ARTICLE

GENDER AND GENERATION: DIMENSIONS OF CARE IN EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

JULIANA SCHUMACKER LESSA[1]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3884-8309

MÁRCIA BUSS-SIMÃO[2]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6076-0640

ABSTRACT: The article results from two ethnographic researches with children, carried out in public contexts of Early Childhood Education and aims to analyze the relations between the dimensions of care, gender and generation, from the theoretical framework corresponding to the main references used in the researches, based on perspectives of the Social Studies of Childhood, in dialogue with Social Theory. The confrontation between theory and empirical studies allowed the emergence of categories and thematic axes that configured the results of their analysis, circumscribed in the educational relationships with children. The analysis resulting from the dialogue between the two researches (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012; LESSA 2019) announces the categories generational relations (LESSA, 2019); 'generationing' processes; generational order (ALANEN, 1994; 2001; 2012); gender boundaries; neutralization (THORNE, 1993), and; inter and intragender relations (KELLE 1997, 1999, 2000) as important contributions to the critical analysis of the educative-pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, generational processes, gender relations, care, children.

GÊNERO E GERAÇÃO: DIMENSÕES DO CUIDADO NAS RELAÇÕES EDUCATIVAS NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

RESUMO: O artigo resulta de duas pesquisas etnográficas com crianças, realizadas em contextos públicos de Educação Infantil e tem por objetivo analisar as relações entre as dimensões do cuidado, gênero e geração, a partir do quadro teórico correspondente às principais referências utilizadas nas pesquisas, fundamentadas em perspectivas dos Estudos Sociais da Infância, no diálogo com a Teoria Social. O confronto entre teoria e empiria permitiu a emergência de categorias e eixos temáticos que configuraram os resultados das suas análises, circunscritas nas relações educativas com crianças. A análise resultante do diálogo entre as duas pesquisas (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012; LESSA 2019) anuncia as categorias relações geracionais (LESSA, 2019); processos de geracionalização; ordem geracional (ALANEN, 1994; 2001; 2012); fronteiras de gênero; neutralização (THORNE, 1993), e; relações inter e intragênero (KELLE 1997, 1999, 2000) como importantes contributos para a análise crítica da prática educativo-pedagógica na Educação Infantil.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil, processos geracionais, relações de gênero, cuidado, crianças.

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[1] Santa Catarina State University (UDESC). Florianópolis, SC, Brasil. <julianallessa@gmail.com>
[2] Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Florianópolis, SC, Brasil. <marcia.simao@email.com.br>

GÉNERO Y GENERACIÓN: DIMENSIONES DEL CUIDADO EN LAS RELACIONES EDUCATIVAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

RESÚMEN: Este artículo es el resultado de dos investigaciones etnográficas con niños, realizadas en contextos públicos de Educación Infantil. Tiene como objetivo analizar las relaciones entre las dimensiones del cuidado, género y generación, desde el marco teórico correspondiente a los principales referentes utilizados en las investigaciones, como los Estudios Sociales de la Infancia, en diálogo con la Teoría Social. El enfrentamiento entre teoría y datos empíricos permitió a las investigaciones el surgimiento de categorías y ejes temáticos que configuraron los resultados de su análisis, entre los cuales se eligieron para la discusión categorías de cada investigación, ambas circunscritas en las relaciones educativas con los niños. El análisis resultante del diálogo entre las dos investigaciones (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012; LESSA, 2019) anuncia las categorías *relaciones generacionales* (LESSA, 2019); *procesos de generacionalización*; *orden generacional* (ALANEN, 1994; 2001; 2012); *fronteras de género*; *neutralización* (THORNE, 1993) y; las *relaciones inter e intragénero* (KELLE 1997, 1999, 2000) como importantes aportes al análisis crítico de la práctica educativo-pedagógica en la Educación Infantil.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil, procesos generacionales, relaciones de género, cuidado, niños.

CARE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: GENERATIONAL AND GENDER RELATIONS

In this text, we present a reflection on the educational processes of young children in collective contexts of Early Childhood Education, based on two research studies[3] that took gender and generational relations[4] as categories of analysis to think about the corporal dimension (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012) and of feeding (LESSA, 2019), which are constitutive of pedagogical relations. We consider that the categories addressed in the research are central to the understanding of care relationships, as a specificity of educational relationships in Early Childhood Education and, above all, as a founding relationship of childhood, characterized by the interdependence of children in relation to the adult world to ensure the production of their existence.

In this sense, our purposes in this article seek to emphasize the public dimension of care, considering a debate that is part of the defense of policies to combat the structures of oppression that shape inequalities in access to and production of care in our society. We also indicate the defense of the guarantee of material and concrete conditions of equal access to these policies, taking into account the singularities of care demanded by different social groups (children, young people, the elderly, those with specific needs, black populations, women, immigrants, indigenous people, quilombolas (an Afro-Brazilian inhabitant of quilombola settlements first established by runaway slaves in Brazil. They are descendants of Afro-Brazilian slaves who escaped from the slave plantations that existed in Brazil until its abolition in 1888), river dwellers, to name a few examples). It is a matter of considering the different demands of care policies, based on the assumption that inequalities in access to these policies reproduce social inequalities.

In the case of young children, the policy of care is sometimes in the sphere of assistance, sometimes in that of education, thus placing the need to think of care as an intersectoral policy, that is, one that needs to be understood in its multiple facets: health care, education, and assistance that, in the case of young children, is transversal to all and any form of interaction in which they are involved. Public Brazilian Early Childhood Education, linked to policies of care and social protection of childhood, including those of feeding, were characterized much more by assistance and the production and reproduction of poverty, as seen during the dictatorial period, in the decades from 1960 to 1980 (VIEIRA, 1988; KUHLMANN JR, 1991; ROSEMBERG, 2002).

