reference room

Children involved: Luísa, Emmily, Valter, Francielle, Letícia e Natanael.

Luísa, Emmily and Valter are playing the game of sewing figures with colored strings inside the 'little house' built with chairs, when Francielle shows up and decides to take the yellow string that Emmily has. She doesn't let go of the string and then the struggle for the object begins. When she pulls and realizes that Emmily won't let go that easily, Francielle screams and slaps Emmily's head three times.

Emmily (screaming): Let go! Take it from her, go, Luísa! Take it!

The girls keep pulling the string. Emmily whines.

Francielle: I had it first!

Francielle stands up to have more strength to pull the string. Emmily puts the string in her mouth and pulls it even harder. Unable to take the string, Francielle hits Emmily's head with two more slaps, pinches her, and pulls her hair. Francielle screams for not being successful and then sits on the chair and keeps fighting over the object.

Francielle, tearful, says: I got it first.

Emmily keeps crying and pulling the string. Francielle looks at her hand and sees that it's red due to the friction of the string. Luísa tells Francielle: You were there, go to the bathroom! (...) I'm gonna tell my auntie, okay? (looking at Emmily)

Francielle gets up from the chair, hits Emmily once more and screams: Give it to me!

Francielle pulls the string and decides to let it go, leaving it in Emmily's possession. Francielle gets up and moves away from her colleagues. Emmily cries. Luísa takes the other string that were with them, about 7 strings. Francielle returns. Denzel approaches the group and seeing Emmily crying, asks:

Denzel: What is it?

Luísa: She took the thing (directing her look to Francielle). (...) Here! (handing the green string to Francielle)

Emmily looks weird at Francielle and says: Ugly!

Francielle: I'll tell my auntie she said I'm ugly!

Luísa organizes the toys and tells Emmily: I'm her friend (pointing to Francielle).

Luísa looks at Francielle and says: Girl, you didn't take a shower, did you?

Emmily: Yeah, she's going to take a shower.

Francielle: Stop! (Going at Emmily, slapping her twice)

Emmily raises her hand, threatening to hit Francielle. She slaps Emmily's hand, screams and moves away a little from her colleague. Emmily keeps her hands up as if she was going to hit Francielle at any action from her colleague. Francielle gets up from the floor with the green string in her hands, walks around the room and then returns to the space where the girls are and sits next to the chair where Luísa is seated. Luísa takes a few strings and hands them to Francielle.

Luísa: Here, girl, take it!

Francielle organizes the strings that are tangled, when Letícia and Natanael show up. The boy takes the string that Francielle has and tries to untangle them. Luísa screams:

Luísa: It's mine! No!

Francielle: It's his! It's hers!

Natanael hands over the strings and leaves. Francielle tries to untangle them, gets up and leaves the little house, Luísa follows her.

The episode above exemplifies a typical situation of conflict related to the fight over objects, evidencing social dynamics and the processes of negotiation between children. In these circumstances, it's common for them to resort to arguments of possession to justify their right to use the object, expressing sentences like: "It's mine! I got it first! I was already with it!".

It's relevant to highlight that the children in the investigated context comprehend that the toys and educational material at the daycare are for collective use. Thus, access to these objects require negotiations and deals among the parties (Corsaro, 2011). Francielle's statement illustrates this conscience when she says: "I was with it, I got it first", instead of claiming exclusive possession of the item, demonstrating her comprehension of the temporary nature of this right.

In the described case, Francielle and Emmily are fighting over a string, using not only verbal arguments, but also physical strategies to secure their possession. During the conflict, aggressive actions occur, such as slaps, pinches, hair-pulling, as well as the use of tactics like holding the string tightly or putting it in their mouth to prevent the other child from taking it.

Luísa's attitude in the conflict deserves attention. At first, she argues with Francielle using the principle of ownership, reminding her that it wasn't there initially, and, therefore, could not claim the initial possession of the object. However, in light of the precision of the conflict, Luísa suggests that they resort to the teacher, recognizing the adult's authority as a legitimate mediator to resolve the conflict.

