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Playing at making movies with children: curricular practices made of dreams, films and life

*Brincar de fazer cinema com crianças: práticas curriculares
feitas de sonhos, filmes e vida*

*Jugando a hacer películas con niños: prácticas curriculares
hechas de sueños, películas y vida*

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Abstract

This study investigates the curricular and educational activities of the "Playing to Make Cinema" project in 2022, analyzing the experiences lived with children in the context of the return to in-person classes after the most critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a post-critical curriculum perspective, the work aims to analyze how curricular practices were constructed amid challenges and resistance, focusing on creating new possibilities with and for children. The methodology explored the experiences lived in the meetings, which resulted in the production of a "life" curriculum, where the process of interaction, dialogue, playfulness, questioning, and the creation of new subjectivities became the central focus, surpassing the mere elaboration of the final product. The conclusion is that the project's curricular proposals can inspire new pedagogical

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practices in basic education, highlighting the importance of joy, creativity, and cinematic language as tools for the production of knowledge and meaningful experiences for children.

Keywords: Education. Curriculum. Childhood. Cinema. Animated Film.

Resumo

O presente estudo investiga as ações curriculares e educativas do projeto de extensão “Brincar de Fazer Cinema com Crianças” em 2022, analisando as experiências vividas com crianças no contexto do retorno às aulas presenciais após o período mais crítico da pandemia de Covid-19. Com base em uma perspectiva pós-crítica de currículo, o trabalho objetiva analisar como as práticas curriculares foram construídas em meio a desafios e resistências, focando na criação de novas possibilidades com e para as crianças. A metodologia explorou as experiências vivenciadas nos encontros que resultaram na produção de um currículo de vida. Nele, o processo de interação, diálogo, ludicidade, questionamentos e criação de novas subjetividades tornou-se o foco central, superando a elaboração do produto final, um filme de animação. A conclusão é que as propostas curriculares do projeto podem inspirar novas práticas pedagógicas na educação básica, destacando a importância da alegria, da criatividade e da linguagem cinematográfica como ferramentas para a produção de saberes e vivências significativos para as infâncias.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Currículo. Infância. Cinema. Filme de Animação.

Resumen

Este estudio investiga las actividades curriculares y educativas del proyecto "Jugando para Hacer Cine" en 2022, analizando las experiencias vividas con niños y niñas en el contexto del regreso a clases presenciales tras el período más crítico de la pandemia de COVID-19. Desde una perspectiva curricular poscrítica, el trabajo busca analizar cómo se construyeron las prácticas curriculares en medio de desafíos y resistencias, centrándose en la creación de nuevas posibilidades con y para los niños y niñas. La metodología exploró las experiencias vividas en los encuentros, lo que resultó en la producción de un currículo "de vida", donde el proceso de interacción, diálogo, juego, cuestionamiento y creación de nuevas subjetividades se convirtió en el eje central, trascendiendo la mera elaboración del producto final. La conclusión es que las propuestas curriculares del proyecto pueden inspirar nuevas prácticas pedagógicas en la educación básica, destacando la importancia de la alegría, de la creatividad y de el lenguaje cinematográfico como herramientas para la producción de conocimiento y experiencias significativos para los niños y niñas.

Palabras clave: Educación. Currículo. Infancia. Cine. Película de animación.

1. Introduction

Shakespeare said that “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” (Letelier, 2012, p. 3). *Fairy Docine* – a character created by Hernán Letelier in the book *La contadora de películas* (The Movie Teller) –, in her Shakespearean-inspired artist-becoming, says that “we are made of the same material as films” (Letelier, 2012, p. 3, our translation). Well, I, affected by this world of inventions that makes me think about the many matters of which we are constituted and constitute the materials around us, argue that **a curriculum**, despite being constituted in many ways, **can perfectly be made of the same matter as dreams, films and life**. Of course, to this end, a curriculum requires other thoughts, reasoning; it needs another logic (Paraíso, 2015, p. 49-50, emphasis added).

Inspired by the theoretical foundation of Marlucy Alves Paraíso (2015), this article adopts the post-critical perspective to consider and discuss possible reformulations of the educational curriculum and practices. The author’s thought-provoking argument that the curriculum is constituted of the “same matter as dreams, films and life” (Paraíso, 2015, p. 50), as described in the epigraph, is inspiration for the central proposition of this article: to discuss the curricular, pedagogical and artistic processes adopted in educational activities with children in public schools. The empirical context is provided by the experiences of the *Brincar de Fazer Cinema com Crianças* (Playing at Making Movies with Children) extension project, associated with the School of Education of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul – FAED/UFMS, in operation since 2010. The analysis will focus on the curricular and educational proposal implemented with children over more than a decade in the project, aiming to identify the potential, manifestations of resistance and processes for creating possibilities with children. Therefore, the text is aimed at analyzing the curricular practices conducted with children in the project, focusing on the potential, resistances and processes of subjectivation.