Later, with the opening of the regime, these policies expanded the care as public policies, ensuring their achievement as social rights, after the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), which resulted in a numerical expansion, but without achieving a universalization of care and quality. However, from this point on, the access to public institutions of Early Childhood Education has become a social right of children and their families, whose duty is incumbent upon the municipalities and the federal sphere. Also, the expansion of vacancies allows us to glimpse, unlike the reproduction of poverty, the increase and strengthening of a working class willing to dispute Early Childhood Education and, therefore, to operate on the political transformation of care.

The coexistence between public and private institutions and also between Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of philanthropic origin, in turn, generates the class inequalities that have historically been linked to the emergence of day-care centers and pre-schools. These inequalities are related to the ways of conceiving activities related to the care of children, and these conceptions are the product of the historical and material conditions of the emergence of Early Childhood Education, linked to unequal gender relations in society. The fact that caregiving relations are socially linked to gender rules and norms produces them as a set of female activities and, therefore, within a universe socially constructed by and for women. By naturalizing the role of women in these actions, both in domestic

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[3] PhD level research carried out at the Center for Studies and Research in Early Childhood Education (NUPEIN/UFSC), under the supervision of Prof. Eloisa Acires Candal Rocha.

[4] Gender relations based on Thorne (1993) and Ferreira (2002a; 2002b); and generational relations based on Alanen (1994; 2001; 2012).

work (including mental work)[5] and in paid work, caregiving becomes engendered on the basis of what Helena Hirata (1997; 2002; 2005; 2009) and Danièle Kergoat (2009) conceptualize as the sexual division of labor, defined in the Critical Dictionary of Feminism[6] (HIRATA et al. 2009, p. 67) by Kergoat (2009) as follows:

> [...] the conditions under which men and women live are not products of biological destiny, but are, above all, social constructions. Men and women are not a collection - or two collections - of biologically different individuals. They form two social groups involved in a specific social relation: the social relations of sex. These, like all social relations, have a material basis, in this case labor, and are expressed through the social division of labor between the sexes, called, concisely, the sexual division of labor.

Care, as relations inscribed in the sexual division of labor (HIRATA, 1997; 2002; 2005; 2009; HIRATA and KERGOAT, 2007; KERGOAT, 2009), besides being marginalized, is supported by women's double or triple workload, that is, by the sum of productive, paid work and reproductive, unpaid work. In the context of Early Childhood Education, these issues intensify, since care is present not only in the domestic sphere, but also in the public one. In this sense, the logic of extending domestic childcare to Early Childhood Education has consolidated this stage of basic education as a space occupied, in its enormous majority, by women (CERISARA, 2002; VIANNA, 2013). As we are socially produced to care for those we care for in our feminine universe (and not only maternal), we are also dedicated to thinking about the sensitivities and heterogeneity of children in the educational context. Thus, to the mental burden of caring for family and the like, we add that of caring in the work space.

We understand caregiving relations, in the context of Early Childhood Education, as a professional activity carried out by qualified adults for all children, guaranteeing their distinct demands and ensuring material conditions. This implies removing care from the domestic sphere, reinforcing the importance of care, the corporal dimension and feeding practices that reside both in their inevitability and in their political dimension, as they constitute a system of material and symbolic production in which ways of living childhood are produced. In this sense, we problematize the gender inequalities (including race/ethnicity and class) that circumscribe the conceptions, practices and relations of care in childhood.

Both researches (doctoral theses) we bring to discussion were designed as ethnographic investigations with children (CHRISTENSEN and JAMES, 2005; GRAUE and WALSH 2003; SARMENTO, 2003), which have as a particularity, besides the use of ethnographic procedures, such as participant observation and dense description of the relations established between researcher and subjects that are part of the field of their research, the fact that children are considered privileged informants of knowledge about them. Thus, conceiving of them does not mean, as Cerisara (2004) points out, to deny the existence of differentiated levels between children and adults but, on the contrary, it reveals itself as a starting point in childhood studies not only interesting, but necessary to mark the educational action.

Both researches were based on the assumption that knowing children in their real-life contexts and understanding the multiple determinations that fall upon the conditions of childhood existence, constitute starting points for the elaboration of indicators for pedagogical practice and contributions for the construction of a Pedagogy of Childhood[7] (FARIA, 1999; ROCHA, 1999). This

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[5] As Castro and Chaguri (2020, p.s.) explain, "In the mid-1980s, Monique Haicault coined the idea of "mental load" to describe the constant fatigue felt by women entering the world of work. Haicault had extensive research experience with women who worked from home in the textile industry, overlapping work spaces and times. However, when the researcher moved her study to another context, that of women working in factories, outside the home, she realized how the distinction of social spaces was simply symbolic. When they are in the factories, women plan their home lives, thinking about the week's and month's shopping, the bills to pay, and the chores they have to do. The home would accompany them to the factory. The mental load is not, therefore, in the juxtaposition or summation of activities, but in their synchronicity, their simultaneity. [...]. The mental load is full of those little censors who say simply and so often: 'I have no time'" (HAICAULT, 1984, p. 275, free translation by CASTRO and CHAGURI, 2020).

[6] Entry: "sexual division of labor and social gender relations", Critical Dictionary of Feminism (HIRATA et al.) 2009, p. 67.

[7] According to the definition made by Barbosa (2010), in the entry Pedagogy of Childhood: "Pedagogy of Childhood emerges from a scientific accumulation in the area of education that starts to criticize the reproduction of reductionist and conservative educational models of education/teaching, production/transmission of knowledge, collective life/classroom and children/students. Rocha (1999) and Faria (1999) at first indicated the Pedagogy of Childhood as a perspective of public

pedagogy is "not yet consolidated to the point of clearly guiding training and educational practices" (ROCHA, LESSA and BUSS-SIMÃO, 2016, p. 39). The theoretical framework corresponds to the references that the two researches (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012; LESSA, 2019) used, as will be presented below, grounded in perspectives of the Social Studies of Childhood, in dialogue with Social Theory.