By noticing that Emmily did not intend to share the string with Francielle, Luísa adopts a new strategy to solve the conflict and secure the continuity of the game. For that, she decides to give her own strings to Francielle, facilitating an agreement among the children. This attitude demonstrates an attempt of preserving social interaction, as it reveals the progressive construction of respect of other's desires in children's interaction.

Luísa's mediation highlights her leadership in the group. Her behavior demonstrates characteristics of a leader who seeks to intervene in conflicts, offer solutions and facilitate the return of harmonious interaction among colleagues, continuing the development of the joint play. However, despite her attempts of conciliation, Emmily does not show herself fully satisfied with the adopted resolution. In light of this, Luísa resorts to arguments based on friendship, emphasizing her relationship with Francielle to justify her decision.

The disagreement between Francielle and Emmily persists momentarily, with new threats of physical aggression. However, the situation finds a resolution when Luísa hands over more strings to Francielle. This gesture suggests that the resolution of the conflict occurred only when Francielle felt effectively included in the game, by securing the possession of a significant amount of disputed objects.

This analysis highlights how social interactions in childhood involve complex processes of negotiation, leadership and mediation, which contribute to the development of children's socio-emotional skills. The episode highlights how children handle friendship relationships, demonstrating actions of solidarity, but also situations of conflict. Ferreira (2004, p. 190) contributes in this sense stating that in the social order of the group:

[...] the different actors play and strategically exchange multiple resources, operate the delegation of control and negotiation [...] This means that as important as the spaces of cooperation, the spaces of conflict and disputes, which are inseparable from them, are also structuring of relationships and identities of similarity and difference among others and, therefore, of their own organization as a hierarchized social group and the places each child occupies within it. It is, after all, about not losing sight of the socialization processes among children [...]

From the inferences gathered from field observation, the complexity of children's interactions are highlighted, revealing that conflicts and disputes are as structuring of children's cultures as cooperation in social relations, as argued by Ferreira (2004). By stating that different actors "play and strategically exchange multiple resources", the author suggests that children not only dispute objects or positions, but also negotiate meanings, rules and roles within the group, as we can see in the situation presented above. This reinforces the idea that socialization processes do not occur only through harmony, but also through tension and the necessity of administering differences and disagreement. Besides, conflict spaces are not only opposition moments, but are directed to the organization of the social group and the construction of children's identities. The relationships between similarity and difference become fundamental in this process, as they assist in comprehension of positions and roles within the social context. Thus, conflict must not be seen only as a problem to be avoided, but as an essential element in the formation of social relationships, fundamental to the production of peer culture.

We will refer below to another episode to illustrate a situation of conflict caused by Layza's attempt to access an ongoing game:

Episode: "Get out! You're not my friend!"

Location: Reference room

Children involved: Luíza, Emmily, Valter, Layza, Sibele.

Luiza, Emmily and Valter build a 'little house" with chairs in the corner of the room. They sit on the floor and start to play with the sewing figures game, in which the child must thread the string around the figure, simulating a stitch. Layza walks toward the children, pulls the chair and enters the "little house".

Emmily: Get out! Hey, auntie, look at her!

Layza ignores Emmily's request and sits on the chair. Luiza tells Layza:

Luiza: You're not my friend!

Emmily: Don't even think about it (pulling the chair, creating a barrier, so Layza wouldn't come close to them). Don't pay attention to her, Luiza! Stay here Luiza, come here, come. (showing the protection with the chair). Stay here with these people, go, go, go!

The caregiver² calls Layza and asks her to go to the bathroom. The girl gets up and heads towards the bathroom, when Emmily says:

Emmily: Go to the bathroom, go! (pointing the finger to Layza). In your face! (she says mockingly)
Luiza and Emmily laugh.

Layza returns and says: Don't talk to me! (...) Shut up, shut up!

Luiza keeps laughing. Layza turns her back to the group of children and goes to the bathroom. When, all of a sudden, returns and tells Luiza:

Layza: What is it? What is it, you too?

Sibele is observing the scene, when Layza looks at her and says:

Layza: What is it, you too?