From this perspective, Paraíso (2015) invites us to conceive the “curriculum as a space of possibilities” (p. 50), dissociating it from conceptions that stiffen it, that format it. The author argues that a “curriculum, when formatted too much, spreads sadness, discouragement or indifference” (Paraíso, 2015, p. 52, our translation). Such criticism is directed to the practices of a “form-curriculum,” whose materialization into school routines culminates in tiredness and fatigue, both for teachers and students. This model is characterized by approaches that promote boredom, repetition and an excessive amount of exercises, resulting in low learning effectiveness and, crucially, “leaving no room for surprising encounters” (Paraíso, 2015, p. 51, our translation).

In this context of questioning traditional curricular approaches, the extension project arises as an educational and curricular proposition that dialogues directly with the invitation of Paraíso (2015). By fostering audiovisual creation and artistic expression with children in public schools, the initiative transcends the logic of a predetermined and homogeneous curriculum, opening to the multiplicity of knowledge and experiences. This environment of collective and collaborative creation aims precisely to provide the “surprising encounters” that the author advocates, enabling the curriculum to be built based on the subjectivities and inventive potential of children, in contrast to the reproduction of decontextualized content and knowledge. Thus, the practices conducted in the project constitute a fertile field for the study of a living and dynamic curriculum, which values the children’s curiosity and authorship.

In the experiments in the project with children, the central objective is to promote and experience the encounters with them and with cinema, both in the enjoyment of audiovisual works and in their production. This conception of “encounters with cinema” is founded on the propositions of Alain Bergala (2008). The author understands cinema as alterity, capable of providing, through the experience of filmic fruition, the projection of the spectator in other subjectivities.

According to Bergala (2008), cinema, as an art, is not taught in a prescriptive manner, but is found and experienced. The author problematizes the introduction of cinema in school as art, arguing that, “in order to remain art, it must remain a haven of anarchy, of scandal, of disorder. Art is by definition a disturbing element within the institution. It cannot be conceived by students without the experience of ‘doing it’ [...]” (Bergala, 2008, p. 30, our translation).

The author notes two important argumentative aspects. The first is that cinema, as an art, is the haven of questioning, an instigator of multiple ways of thinking and, at school, it promotes encounters with films that take us to

many places, to ethical and aesthetic experiences and ways of thinking about who we are and how we can produce new ways of being. Additionally, they emphasize the relevance of the encounter with cinema in the school setting, noting the “emotions of creation itself” (Bergala, 2008, p. 35, our translation). The author emphasizes the importance of watching films, enjoying them and also producing creative experiences. They also point out that “school today represents, for most children, the only place where this encounter with art can take place” (Bergala, 2008, p. 32, our translation).

In this context, the project called *Brincar de Fazer Cinema com Crianças* constitutes a space-time in which the “encounters with cinema as art,” as advocated by the aforementioned author, materialize. By meeting with children in public schools, both for enjoying and producing movies, the initiative transcends mediation and discussion of content, promoting disruptive artistic and creative experiences. The experiences in the project, marked by the children’s authorship and experimentation, shed light on the potential of curricular practices that seek to break the logic of the “form-curriculum” (Paraíso, 2015). Thus, they demonstrate how it is possible to build curricula that embrace the creative disorder of art, fostering children’s curiosity, expression and ability to invent, which are important elements for meaningful learning and the production of plural subjectivities of childhood.

Bergala (2008) is emphatic in ensuring the primary role of the school in promoting fertile and promising encounters with the art of cinema. They point out that “the most beautiful films to show children are not those in which the filmmaker tries to protect them from the world [...]” (2008, p. 98, our translation). Thus, the school setting must provide an encounter with films capable of impacting children and adolescents, driving them to become subjects who “feel and think their own practice” (p. 176, our translation), that is, their own existence. The author also emphasizes that the encounter with art is materialized through acts of creation. According to the author, “school, if it wants to address cinema as art, has to get rid once and for all of the old scholastic notion that there is a good way, and only one, to say something and to film a scene, or a shot, in cinema” (Bergala, 2008, p. 162, our translation). In the acts of filmic creation, which emerge from the meetings promoted by the project between children and the team, the interaction and meetings between the participants and the engagement with cinema as an expression of art – more specifically, of animation cinema – are prioritized.

The description of activities, in this article, despite being restricted to the curricular and educational processes of the project’s actions throughout its years of existence, will focus specifically on the activities in 2022, a notable period due to the project’s face-to-face meetings being reactivated after the discontinuity imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that the project, initiated in 2010, operates annually in public schools in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, and throughout its history has engaged children from the 3rd to the 5th grade of elementary school in the collective creation of animated short films.