Both Buss-Simão's (2012) and Lessa's (2019) research were conducted in a public and urban full-time Early Childhood Education institution, each belonging to the same Municipal Education Network of a capital city located in the Southern Region of Brazil. Buss-Simão (2012) observed and recorded, through written, photographic and video means, during the months of March to November 2009, from 2 to 3 times a week, the relations established among children with a focus on their corporal dimension, in an age group, formed by 15 children, between 2 and 3 years old, 12 girls and 3 boys. The participant observations and records of the dense description occurred in the several pedagogical spaces and times that make up the full-time routine of kindergarten (feeding, playground, room, sleep, hygiene). In the other research, Lessa (2019) recorded, also in writing, photography, and video, the relationships established between and with the children during their practices of eating collectively in the cafeteria of an Early Childhood Education institution. During 9 months, the researcher participated, on alternate days and times, in the different meal times that structure the full-time routine (breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, and dinner), accompanying a group formed by 210 children[8], between 1 and 6 years old, enrolled in the institution in the year in which the field research was carried out (2016). The data from the two ethnographic researches were also composed by semi-structured conversations with professionals from the pedagogical teams and with children's families, besides the analysis of documents that guide the practices and educational relations in the investigated contexts.

In the next two sections we will present each of the two researches, highlighting some of the concepts used to analyze the relations and practices of the children involving dimensions of care, when in collective and pedagogical contexts of the first stage of basic education, which includes children from 0 to 5 years and 11 months of age.

The first research that will be presented was the Doctoral Thesis defended by Lessa, in the year 2019[9], in which we highlight how the concepts of *generational relations* (LESSA, 2019); *generationing* process and *generational order* (ALANEN, 1994; 2012) allow us to analyze caregiving relations among children and between them and adults, in intersection with the category generation, in which childhood is socially constructed, not isolated from other categories, with generational relations being determined not only by age clippings, but by markers of social experience. In this sense, Lessa (2019) shows us how care and education in the context of Early Childhood Education can be analyzed in the light of generational relations, from a relational perspective.

The second research to be presented is the Doctoral Thesis of Buss-Simão, completed in 2012, which, by operating with the concepts of gender boundaries and neutralization (THORNE, 1993), reveals how children culturally and socially work these boundaries in inter and intra gender relations (KELLE 1997, 1999, 2000). Such concepts allow us to highlight the transgressive and resistant character of children's agency in their own ways of working the borders, among them, through processes of *neutralization* of gender relations.

We end the presentation of the two researches reinforcing the dialogue between the concepts and the categories taken for analysis, in order to contribute to a multidimensional reflection of pedagogical relations, particularly those of care and education, that fulfill the social function of Early

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education for Early Childhood Education, but then extended it to all those between 0 and 10 years of age. It affirms childhood as a generational category, socially and historically and geographically constructed, heterogeneous, crossed by the variables of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity. Taking as assumption that all cultural appropriation and any learning is the result of a social and shared relationship of collective meanings" (Dictionary: work, profession and teaching condition, GESTRADO/UFMG, 2010).

[8] For more detail on the subjects participating in the research we are presenting here, see: Lessa (2019), Chapter 4, item: "The children, families and professionals of the investigated daycare center" and Buss-Simão (2012), Chapter II, item: "The investigative context".

[9] Both researches, by Lessa (2019) and Buss-Simão (2012) were carried out at the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Santa Catarina and were funded by CAPES, CNPq, and DAAD.

Childhood Education, configuring the specificity of the educational context in the first stage of basic education.

DIMENSIONS OF EATING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: GENERATIONAL PROCESSES IN CAREGIVING RELATIONSHIPS

Lessa's (2019) research proposed to investigate how material and symbolic determinants act on children's social relations, mediated by the practices of eating that are, in turn, intrinsic to the relations of education and care that constitute pedagogical practices in the context of Early Childhood Education. The research takes the space-time of children's feeding, understood in its material conditions and social practices as a social phenomenon of multiple dimensions, which makes it a system of multifaceted symbolic production (BEARDSWORTH; KEIL, 1997).

The data[10] were analyzed taking as a basis the Social Studies of Childhood from the perspective pointed out by Qvortrup (1994; 2005) about childhood as a generational structure, and the relational approach proposed by Alanen (1994; 2001; 2012; 2014). This author starts from a relational analysis of childhood as a generational category, in dialogue with the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1996; 2002; 2014) focusing, above all, on the relational perspective built by the sociologist. In an attempt to break with a substantialist way of thinking, which apprehends the phenomena statically, Bourdieu (1996) proposes a philosophy of action conceived as relational, by the fact of giving primacy to relations and, also, called "dispositional, which actualizes the potentialities inscribed in the agents' bodies and in the structure of the situations in which they act or, more precisely, in their relation" (BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 10 - author's emphasis). Childhood, understood as a generation inscribed in a structure of generational relations, requires that attention be paid to the processes by which generational structures are constituted and subsequently, reproduced or transformed, what Alanen (2012) called *'generationing'* processes. Composing this theoretical basis were also the studies that took as the empirical field reference of their research, the collective practices and relations of eating of children in educational contexts.