Layza goes to the bathroom. The girls laugh at her and Emmily screams:

Emmily: Get out, head (--) laughing. Get out, sausage head!

Emmily, Luiza and Valter smile. Valter repeats smiling:

Valter: Sausage head!

In the episode described above, Emmily, Luísa and Valter are already involved in an interactive process when Layza positions herself in the play area, sitting in a chair in the playhouse. Layza's invasive attitude is not well accepted by the group, causing discontent among the participants. Emmily's first reaction is to ask Layza to leave, and then she resorts to the inherent power of the adult to remove the child from the interactive space.

Since Layza ignores her colleague's reaction, as she intends to participate the joint activity, persists in observing the group's resistance. In this process, with serenity, Luísa uses the strategy of denial of friendship: "You're not my friend!". Luísa's statement is used to ratify the non acceptance to Layza's participation in the development of the joint activity and to exclude her colleague from the play space.

In the development of the episode, Layza does not get access to the group and needs to retrieve herself from the space, as she is called by her caregiver to take a shower. The girl heads towards the bathroom, but when she notices the group laughing and joking, she returns making verbal references of conflict to the colleagues.

Thus, a verbal conflict begins, a verbal game referred to by Corsaro as opposition conversations, a way of teasing and confronting while playing. The author emphasizes that this type of conversation was used frequently by afro-american children to "build their social identities, to cultivate friendships and, and both to maintain and to transform the social order of their peer culture" (2011, p.187)

² We chose to use the term "caregiver" through the text, since, in the context of the research, that was the official nomenclature of the position, whose duties involved the daily monitoring of the children. We acknowledge, however, that the use of the term is not the most appropriate in the Early Childhood Education field, specially considering that the regulations in the area point toward overcoming the dichotomy of "caring and educating", advocating for the inseparability and complementarity between these dimensions at this stage of Basic Education. Still, since it is a specific designation in use during the research period, we chose to keep the nomenclature as it was used in the investigated institution, in order to preserve fidelity to the analyzed context.

As it can be seen, the verbal conflict turns into a game. In the episode "Get out! You're not my friend!", the children do not react negatively to Layza's teasing, on the contrary, the teasing verbally enriches the game. The proof of this is that they do not resort to the teacher or caregiver's mediation. Through opposition and confrontation, children explore, test and develop friendship abilities, emerging from this process, competitive friendship relationships that lead to mutual respect and group solidarity (Corsaro, 2011).

Corsaro emphasizes that conflicts in peer interactions, specially fights and verbal discussions, serve to strengthen interpersonal alliances and organize social groups. The interpretive analysis of the episodes of conflict indicate that children learn how to administrate disputes and conflicts based on rules constructed and shared by the group. Borba (2005) contributes in this sense stating that:

[...] the children's experiences with conflicts offer a field of learning sociability rules and a collective social practice in which the construction of a common shared space is made from relationships of affinity, friendship, differences, similarities, solidarity, disputes, disagreements, agreements, equalities, disparities, hierarchies, in short, from facing all the contradictions present in relationships that we establish with one another and with the world. (p. 240-241, author's translation)

Another factor generating conflicts among children relates to the definition of roles and actions within the games, illustrated in the following excerpts:

Kethely and Ruan are playing house, when Guilherme approaches.

Ruan tells Guilherme: I'm the dad and she's the mom (pointing to Kethely).

Ruan looks at Kethely and asks: I'm the dad, right?

Kethely tells Guilherme: you're the son.

Guilherme: No, I'm... (...) I'm the dad.

Ruan: No, I'm the dad!

Guilherme: I'm the dad!

Ruan: (...) Look, two dads (pointing to Guilherme) and you're the mom (pointing to Kethely).

Ruan strokes Kethely's hair twice.

Kethely stands up and lies on the floor. Ruan follows Kethely saying:

Ruan: Two dads, two dad! Come on, two dads, come on, two dads. (Field diary entry)

Ruan and Guilherme initiate a conflict with verbal discussions that follow a simple structure, just like in fights over objects, with expressions such as "I'm the dad, you're the son!". The boys want to take on the same role and do not reach an agreement, as reported above. To solve the matter, they end up sharing the character, which amplifies the possibilities of the game, creating other possibilities for participation related to other family roles.