The project meetings are based on three methodological pillars (Xavier Filha, 2020). The first, called “Playing at thinking about yourself, the other and the world,” focused on the children’s previous knowledge of the theme selected for each year. In 2022, it was observed that children had difficulties in relating to each other due to the maelstrom of emotions experienced in returning to face-to-face classes at school, both in social interactions and in the educational challenges resulting from the distance learning period. Here is an important highlight of the project’s curricular practices that year. We were dominated by a ‘feeling of death’ in our lives due to the effects of the pandemic, which explains why we were called to school to develop a curriculum that promoted life, encounter, self-reflection and new ways of subjectivation in that context of returning to face-to-face classes.

The collective production of the animated film continued in the stage “Filmmaking by playing.” The children actively participated in the entire process, comprising pre-production, production and post-production planning, culminating in the suggestion for the final editing of the film. This last stage is the only one in which children do not participate effectively, but plan each scene indicating the steps to be followed by a professional in the field of film editing.

The concluding stage was “Watching, enjoying and thinking the film,” which included socialization moments from the process and premiere of the work. The children shared their experiences at a round table held at the university for the screening of the film for the school and university community.

This text aims to present the curricular, theoretical-methodological and reflective processes of the pedagogical practices of encounters and filmmaking with children. To this end, project activities in 2022 will initially be detailed. Then, the short film production process will be focused. We conclude with theoretical discussions on co-creation and subjectivation processes within the scope of the project's curriculum in film production with children, in addition to seeking to reflect on how the curricular and pedagogical activities implemented can inspire other practices of dreams, life and films with children in elementary education.

2. The curriculum of dreams and life in the experiences of the project “Playing at Making Movies with Children”

In 2022, the extension project activities were carried out at a state school in Campo Grande, MS, Brazil. The participating class was from the 5th grade of elementary school, composed of children aged between 10 and 12 years. The choice of this class was motivated by a request from the pedagogical coordination, which reported difficulties in interpersonal relationships among the students, as noted above.

After the presentation of the project and the initial contact with the children, a meeting was held with the guardians and family members to obtain formal authorization for participation of the children by signing a consent form. The children also signed the form, formalizing their acceptance to participate in the activities.

The meetings were started focusing on the theme of emotions and feelings: Emotions and education of emotions: the self, the other and the world. The main objective was to explore and conceptualize emotions and feelings, encouraging students to reflect on their manifestations in concrete interpersonal situations at school and outside it. Thus, we sought to understand the process of subjectivation in the face of emotional and sentimental experiences. With the exploration of the theme, we sought to socialize knowledge and instigate reflection with children so they could identify and manage their emotions and feelings, emphasizing good coexistence in the school setting.

The adopted theoretical and methodological assumptions were consistent with the approaches adopted in previous instances of the project. Since its conception in 2010, the methodological strategies have been continuously reworked, emphasizing playfulness, playing, reflection for the construction of thought, and cooperative and collaborative work. Several dynamic activities were employed to make the discussions more playful and meaningful for the group, including group work, theater, varied ways of playing, games and exhibition of animated films. In addition, books for childhood constituted important pedagogical, aesthetic and playful instruments, facilitating the debate and discussion about emotions, feelings and interpersonal relationships in the school setting. Many children exhibited a marked preference for reading images rather than written text. Although this trend had been observed in previous classes of the project, it seems to have intensified in recent years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The distance learning period, during the peak of contagion of the virus, may have hindered the literacy acquisition process, especially for children without individualized monitoring. This situation was noticeable in the class of the 2022 project, in which several children showed difficulty in reading texts. Some of them even avoided physical contact with books, possibly so as not to expose to colleagues their inability to understand the text and not be able to read it, which led to embarrassment, especially among boys.

The COVID-19 pandemic had numerous impacts on the education of several children, especially those in vulnerable situations, compounding issues such as loss of family members and worsened economic conditions due to unemployed family members, among other social issues resulting from the global health crisis. Writing and reading difficulties were markedly intensified, which became evident in the 5th grade class, as most children showed difficulty with writing skills and—more strongly—reading skills.

The issue observed in the children's learning enables us to retrospectively consider a challenging period in our recent history, which significantly impacted Brazilian public education. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a pandemic. Consequently, schools were

closed and classes were adapted for distance learning, mainly through activities sent by schools to be done by children. Other methodologies included online classes via internet-connected computers.

Although children were considered less vulnerable to the symptoms of the disease, their daily lives were deeply affected. This included the suspension of face-to-face classes, the consequences of social isolation and, in many cases, financial and health challenges faced by family members, as observed in studies by Carolina Haberbric Folino, Marcela Vitor Alvaro, Luisa Massarani and Catarina Chagas (2021).