The general analyses of this scientific production on the theme, formed, in its great majority by foreign researches (Anglo-Saxon and Francophone languages)[11], pointed out the space of eating in Early Childhood Education as a context of learning and intense production, among children, of the most varied forms of meanings linked to caring - being cared for, taking care of oneself, nurturing oneself and caring for the other - and linked to the specificities that characterize *eating-together* (ALCOCK, 2007) in the collective of children, as a means of care (DORRER et al, 2010) and of expressing emotions (EMOND, MCINTOSH, PUNCH, 2014). In this sense, the context of food in Early Childhood Education configures itself as "an observatory of children's cultures and intergenerational relations" (MATHIOT, 2012), of dynamics inherent to generational relations (LESSA, 2019), that is, where it is possible to observe how childhood and adulthood co-construct (ALMEIDA et al., 2013), mediated by generational processes.

Thinking about generational relations means paying attention to the various forms they can take, such as those of parenting, care, education, including different agencies, such as child-father/mother, child-teacher, child-peer group, child-subject of the educational relationship, child-subject of care relations, etc.

According to Alanen (2012, p. 06):

> The major significance of the notion of a *generational order* then, is that it gives a name and sociological content to the processes through which the social world is organized in terms of generational distinction [...]. For the case of children, this means that their lives, experiences, and meanings are not only gendered, classed, 'raced' (and so on) but also - and most importantly for the sociological study of childhood - *generationed*.

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[10] Research approved by the Ethics Committee on Human Research of the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Opinion 1.513.055 / CAAE: 54562316.0.0000.0121.

[11] Turner, Mayall and Mauthner (1995); Christensen (2003); Alcock (2007); James, Kjorholt and Tingstad (2009); Comoretto (2017). For a detailed survey of the international literature about the topic, see Chapter 2 of Lessa's Thesis (2019).

From this perspective, to place the *generational relations* as a category of analysis of the social relations and practices of children in the collective and pedagogical context of Early Childhood Education means, instead of taking the generational categories (childhood and adulthood) as a starting point, to pay attention to the dynamics of relations that build them: how ages are built in the relations between generations and within generations (intergenerational and intra-generational relations). That is, to look at the relationships of mutual interdependence through which adults and children become who they are, overcoming the "static" character attributed to the categories childhood and adulthood. In this direction, a child becomes a concrete and situated child to the extent that he/she does so in the relationship with another and within a particular material and symbolic adult world: a child becomes a child in the caregiving relationship involving parenting with adults.

Dealing with *generational processes* as a dimension of educational relations in childhood means highlighting the data from the analytical construction of a *generational order*, in the case of Lessa's research (2019), built in the reiterative and pedagogical space-time of the practices of eating children in Early Childhood Education. To this end, the data analyses were presented in the research, according to the interpretation of the age logics of the functioning of eating in kindergarten, that is, the construction of distinct generational orders. In the investigated field, the cafeteria[12] was the main observation context, and in this pedagogical space, meals were served daily, mediated by adults from different teams: pedagogical, nutrition, kitchen, and cleaning. The *generational order* was built from the evidence of a social organization (with its conflicts and contradictions) in terms of age distinctions: different ways of thinking and organizing the moments of eating, requiring from the children certain skills, according to the age groups; but also, different ways of organizing these moments, requiring from children of the same age group different skills and actions. This shows us how children's ages and becoming children are being built in the dynamics of *generational relations*.

In this sense, an issue to be considered when taking *generational relations* as a category of analysis is that childhood is not only defined in terms of age, but also of social experience. An example observed in the research was the identification of constructions of distinct generational practices for groups of the same age group. In the case, for example, of two groups of the same age group, but one formed by novice children and the other by veterans in the social experience of the institution, the competencies and capacities of action expected in the cafeteria were different. This means that *generational relations* are not only built by the cutouts of age, but of a social age.

In this same direction, Wintersberger (2005) notes that childhood as a generational category and its inter-age relations can be explained by taking gender relations as a basis. Although their relations are of a different nature, the author shows that both gender relations are not constructed by gender alone, and *generational relations* are not constructed by ages alone:

> While feminist researchers introduced the dimension of sex for revealing the gender order of patriarchal welfare states, the generational dimension in childhood research is in principle-about age. But as in the case of sex and gender, we should make a distinction between biological and social age as the generational order of society. While biological age can easily be defined by the day of birth, the social meaning of being, for instance, 17-years-old varies cross-nationally and culturally as well as for different periods in history (WINTERSBERGER, 2005, p. 215).

The following excerpt from the field record (LESSA, 2019) makes it possible to observe the dynamics inherent to the specificities of *generational relations* that the pedagogical context of sharing the meal at the table allows, particularly, of relationships between children (intra-generational relationships):

> Camila (5-6 years old) shares the table with a boy of the same group as hers and another smaller boy (3-4 years old). I observe them. The boy from the same group asks Camila, "Are you going

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[12] Other spaces, in addition to the cafeteria, were part of the observations and records, because they were other contexts in which the food issue figured in the pedagogical dynamics of the institution. They were: pedagogical meetings and events with the participation of children and their families, meetings with families and babies, as well as spaces such as the group rooms (including the one for babies) and the parks, which are configured as space-time of interactions and relationships before and after those present in the inter and intra generational relationships in the cafeteria.

to eat more?" She answers affirmatively and starts dialoguing with the small boy, who is sitting in front of her. Without verbalizing any words to each other, Camila shows her own blouse to the little boy. He observes her and tries to understand the girl's gesture. Now she takes her own blouse and makes a gesture of shaking it. He takes a while to understand. Then she leans over the table and takes out the rice that was on his blouse. "He only eats tomatoes at home," says Camila to me. Camila gets up and goes to repeat the meal, moving to the buffet along with her friend who asked if she would eat more (LESSA, 2019, p. 239 - Field record of 06/15/2016/Lunch).