Lira (2012) highlights that a child's motivation to take on a certain role or develop an activity that can lead them to be involved in disputes. In this context, it's fundamental to observe that, in a group, the motivations and interests of each child are constantly crossing with others, requiring these interests to be balanced in the field of social interactions, in order to find strategies to solve disputes whether over social roles in play or objects/toys.

From the field observations, it was found that, in the investigated group and context, conflicts were present in many situations. However, children, for the most part, managed to solve them autonomously and quickly. Although, at times, they mentioned the possibility of resorting to the adult as a strategy to pressure the colleagues during the disputes, we observed that the teacher's mediation was required very few times.

Another relevant aspect to be highlighted is that most of the conflicts arise from a fight over a material or a toy, with the argument of ownership being the most recurrent - an observation that aligns with Boba's (2005) research. Expressions such as "It's mine!" or "I got it first!" were used as arguments valued

by the children, as generally, when children acknowledged the statement, whoever had possession of the object first, won the dispute.

Besides that, we observed that verbal affiliation was also used as an argumentative strategy in situations of conflict. Questions such as "Are you my friend?" were used as a trump card in control of interactions and play, as Borba (2005) points out. Interactive episodes presented a simple structure, based on opposition-reaction, a structure that can be repeated until one of the children gives up or an adult or another child intervenes to reach a solution/mediation of the conflict (Borba, 2005). In most situations of conflict that were observed, children act with autonomy in solving their disagreements. This way of acting points to the development of social and interpersonal skills in the foundation of their identities.

Final considerations

This research delved into the context of a group of Early Childhood Education young children aiming to comprehend how children lived and produced their childhood cultures, from free choice play in Early Childhood Education. From the episodes presented in this excerpt, the results corroborate with research that highlight play as a privileged space to investigate interactions in social worlds of children. Through interactive processes, they demonstrate their capacity of acting socially among peers, sharing meanings, negotiating rules and values, reinforcing the conception that they are active agents in the contexts where they live.

Conflicts among children frequently unravel an immediate adult intervention, that, moved by discomfort, tend to take over the resolution of the situation. This occurrence reveals a subjacent belief that children would not be able to solve their own disagreements without adult mediation. However, for children, conflicts are part of the natural dynamics of social relationships, and they demonstrate a great ability to face them, developing their own negotiation and resolution strategies, as evidenced in this study. The results indicate that, in the investigated group and context, the situations of conflicts and their ways of mediation are essential elements of childhood cultures. In these interactions, children learn how to manage disputes and disagreements based on collectively constructed and shared rules, which contributes to the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and the organization of social rules. This process points to the development of social and interpersonal skills in the formation of their identities.

It's important to mention that the "insults" and "aggressions" identified in interactions among children, although they might serve as drivers of social and emotional development, need to be monitored and mediated by adults. This mediation must not occur from an adult-centric logic, but rather with an attentive and sensitive attitude, capable of intervening when necessary. It's fundamental that children comprehend that taking a stand is important, but it can not occur through aggression or disrespect with others. We emphasize that interactions and conflicts that emerge in play situations are an essential part of the learning process to live collectively. However, it does not mean that everything is allowed - it's necessary to consider the other, the agreements and the limits that are part of coexistence, and that can be learned in play situations among peers.

We assert from our research, that these discoveries offer relevant contributions to the Early Childhood Education field, once that they amplify the visibility of play created and organized by children themselves. Many times, these social practices go unnoticed or are not observed, accompanied and evidenced by teachers in many Early Childhood Education institutions.

In the context of Early Childhood Education, play, as elucidated in this investigation, constitutes a fundamental space for learning and constructing meanings. Children, when interact during play, resignify social situations they observe in their daily life. When intentionally planned by the teacher, with time, space and material organization that favor interaction, ludic activities not only strengthen the childhood experience, but also promote experiences that recognize and value the childhood cultures.

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