Studies reviewed to understand the impacts of the pandemic on children's lives note some aspects that we observed in practice in the meetings held with them in 2022. Including:

- The pandemic markedly showed the social, economic and educational abyss of the Brazilian population. Brazilians experienced social isolation in very different ways. The social classes that had more financial resources, with ample access to the internet, were able to experience social isolation in a *creative* manner, whereas other groups had nothing to eat and lacked protection from the virus, given their socioeconomic conditions (Ferreira, Barbosa, Santos, 2023, p. 251). This greatly affected the children of the poorer social strata. Project participants reported that their family members worked outside the residence during the pandemic and that most lacked mediation from adult family members for help with school activities.
- The suppression of face-to-face activities broke contact with the school for a significant number of children and adolescents. In this context, the deficient strategies adopted to provide means, equipment and technologies, the difficulties faced in preparing/training mediators capable of supporting the construction of bridges between students and institutions, and the difficulties faced in communication between schools and school agents created serious issues that, in practice, turned into hindrances to the access of children and adolescents to schools (Ferreira, Barbosa and Santos, 2023, p. 260).
- This impact especially affected poor and black children and adolescents, students that were mostly from Brazilian public schools. Children who participated in the project reported that they lacked computers with internet access, that some had access to their family members' phones for some times of the day, and that they preferred to access games and videos on YouTube to study the requested school content.
- Another aspect to be noted concerns psychological and social issues, according to Bernadete Gatti (2020). From the psychosociological point of view, argues the author, the school represents for students not only a place for study, but a place for meetings, a place for socialization, cultivation of friendships, confrontation with oneself, definition of one's identity. Absence from school affected the children because they lacked the school space for socialization and interpersonal exchanges.

The studies reviewed (Gatti, 2020; Ferreira, Barbosa, Santos, 2023; Folino, Álvaro, Massarani and Chagas, 2021; Silva, 2022), for the purpose of synthesis, frequently mentioned the difference in the impact on the suspension of classes between children of different social and racial classes, causing learning gaps in the distance learning period and difficulties in social interaction resulting from the time the children remained out of school. The aspects related to difficulties in reading and writing, as well as the difficulty in social coexistence when returning to face-to-face interactions, were evident in the meetings with the children of the project. For **mitigating** some of these impacts, there were proposed moments of reflection on the historical context of the return to face-to-face classes and their effects on the lives of the children in that specific class.

It is interesting to note that, when asked about the positive and negative aspects of the distance learning period, the boys were unanimous in pointing out as positive the greater freedom to play during the pandemic and the interruption of this activity with the return to school. Many of them were emphatic in saying that they preferred to be out of school to be able to play and that the school had "stolen" this possibility of freedom. Only two girls showed understanding of the serious consequences of the period without classes for the school learning of the class, notably, for example, with many not knowing how to read a simple text.

The pedagogical and curricular strategies adopted in the project activities sought to provide moments for collective dialogue and reflection on global and personal events during the pandemic period, particularly before the vaccine was released. The focus was on understanding how this situation impacted emotions and feelings, both during the most acute phase of the pandemic and in the return to face-to-face classes and interaction with the school community.

The project meetings, held weekly during the time of the afternoon classes, were held from July to December of that year. Although project activities were implemented in a timely manner at school, we can consider that the provided and adopted curriculum—although differentiated from the formal curriculum adopted by the school—contributed to destabilize some “fixed lines” and orders that have historically marked school curricula. Paraíso claims that “a curriculum is always full of fixed orders, fixed lines, organized bodies, majority identities” (2009, p. 3, our translation).

The project curriculum attempted at going against these practices to become an artifact with possibilities of dialogue with life, of promotion of life, especially in that historical period when we needed to reaffirm the pact with life and resume the dreams of living and coexisting with people and differences, in addition to also trying to re-signify what many felt in relation to school on the return of face-to-face activities, which some felt as a ‘kidnapping’ of freedoms, games and dreams.

The project’s curricular and methodological proposal aimed to promote possibilities for dialogue with children about life at school. We needed to provide and instigate the pleasure of living together, the desire to be in school and resume the school trajectory after a period of so much pain and death. Paraíso teaches us that the curriculum can be a favorable place for contagion of desire (Paraíso, 2009, p. 286). The author argues that in a curriculum an encounter can occur and, with that, take sadness far away as people can be infected by the desire and joy of learning subjects about their lives. Accordingly, “it is possible to build, in curricula, convenient meetings to increase the power of life and joy” (p. 279, our translation). And that was the proposal—and also a huge challenge—that we proposed with the children.

Another important aspect contributing to rethinking the curricular construction of the project’s actions was the possibility of developing a curriculum with the children. To this end, we recognize them as human and social subjects that produce culture (Corsaro, 2011; Sarmiento, 2007), holding rights as children experiencing their childhoods.