In the episode, it is possible to observe how children, in their relationship dynamics, articulate generational processes, such as the older girl's care for the younger boy, within a particularity proper to the observed generational relationship (younger child and older child). While the boy shows us his appropriation processes of the most essential cultural practices, mediated by intergenerational relations (between generations), such as eating with a spoon, sitting at the table and sharing the meal with peers, it is in his relationship with the older girl that we can see how the *generationing processes* occur (ALANEN, 1994; 2001). The analysis brought in the research reveals the contradictory character and conflictual nature of the *generational relations*, particularly those involving the relations between children and adults of the institution, and also, between adults of the institution and between adults of the institution and adults who are relatives of the children. In these relationships, different adults require different skills for children of the same age range. On the other hand, in the research record presented, when the analysis falls on the relations between the children, they end up revealing another generational order, founded on generational relations of a cooperative and horizontal nature.

The older child, by reproducing his intergenerational relations in the interaction with the younger one, also becomes more experienced through this relationship. This process of reproduction and transformation of *generational relations* can be understood as what Alanen (2001) defines as *generationing processes*. These dynamics reveal how the adult world is being produced among the meanings attributed by the children and put into relation with their peers. Episodes like this one, brought in the research (LESSA, 2019) show that one of the specificities of eating-together (ALCOCK, 2007) consists in the fact that children, companions at the table, also educate other children, and these relationships are, therefore, the object of reflection of pedagogical action.

In the episode, children's cultures, namely the collective production of meanings, which is mediated by the children's eating practices in the pedagogical context, reveals its composition of cooperative relations. In it, it is possible to observe how the eating-together (ALCOCK, 2007), which characterizes the relations among the children at the table, makes it possible to expand a care of self to the other, in an action of cooperative meaning with the other. The girl, by expressing competences of caring for herself, linked to her practices of nurturing herself, enhances these practices of self with the other, in the relationship with the younger boy who, it seems, has a certain intimacy, since she mentions a curiosity about him, observed "at home". This action of caring for the younger child occurs in relation to her action itself, of cleaning him, but also with the expression of a norm and, finally, of a way of talking about the younger boy, in the third person singular, without referring directly to him. When the girl helps the younger boy to clean himself, first by trying to show him, by means of gestures, the rice that had fallen on his blouse, then, she herself helping him to shake his blouse until the traces of food fall off, she does this with discretion, without exposing the boy and without verbalizing with him. And she also does it by verbalizing to the researcher about a food issue of the boy, manifesting this other in the relationship as a subject/object of concern: "how weird is that, right? These dynamics of relationships show how the girl becomes more experienced in her relationship with the younger child, and how the younger child herself becomes more experienced in her relationship with the older one, revealing *generational processes* in the relationships between children that are potentiated during feeding times in the kindergarten group.

This potentiality of intra-generational relations, mediated by care practices, such as feeding, occurs not only because of the context itself, which brings together a group of children, but also because of the fact that food, in the context of day care centers and preschools, is presented to the children as a set of social and cultural practices devoid and protected from market values, with a value in itself, safeguarding a food protection. The National School Meals Program (PNAE, 2013) is part of the organization and management of Brazilian public basic education. As part of a childhood care policy,

inscribed in the educational policy, food in the context of Early Childhood Education guarantees a relative protection of childhood from the dictates of the market, especially in the ways of relating to food, without the mediation of advertising and propaganda and food as merchandise, being enhanced from others, such as the interactions with peers and the relations of cooperation and horizontal care that derive from them, as we could see.

In the construction of the relational framework of analysis of the research (LESSA, 2019), which included the identification of the relationships to be researched, attention was directed to the generational processes that were evident in the dynamics of educational relationships, made possible by the various forms of generational relationships that are configured in the context of the practices of children's eating in the routine of Early Childhood Education. An example of this can be observed in the analysis of generational processes covering the relationships between younger children and adults on the pedagogical team. Situations brought up in the research in which some younger children receive food in their mouths reveal a mismatch of distinct times (institutional, biological, social and cultural), that collide with the experience of eating, and that is being mediated by intergenerational relations (between adulthood and childhood). In general, putting food in the child's mouth allows the time of the individual experience to be orchestrated with the time of eating together, with the time of the educational routine, including the pedagogical team's entrance and exit times, and the time that marks the ticking of the collective meals.

In contrast, feeding in the mouth, as a generational action that brings with it the control of slow/fast time, also designates a caring relationship. In this asymmetric relationship that is established between the adult who puts food in the mouth and the child who receives the food, verbal language, as a strategic way of establishing caring relationships, is placed as central in the pedagogical meanings of the generational order. A refusal to put a spoon in the mouth can be verbalized by asking if the child is satisfied, even if she doesn't understand at first; later on, she will understand that the questioning is key to express self-care processes (satiety or her appetite), which are constitutive of the corporal dimension present in educational relations in Early Childhood Education. This reveals the importance of symbolic references that propose the bet on a pedagogical relationship focused on the negotiation of meanings and agreements, mirrored in the horizontal and cooperative forms reflected in the generational relationships observed among children, which suggests an interested position rather than a commanding one, enhancing the sharing of meanings among them and with adults.

Finally, one last point to be highlighted from Lessa's research (2019), which we consider a contribution to the debate on pedagogical relations in Early Childhood Education, relates to the fact that, in the investigated field[13], the daily feeding practices are inscribed in a political-pedagogical project, practices that give contours for thinking about care in its political-pedagogical dimension. In this sense, the importance of eating in the collective contexts of Early Childhood Education is related both to an elementary sense of nourishing in order to stay alive, and to a social, and therefore educational and pedagogical[14], sense. Life itself can only be thought of within the nutrition of the body; living means nourishing the body.

This care is so vital and physiological that it accentuates its political dimension to the extent that we think about how it is regulated and conceived by all and for all. We realize this when we pay attention to who are the children most affected by social isolation due to the risks of contamination by the new Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), which is devastating Brazil and the world since the beginning of 2020[15], with the closing of educational institutions and the interruption of face-to-face and collective care to children. All are affected because they interrupt important educational processes, but others, because they no longer have access to a national policy of free and balanced food, which fulfills

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[13] According to the Political Pedagogical Project of the investigated institution (PPP, 2016).