Curricula, from a traditional perspective, adopt the adult-centric logic, which disregards the knowledge and cultures of childhoods. Contrary to this perspective, we favor the playing-life-dream-curriculum, emphasizing the knowledge and voices of childhoods. The practice of this curriculum relies on the contribution of frank conversation with children, the philosophical exercise of their thinking, the learning-by-playing, the enjoyment of cinema as art, and the creative possibility of artistic production.

Historically, the conception of children as a being devoid of speech—and, by extension, thinking—limited the understanding of their effective participation in social and school practices. However, our project adopts a distinct methodological and curricular approach, based on the creation of spaces for attentive and sensitive listening to children. These possibilities enabled them to exercise and build new ways of thinking and develop the ability to formulate arguments and reflections on subjects that affect them, underscoring their role as thinking subjects and participants.

Children were invited to think about their emotions and feelings in social and everyday relationships at school. This invitation was extended to the team members, consisting of Pedagogy students, former students from the university and a technician in educational subjects from the same institution.

Lígia Márcia Martins and Bruna Carvalho (2016) distinguish emotions from feelings, characterizing emotions as organic phenomena that manifest intensely in body and thought. Feelings, on the other hand, are described as affective states of a more prolonged and constant character, resulting from emotions and possessing greater durability. In the project, we adopted these concepts, highlighting above all the role of social and cultural aspects in the experience of emotions and feelings. In addition to this knowledge, we included in the proposal the discussion of the taxonomy of basic emotions proposed by Paul Ekman and Eve Ekman (2016), comprising joy, sadness, anger, disgust, fear and surprise. The emotions of sadness, anger and fear were particularly explored in the meetings, with the premise that they could be associated with challenges in the respectful coexistence between children at school. It should be noted

that this approach was not intended to psychologize the management of emotions. This position is justified, first, by the fact that we do not work in the field of Psychology and, second, by the understanding that emotional experiences are not merely individualized, but intrinsically related to social, cultural interactions and the surrounding environment.

Emotions and feelings are culturally experienced and re-signified, resulting from social learning, especially related to gender. Traditionally, girls are expected to show joy, docility and discipline, while boys are expected to express anger and aggression, often seen as acceptable and even encouraged. The social acceptance of the violent manifestation of these emotions was exemplified by one of the boys who reported feeling angry and *“willing to shoot.”* These gender attributions are not innate, but cultural and social constructions, and these points are addressed and discussed with children during project meetings. It is important to demarcate gender normativities in terms of expressions of emotions and feelings. Judith Butler notes the continuous and systematic process of gender learning that, according to her, “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names” (Butler, 2007, p. 154, our translation). It is in constant gender practice and learning that we learn from a very early age to behave and to express emotions and feelings that are more socially accepted and consistent with gender norms.

Children’s books were selected to be worked on. It is important to note that the bibliographic resources did not have a moralizing or self-help character but sought to instigate critical reflections in the reading public on the role of emotions in triggering attitudes and actions in contexts of social interaction, with emphasis on the school environment. In addition, animated feature films and short films were screened to foster discussions and new perspectives on the issues addressed.

The books selected exhibited a shortage of male leading characters. This observation can be attributed to gender norms, since most of the books found on the issue featured female protagonists. Such disparity may reflect the social perception that girls are more likely to reflect on their emotions and feelings, as opposed to the expectations commonly attributed to boys. Considering that the class that year was predominantly male, the desire to include books that addressed the emotions and feelings of boys became even more relevant and, at the same time, a major challenge.

The difficulty in finding children’s books with male protagonists concerns the construction of our cisheteronormative society¹. This social framework tends to consider that the discussion about emotions is a subject to be addressed and worked on predominantly by girls and women. In the hegemonic culture, there is the perception that boys and men can “lose” their virility when dialoguing on themes that we prioritize. We refute this perspective and consider this discussion fundamental, particularly for boys. By reflecting on their emotions and feelings, they can become subjects capable of building more plural and sensitive masculinities.

The curriculum of the project meetings—here understood as a set of practices, of knowledge that is permeated by power relations (Silva, 1999; Silva and Camba, 2022)—aimed to reflect on life. Despite constituting a field of struggle around knowledge, it can become an instrument for constituting ways of life (Paraíso, 2010). Far beyond a list of contents, the curriculum adopted with the children provided the constitution of differences and subjectivities, aspects to be addressed more in-depth below.

Subjectivation processes in curricular and pedagogical practices in the co-creation of films, dreams and life

To problematize the curricular and pedagogical practices carried out within the scope of the project with children, it is important to highlight that we recognize them as socially competent subjects and producers of culture,

¹ “Cisheteronormativity is the naturalization and normalization of a specific form of affective-sexual relationship: a cisgender man relating to a cisgender woman, assuming a linearity between somatic body, sexual practice and gender identity, a linearity that maintains the male-female binarism” (Costa et al., 2023, p. 67, our translation).

according to Corsaro (2011) and Sarmiento (2007). This understanding made it possible to build a curriculum with them, as already discussed. Playfulness, the ability to play, to think and produce stories were favored elements in the experiment adopted in project meetings. These questions were associated with the possibility of providing children with the exercise of thinking and the ability to think about themselves, as they produced stories with images and sounds.

The curricular processes undertaken were aimed at being with the children and learning-teaching with them and for them, combining the cinematographic language, the fruition and debate of films to compose the life to be lived in school and outside it. Although children are significant consumers of audiovisual language, particularly animated films, their participation in film production processes is often limited or almost non-existent, denying the children's own creative and agency potential. Recognizing this gap, we developed curricular and pedagogical experiments in the project that aimed to actively engage children, assuming that they have valuable knowledge and perspectives to share and teach us. The creation of spaces and conditions conducive to discussion and production proved important so their children's voices could emerge and materialize in new content.

The methodological dynamics was adopted based on the children's books that were read with my mediation. Subsequently, the book began to be displayed in a *power point* image to guarantee all children could see the texts read and illustrated. Physical books were later handled by the children so it became a material and tactile artifact, important for learning and discussions. Based on that, we held a conversation circle about what else from the book had touched each child and what they would like to talk about. We then conducted interactive dynamic activities at each meeting to delve into the emotion discussed at that meeting. Animated short films were screened to provide inputs for discussions. Part of a feature film was also worked on. Finally, a written or drawn activity was performed individually to synthesize the meeting. For children who could not write, team members played the role of scribes. In the next meeting, we resumed what had been discussed in the previous meeting and exhibited the productions of the class in the form of drawings and small texts on slides, displayed in *Power Point*. This moment was very important to start drafting ideas, thoughts, arguments for the collective writing of the film's script.

The film "*Inside Out2*" was chosen as the subject of discussion. In it, we realize what the emotions that governed the protagonist's life were like. The question was whether emotions should govern us, or whether we should learn to deal with them. In this debate, books were fundamental so children could think more in-depth about their emotions, their causes; how they could seek to understand them, name them, classify them, and then act more consciously.

Based on the activities produced by the children throughout the meetings, for the purpose of exemplification, they were asked to draw situations in which they felt fear or sadness inside the school and outside it. They were also invited to write at least one sentence about the emotions that occurred in those spaces. Of the 15 children present at that meeting, three (all boys) chose to describe situations of fear; 11, situations of sadness (of these, two girls), and one boy expressed having felt both emotions together.

Of the children who underlined having felt fear, one said "*When I go hand the test to the teacher*" (JC., boy, 11 years old) and another spoke of the "*fear of failing the year, in the 4th grade*" (R., 10 years old). We observed the predominance of accounts in which fear was related to the learning aspect, with situations of test and failure.

As for the emotion of sadness, they reported situations or moments such as: "*When they stopped being friends with someone*"; "*The snack distributed at school [which the child did not like]*"; "*When people scold their friends*"; and "*When they cannot play cards [bafo]³ at school [or when the cards were torn or lost]*." The other situations related to pedagogical relationships: "*When the physical education teacher does not let them play cards and they needed to copy*" (MR., boy, 10 years old); "*Not going to the court*" (MV., boy, 11 years old); "*Copying in class*" (W., boy, 11 years old).

2 Inside Out (1h 35min, 2015). Directed by Pete Docter; Written by Pete Docter and Meg LeFauve, Pixar.

3 The "bafo" card game (or beating cards game) is a recreational/playful game, very common in Brazil among collectors of stickers/cards. Its name is due to the air displacement (commonly called bafo [breath]) caused by the hand impact when it hits a flat area in which the stickers/cards are placed, stacked. The cards are won by whoever can turn them from the stack. Retrieved from: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jogo_do_bafo - Accessed: Jun 23, 2024.

About fear and sadness outside school, they mentioned everyday situations, those that happen in the domestic setting, such as fear of the dark; sadness for not being able to play or play ball. Two boys reported situations of fear and sadness related to school, despite being asked to report situations outside of school: “*Fear of getting a low grade*” (MR., boy, 10 years old) and “*When I leave school*” [situation of sadness] (VR., boy, 10 years old). It is interesting to note the children’s recurrent emotions related to school performance and pedagogical relationships. Concern about writing and reading difficulties was the most emphatically pointed out.

As for the emotion of joy, the children reported having experienced it at school in the following situations: at recess time and at play time. Only one boy said: “*The best class: that of the project and those of A.*” [teacher conducting the class] (A., boy, 11 years old). Another boy said his greatest joy was at snack time. The reported moments of joy were more related to social interaction at school, especially with games among children, in games in physical education classes, at the time of collective snack and in friendship interactions. The latter was more pronounced and frequent among girls. Here we observe a contradiction, because, despite attributing situations of joy to friends, they also reported and showed the difficulty of socializing among them.