[14] The distinction between educational and pedagogical here has as a reference the idea that care can be educational, such as family care, but this does not mean that it is pedagogical, because the latter contains within it the idea of a thought out, intentionally planned and evaluated action.

[15] At the time of writing and closing this article, the whole world has recorded more than 3.8 million deaths, of which more than 500,000 deaths were in Brazil, occupying the second position with the highest number of deaths in the world, behind only the United States. Vaccinations began in Brazil on January 17, 2021, and by mid-June only 11.2% of the population was immunized.

its function from the daily care of the body's needs, with the concrete guarantee of conditions for access to meals and types of food, within a food security. The food offered by public educational institutions has a decisive impact on the children's food sovereignty and safety. One of the first demands to the municipal, state, and federal levels, with the impossibility of attendance in daycare centers, preschools, schools, and universities, due to social isolation and the risks of a pandemic contamination, was to guarantee the continuity of access to food, through financial aid or food distribution.

If Lessa's research (2019), when investigating the children's relationships in the collective context of eating practices, in light of the generation category, draws attention to *generational relations* as one of the constitutive dimensions of care, which, in turn, is the foundation of the pedagogical processes in Early Childhood Education, the study of Buss-Simão (2012) takes gender relations as a category of analysis as one of the constitutive dimensions of the body, when focusing on the children's relationships with their peers in the collective context of Early Childhood Education. As we will see, the dialogue between the two studies highlights the categories gender and generation as important dimensions for thinking about the specificity of care in the relationships and practices in these contexts, being intrinsically linked to the other social determinants of class and ethnicity/race.

GENDER AND CARE IN EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The research of Buss-Simão (2012), investigated how young children express, manifest, share and give meanings to cultural and social elements involving the body, presenting the category gender as one of the constitutive dimensions of educational relations in Early Childhood Education.

For the analysis of these relations among children and between them and adults, Buss-Simão (2012), based on Thorne (1993) and Kelle (1997, 1999, 2000) conducted the research observing not only the gender relations in groups separated by sex (inter-gender relations), but also the variations and relations within the same gender (intragender relations). This perspective seeks to overcome the existing dualism between the world of girls and the world of boys, because when gender relations are analyzed only in opposition (intergender), they may trigger caricatured ideas and assumptions, reinforcing what is specific to one or the other, considering, a priori, the differences between genders more important than the differences within genders (intragender).

In the approach to the meanings given by children to their ways of life in the educational collective, the gender category was delineated as central and constitutive of their relationships and interactions. Buss-Simão (2012) shows that the separation, observed between girls and boys, in the context of the relations and interactions in Early Childhood Education constitutes a kind of *borderwork* (THORNE, 1993), more strongly felt, in the scope of the interactions between pairs, by those children who wish to participate in an activity controlled by children of another sex. However, these borders, because they are worked by the children, may also dissolve in other contexts of interactions and relations in the collective space of Early Childhood Education, a fact that gives these borders an episodic, multifaceted and contradictory character.

The term *borderwork* derives from social anthropologist Fredrik Barth's (1969) analysis, in which the author conceptualizes those social relations maintained across ethnic boundaries (e.g., between the Sámi[16] (or Lapps and Norwegians), without diminishing the participants' sense of cultural and ethnic difference. While Barth (1969) focuses on a macro perspective, on an ecological regime, Thorne (1993) emphasizes interactions, both between groups and between subjects of the same group, in which, perceptions may be similar in both cases: "[...] while contact sometimes weakens and reduces an active sense of difference, groups can also, through interactivity with the other, strengthen their boundaries" (THORNE, 1993, p. 65 - our translation). The notion of *borderwork* allows us to analyze *inter and intragender relations*, revealing the limits of these relations and how children are able to work gender culturally. Buss-Simão (2012) draws attention to the warning made by Thorne (1993) regarding the understanding of the notion of 'borders' which, erroneously, may suggest a fence, or an inflexible wall, dividing two parties.

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[16] The Sámi people, known, before their ethnopolitical mobilizations, also as Lapps, are one of the largest indigenous groups in Europe.

Countering this understanding, he recommends that the image of how borders are worked out should resemble a set of small enclosures, or walls, that can be quickly dismantled, dissolved, and transformed.

In observing these interactions, Thorne (1993) identifies four ways of working with boundaries that involve relations among children and between children and adults: i) the games of pursuit in intergender relations, composed of basic elements of chase and flee, capture and save, these being a means of ensuring the maintenance of boundaries between boys and girls; ii) the strategies of competition, which consist of instigating girls and boys against each other in competitions, these being potentiated in those pedagogical relations that accentuate gender divisions and oppositions; iii) the rituals of contamination (more recurrent in girls' agencies[17]), consisting in contaminating someone, or a group, with an invisible virus (or maintaining immunity or even eliminating the contamination) and; iv) the strategies of invasions, in which girls or boys, individually or in groups, deliberately disturb the activities controlled by the group of the opposite sex, disturbing or even ruining their games and games.

Trespassing strategies, as a way of working on boundaries, were most commonly observed being used by boys in both Thorne's (1993) and Buss-Simão's (2012) studies. The following episode (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012) evidences how children protagonize invasion strategies and the way they work gender boundaries in intra and intergender relations with their peers.