They also mentioned some solitary situations that caused joy at school: “*Sleeping, sleeping a lot*” (M., boy, 11 years old); “*At recess, playing on the cell phone*” (JC., boy, 11 years old) and “*At the end of the class the teacher lets us play*” (EC., boy, 10 years old). It is interesting to note that children reported situations in which joy can stem from individualizing situations, such as satisfying basic physical needs, such as sleeping. The boy who talked about sleeping also said that what made him happiest outside of school was also sleeping. It was curious that he ensured that what made him feel happy at school was sleeping. In his drawing, he portrayed a sleeping child sitting, resting their head on the school desk. The use of games on the mobile phone, or computer, was also cited as a moment of joy and contentment at school and outside it. It is interesting to note that the children practically did not talk about joy in pedagogical and school activities. That is something that should be taken into consideration by educators to try to get closer to what they like and what makes them happy, so as to produce ways of teaching and learning in everyday school life based on their interests.

We sought to think collectively about how the school could be a space of joy and happiness and how we could build a school that would provide this emotion and feeling. Individual and collective texts were produced. The conversation circles provided discussions about that time of returning to school, the difficult historical time we were living and how those social and cultural issues also affected the experience lived at school. Combined with the questions, *stop motion workshops were held⁴ to, in parallel, elaborate on the concepts of cinematographic language and think about the production of texts that suggested moving images and sounds*. Collectively, we thought about portraying the moment lived by that group of children in filmmaking.

Initially, we built images of superheroes and superheroines, who helped save the world from the invasion of a cruel monster, the Corona virus. The heroes and heroines were: the Screen-Max robot—which connected us to other people; Maskcool—mask and gel alcohol superheroine—and Vaccinix, heroine created by the scientists, who did not spread the monster, but transformed it into a very little one and without many powers. Throughout the script, the children returned to face-to-face classes and their emotions were on edge. They had help from the characters in the books read at the project meetings. In the end, a beautiful party was held at the school to celebrate the differences and the good coexistence between all people.

We used the 2D cartoon drawing technique for the animated film entitled “Emotions got mad”⁵ (6 min.). The children drew the settings, the characters, recorded the audios, drew scenes and indicated the actions for each of them.

⁴ The animation technique consists in photographing physical objects, such as modeling dough, dolls or cutouts, frame by frame. With each photograph, the objects are minimally changed in position. When images are played back in sequence and at high speed, the result is the illusion of movement.

⁵ This and other films produced in the project are available on social networks. Links are provided below:

YouTube - Brincar de fazer cinema - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8GOGQobi-_bfz3vp4kqyqA

Website of the Playing at Making Movies with Children Project – <https://brincardefazercinema.wixsite.com/brincardefazercinema/post/2018/06/27/brincar-de-fazer-cinema-com-crian%C3%A7as-2018>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/brincardefazercinema?igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/brincardefazercinema?mibextid=ZbWKwL>

We set up the scenes with them and indicated how the editing and final cutting should be; this task was assigned to a professional with experience in the production and finishing of animated films.

The genesis of the animated film derived from an ethical and aesthetic process intrinsic to the subjectivation of the participating people, whether children or adults. This course was built both in the collaborative production of the film and in the immersion in previously existing audiovisual and literary works, which were viewed, enjoyed and debated in alignment with the priority theme. Ethical and aesthetic development occurred in the relationships established between the subjects, adults and children, as reflection focused on the life of each individual in their interconnection with other people, with society, culture and the world. In this context, ethical work, from Foucault's perspective, is not limited to conforming to a pre-established norm, but implies the "transformation of oneself" (Foucault, 2014, p. 34) and, mainly, "taking oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action to transform oneself" (2014, p. 48, our translation).

Foucault's perspective on modes of subjectivation and ethical processes offers a conceptual framework to analyze the practices of subjectivation that emerged in the production of the film with children. In the process of producing the animated film with children in the activities of the extension project, several of these elements were experienced: reciprocal care, collaborative work, knowledge mediation (in which knowledge hierarchy, as in the use of technology, does not always lie in the adult person), and the consequent production of new ways of being and constituting oneself in this creative, ethical and aesthetic process. In the production of the animated film, the film product is conceived as a powerful cultural artifact, because it encourages both children and adults (in this case, team members) to reflect on the processes of subjectivation.