> In the little house in the park, the girls Manu, Isa and Helena are playing. Léo, one of the boys in the group arrives and moves around, just like Spiderman, hanging from the house, and the girls, comment:
> Isa: Let's go?
> Helena: But this is our house!
> Isa: But he's over there. [referring to Leo]
> Manu: Go away, Leo!
> Léo stands at the entrance door, almost hanging, and nods his head negatively. Manu turns to me:
> Manu: Tell him to get out of here! This is an all-girls' house! Don't you see? We are all girls and he is a boy! [I had no intention of interfering in the situation, which led me to question Manu]:
> Researcher: Can't a boy come in here?
> All the girls together (Isa, Manu, Helena) and now Nicole [who has just arrived] say: No!
> Manu adds: Only William!
> The girls keep on fiddling with their pots and ask themselves: Shall we leave? But they stay in place, as does Leo, who also stays and looks at the girls. Then, Leo enters the house and speaks:
> Léo: I am Papa - but the girls do not hear him [or do not want to hear him].
> He then gathers two seeds and asks Manu:
> Léo: What is this, Manuele? - [strongly accentuates her name by joining the surname Manu with the name Emanuele] showing the two seeds.
> Manu looks at them and says:
> Manu: Get out of here with those berries, we don't want any berries here! (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012, p. 268 - Field record of 06/08/2009).

Because he was not allowed to enter the girls' group and, consequently, to participate in the games (due to the gender boundaries they worked on), Léo, many times during the research, led situations in which he ruined the girls' games, either by destroying their productions or by taking the objects and toys they used. In the episode described, it is possible to state that, even though there was not, *a priori*, a definition of territoriality of the girls or boys, there was a demarcation circumscribed to the moment and to the game that was being played, by means of intra-gender relations (among girls). When the group of girls plays in the little house in the park, they mean this space as a territory marked by gender relations, and this understanding was expressed by Manu, when she asked the researcher to intervene in Léo's invasion to the territory, saying: "tell him to get out of here! This is a house for girls only! Don't you see? We are all girls and he is a boy! Manu's statement potentiates the understanding of the body as a manifestation of gender, which unfolds as an impediment to the entrance and participation in the group of peers, because this body belongs to a boy.

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[17] In the group researched by Buss-Simão (2012), no episodes of contamination were witnessed by the girls during the field research period.

In the episode it is also possible to perceive the strategies launched by Léo, who arrives and is prevented from participating in the game, first by attributing to himself a role in the game, demarcated by the gender border: "I am the daddy", without there being any reaction of acceptance on the part of the group of girls; then, by putting two seeds together and emphatically and directly asking one of the girls: "What is it, Manuele?". Léo, by directly questioning one of the girls by strongly accentuating her full name, instead of using her nickname, seeks to get the attention of at least one of them; in this case, he turns to the one who expresses frequent dominance in her intragender relationships, leading, in the conduct of play, decision-making and prestigious roles. None of Léo's strategies have open access to the group of girls, being, both him and his seeds, dismissed with a "get out of here with those berries, we don't want any berries here!". This episode selected from Buss-Simão's research (2012) allows us to see that the spatial separation of girls and boys ends up affecting more the intergender relations of the children, as in the case of Léo, who wishes to enter the girls' group play. In these moments, gender relations as oppositions are potentiated and, although girls and boys are gathered in the same territoriality, the *worked borders* emphasize their separations.

Other ways of *working the borders*, distinct from the invasion ritual (THORNE, 1993), acted by Léo, could also be observed with recurrence in the research of Buss-Simão (2012), such as those protagonized by Willian. Representative of this way of *working the borders* were the situations involving the exchange of shoes among the children, witnessed on several occasions in the routine interactions of the group. In many of these moments, the predominant group of girls vehemently positioned themselves against Willian's participation in the exchange, however, in others, the girls accepted and even invited (as we will see in another episode) to exchange their shoes, highlighting how the *gender boundaries* are not fixed, but constructed in the relationships among children:

> After the playground, the children return to the room, wash their hands, and then have lunch. The girls sit down on the carpet and begin exchanging shoes again. Leticia, Amanda, Manu, Nicole, Camila and Bianca are sitting in a circle on the carpet. Willian finishes washing his hands, joins them and speaks:
> Willian: I want to change too. Then the boy takes off his sandals and grabs one of the girls, but Camila says:
> Camila: No, this one is for girls!
> When Willian takes another pair of sandals to put on, she observes again:
> Camila: That one is also for girls!
> With Camila's definition, Willian ends up not changing the sandals, he keeps his own and goes to the cafeteria with them (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012, p. 208 - Field record of 11/17/2009).

In the situation described, for Willian, the gender belonging that was meant for him in the relationship with the girls makes it impossible for him to participate in the dynamics of exchanging sandals. In this sense, the children show how, in their intergender relations, the borders are updated, taking on both a potentiating and a limiting facet of the children's possibilities of social action. Through the relations established with the girls and the indications given by them, that he couldn't wear the sandals, which are/are culturally and socially defined as feminine, the possibility of acting and participating in the social world is limited.

A second notion that must accompany the analysis of how children culturally work gender boundaries, is that of *neutralization* (THORNE, 1993), which consists of the processes by which, in their *generational relations* (with other children and with adults), children are able to neutralize *gender boundaries* founded on division and opposition. The following episode from Buss-Simão's (2012) research provides evidence of how they express these processes:

> The children Willian, Bianca, Amanda, Ana Laura and Nicole are in the little house in the park and play with a Batman game as if it were a memory game; however, the pieces are face up and each child can choose the two pieces they want. I notice that Nicole is wearing Willian's sandals, and he is barefoot. Soon afterwards, Ana Laura invites Willian, Amanda, Bianca and Nicole to go to the Group 4 room, where there is music and children are dancing and playing. On the way there, Willian asks for his sandals, because his feet hurt from walking on the sand. Nicole wants to keep wearing Willian's sandals, so she asks them to switch shoes. They go back to the little house and Nicole offers her shoes to Willian and, when she puts them on his feet, she says:

Nicole: It's beautiful, Willian. It's beautiful, Willian... look here [speaks to me].
Then they walk to where Bianca and Ana Laura are (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012, p. 212 - Field record of 11/05/2009).