In the project's curricular practices, the curriculum, beyond providing constitutions of ways of life, as proposed by Paraíso (2010, p. 588), and other forms of subjectivations, established its viability, effective and affective, providing more horizontal relationships between the adults of the team and the children. These practices fostered new ways of re-signifying the teacher's role for children. Previously seen as eminently hierarchical, it came to be seen as closer, with less rigid power games and the establishment of rules and the construction of knowledge in a more collaborative and horizontal manner between children and adults. The dialogical practices promoted by the curriculum, and the educational activities within the scope of the project, provided the ideas and proposals for films to be produced collectively and in cooperation between the children and between them and the team. In this collective production, we would sit in the circle to dialogue and propose courses of action that were negotiated between all people composing that collective, showing that the final work was not a construction only of the children and much less only of our ideas. It was evident that the curriculum resulted from the collective co-creation of the script and the film, an analysis that I make now, some time after the activities.

The concept of co-creation is important to understand the collective production of the filmic cultural artifact and the related process of subjectivation. Galeano Sanches (2025) emphasizes that co-creation goes beyond the simple participation of children, involving a journey of mutual investigation, reflection, understanding, proposition, development and support in learning among the participating people (Galeano Sanches, 2025, p. 104). In the context of the project, co-creation is understood as a process of collaborative production between adults and children involved. The finished film is a testament to this interaction, representing not only the creation of the children or the team, but the result of a collective endeavor marked by collective negotiations, considerations, questioning, engagement, work and cooperation. This process permeated the entire duration of the project meetings, covering months of interactions, studies, investigations, experiences, imaginations and creative actions, culminating in the preparation of an audiovisual narrative that materialized the work.

The filmic co-creation occurred in conjunction with the curricular co-creation with and for the children at school. These practices materialized in the filmic artistic creation and also in the co-creation of new ways of being happy, of dreaming of human relations and of living more in solidarity, of being able to dream and aspire for a happier world, especially at such a striking and morbid time in the history of humanity.

Final considerations

The curriculum produced with children in project activities, experienced in 2022, promoted life experiences and knowledge that transformed us as subjects and, with that, the world was also transformed (Paraíso, 2009, p. 286). The form-curriculum gave way to the life-curriculum with children, favoring their knowledge, listening to their voices, learning from them, emphasizing that the pains experienced at that historical moment of the COVID-19 pandemic could be re-signified. The form-curriculum, according to Paraíso (2015), spreads sadness, discouragement and indifference. On the other hand, the life-curriculum is permeated with dreams, which promotes and infects (not with viruses) but with desires. “A curriculum, free from imprisoning forms, works with difference to find the desires of the different, to emphasize their dynamics, reinforce them and problematize them (Paraíso, 2015, p. 55, our translation).

During project meetings, we faced many challenges because we also situated ourselves as subjects in the games of constant questioning, in the ways of rethinking ourselves as teachers and how we could deconstruct on a daily basis the adult-centric dictates that insist on constituting us. The option for the curriculum made of the same matter as dreams, films and life, as proposed by Paraíso (2015), was built in co-creation with children, aiming to promote powerful and playful encounters, to redefine curricular and educational practices at school with other guidelines, in a playful, imaginative, creative manner for writing new realities and new ways of being as we created new worlds with cinematographic language.

The potential of the experiments in the project meetings led us to live a life-curriculum, a curriculum fraught with possibilities with children, a curriculum of the matter of dreams, the magic of cinema, the artistic creation of animated film. The focus of the educational activities, in co-creation with children, was not restricted to the final product—although relevant—but primarily on the process of experiences, interactions, dialogues, reflection and production of new ways of thinking and subjectivations. The discussions, studies and reflections provided children with tools to analyze their constitution in pandemic and post-pandemic periods, to analyze their effects on the teaching-learning processes that followed and, fundamentally, the emotional and relational impacts on the return to face-to-face classes. This approach proves an instigating means of fostering more plural and ethical-aesthetic modes of subjectivation.

The co-creative experiments conducted in the project’s curricular activities resulted in a curriculum produced with the children. It reflects resistances and possible creations in school, although it was not born from the curricular production of the classroom. Despite that, the experiments conducted may suggest to teachers the possibilities of proposing curricular and pedagogical activities in co-creation with children at schools. In the curriculum, due to its multiple possibilities (Paraíso, 2009), it is possible to find gaps, fissures that can provide new ways of knowing and living together in school, with the strengths of prioritizing children’s lives, feelings, emotions, doubts, sorrows, joys; listening to their pleas for the pressing need for movement of their bodies and for the desire to learn by playing; in short, a curriculum that is developed with them and for them to “generously transform sorrows,” to dream together with them, or even “multiply good encounters in the name of joy” (Paraíso, 2015, p. 55, our translation). All this work has confirmed the possibility and the need to use art to instigate sensibilities and produce art. It has been confirmed as an opportunity for the happiness of creating together, of co-creating with children, of making the curriculum coincide with life, with collective dreams and the production of possibilities in school, especially in public school.

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