The episode, by showing how the group of girls opens gaps for Willian's entrance in the dynamics of the exchange of sandals - a game recurrently witnessed in intragender relations (among the girls) - reveals how the *work of gender boundaries*, among children, involves processes of *neutralization* of relations based on division and opposition. It also reveals the ambiguous and dubious character of these boundaries. If, on the one hand, the boundaries can be accentuated, reinforced, ratified, updated, and reproduced in intergender relations, on the other hand, they can also be challenged, overcome, and questioned. The processes of *neutralization* of gender relations, founded on division and opposition consist, in this sense, in the transgressor and resistant character of the children's agency in their own ways of working the borders. Thus, it can be said that childhood and, in it, children, as subjects of a time that sees the new in what is already habitual and naturalized in the social world, allow the inauguration of different ways of working with gender. These episodes reveal how the observation of children's own ways of living their childhood give us clues to understand the social construction of childhood. Beyond a social form based on the sexual division of labor (HIRATA and KERGOAT, 2007; KERGOAT, 2009) and in a heteronormative and sexist society of images (FONTENELLE, 2006), the children experience the possibilities to transit and enjoy both worlds, when in relation, in the pedagogical peer group.

To look at the meanings that are produced inside the relations of the children (inter and intra gender) in these contexts, means to emphasize the production of their cultures, therefore, their own ways of producing meaning, in order to understand how they deal with gender relations. The pedagogical work, by giving meaning to the resistances revealed by the children and to their processes of *neutralization* of gender relations based on division and opposition, potentializes, from this, the construction of paths for an emancipating educational project.

It is undeniable that the care of young children is a job that, in its majority, is carried out by women, therefore, the generational relations, namely the care relations, from which children are dependent on adults are, in their majority, gender relations, because they are carried out within a sexual division of labor (HIRATA, 1997; 2002; 2005; 2009; KERGOAT, 2009). This leads us to reflect on the political implications of the pedagogical care with young children, among which, the need to consider that the educational relationships in Early Childhood Education (children-teachers), because they are social relationships, are demarcated by gender relations. This points to a pedagogical action that seeks, in its praxis, ways to work with boundaries that question, challenge, and overcome relations based on gender oppositions and divisions. Some clues can be found from the observation of the interactions and games in the group of children and from the identification of their resistance mechanisms that, in turn, will allow us to think about how to enhance them in an educational-pedagogical action.

Another political implication of the pedagogical care of young children leads to questioning the category of gender, but also that of generation, as relatively unequivocal and visible categories, being opportunely used to separate distinct worlds that divide, hierarchize, and classify. In the contexts of Early Childhood Education, gender and generation are categories commonly used to demarcate boundaries, being taken as a principle of classification and of "naturalized" and "socially accepted" divisions of their organizational forms and institutional structuring. Children, in general, are grouped by age group and, from this hitherto merely organizational principle, a classification of a set of expected competencies is introduced, often creating processes of exclusion.

In turn, these processes derive from a denial of the social heterogeneity of childhood by making other factors that go through the social experience of children other than their age, or even their stage of development, invisible. Commonly, within these groups organized by the same age group, pedagogical relations tend to organize the children's relationships based on opposite, binary boundaries divided by gender. By analyzing these children's gender relations in the collective context of Early Childhood Education, the research of Buss-Simão (2012) allows us to understand how the borders created in these relations are not fixed, but are culturally 'worked', in the case of young children, especially through their play and relations with their peers.

Finally, the research of Buss-Simão (2012) and Lessa (2019) helps to understand the constitutive dimensions of educational relationships in Early Childhood Education, by evidencing how the categories gender and generation are constructed in the dynamics that involve the children's relationships with the dimension of the body and food.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The dialogue between the two research studies (BUSS-SIMÃO, 2012; LESSA, 2019) announces the categories gender and generation as dimensions of the body and the practices linked to it in the collective context of Early Childhood Education, therefore, constitutive dimensions of caregiving relations, taking into account other social determinants, such as class and ethnicity/race. This leads us to consider the political implications of the ways in which care has been conceived in our society, since all care is educational. However, because these are relationships, this does not mean that they all converge with a political-pedagogical project or an emancipatory educational project. Barbosa and Quadros (2017, p. 47), when looking at the learning of social and cultural practices present in the daily life of children in institutions of Early Childhood Education, show how those related to personal care connected to the body are ignored or excluded from the pedagogical and curricular debate. In general, the learning of this practical knowledge is attributed to a family origin and prior to the experience of Early Childhood Education, which leads to a pedagogical action focused only on a perspective of control over the children's bodies.

Together, the two researches show how these categories are relationally produced, indicating that the boundary work between genders is produced and re-signified within the generational processes in which childhood is built. Based on these assumptions, both generations are not defined only by ages - childhood youth, for example - and gender is not defined only by sex, but are interdependent phenomena of the structures of relations in which they develop.

Based on Tronto (2016), we conclude this discussion of care, which is not exhausted, on the contrary, it remains open, remembering that conceiving it implies recognition as a central element of human life, "an essential part of what it means to be human. One cannot understand humanity without understanding what it means to care for others. It presupposes recognizing that care is established relationally and that "there are many different kinds of relationships, including those of oppression, that imply care" (TRONTO, 2016, s/p.), these relationships also being power relationships. Reflecting on care requires paying attention to its recognition detached from a romanticized idea that tends to restrict it as something seen only as "good care," because dealing with care does not necessarily mean a positive judgment. Qualifying care calls us to conceive of what would be, then, an anti-sexist, anti-classist, and anti-racist care, and against all forms of ageist and enabling oppressions.

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