

Childhood pedagogy and educational contexts in Brazil and Italy*¹

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Abstract

In Brazil and Italy, early childhood education has become a crucial stage of education and a sociopolitical space to guarantee children's rights, including learning and development. To this end, quality initial and ongoing teacher training aims to expand and strengthen teachers' knowledge and practices. In addition, it is an education-oriented pedagogical work that involves analysis, reflection, and understanding of children's physical, cognitive, economic, and socio-cultural conditions since they live in diverse, complex, and broad realities. Significant structured work between schools and universities, based on studies, debates, analyses, and formative reflections, is necessary to ensure the rights and training of teachers, aiming to connect theories and practices. To this end, the academic-scientific partnership between female professors-researchers from the schools of Education of a Brazilian university and an Italian university led them to reflect on the educational contexts and childhood pedagogy in both countries. What are the Pedagogies of Childhood like in these two countries? What differentiates them? While both countries have their own dimensions, differences, and diversities, the analyses presented here show that understanding the Pedagogy of Childhood helps us address these realities, considering the objective and subjective parameters.

Keywords

Early childhood education – Pedagogy of childhood – Children – Brazil – Italy.

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Introduction

Throughout its history and socio-cultural and economic transformations, based on contemporary conflicts and achievements involving social movements, civil society, activists, and intellectuals, early childhood education has become an achievement for adults and children, a right of theirs, and a place recognized and built for and with them (Abramowicz, 2003). As an institution, early childhood education is structured as a heritage of experiences, a specific complex of actions that socialize human behavior and allow life production. It is a space and time in which practices and ideas that impose certain imperatives on individuals are disseminated, constructed, selected, and reproduced. However, as a human production, these can also be contested and changed, which allows for non-determinism (Berger, 1986; Berger; Luckmann, 2004).

As a field of study and theory production, early childhood education for Brazilian Heloísa Marinho and Italian Maria Montessori⁴, is also an institutional space for observing children, reflecting on and understanding their relationships, interactions, and ways of learning, aspects that signify a pedagogy of childhood. According to Heloísa Marinho, pedagogical practice must consider physical, cognitive, and social conditions due to the complex and broad diverse realities experienced by Brazilian children (Leite Filho, 2011).

These ideas have substantially impacted history and cultures when we look at the current educational contexts for children in Brazil and Italy. The academic-scientific partnership between institutions⁵ justifies our reference to the two countries, which reverberated in a project that aims to understand the formative experiences of early childhood education teachers and managers, connecting theory and practice. In this sense, this manuscript aims to provide a theoretical and practical reflection on both countries' educational contexts and policies. We are certainly aware of the contexts' dimensions, differences, and diversities, and also in this article. Therefore, we have situated the analyses around an early childhood education institution in Milan and two in Rio de Janeiro, encompassing theories and practices designed for these realities. Furthermore, with due regard for comparisons, this article seeks to present how theoretical and practical flows cross the two realities and how both shed light on such different daily lives.

The first part of the article presents analyses based on Brazilian production on education, policy, and municipal *Carioca* early childhood education. Subsequently, the Italian context is given based on theories and an analysis of the proposal of the Oplà di Vimercate Social Cooperative. We understand that this path will allow us to examine and understand how a pedagogy of childhood is established based on educational proposals and children as historical individuals with rights.

4- We recognize the importance of producing an article that addresses the contributions of the two theorists in greater detail. However, given the text's limitations, such an analysis is inappropriate here.

5- This scientific collaboration agreement was developed between the Universities of the State of Rio de Janeiro and Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca from 2023 to 2025.

Brazilian early childhood education and childhood pedagogy

Early childhood education in Brazil is constituted by, and still suffers, the consequences of government policies that generate tensions, setbacks, and advances. As Rosemberg (2003, p. 177) calls it, it would be the curse of Sisyphus because, according to the interests and needs that guide the choices of elected governments, progressive forces “push early childhood education policy to the top –i.e., quality democratic care –, and opposing forces [...] make it fall downhill.”

These educational advances and setbacks of political processes are influenced by multilateral organizations – even though they do not determine national policy – and have actions, coalitions, conflicts, and pressures from unions and political parties, representative social movements, universities, and civil society. Although they may seem to be in a more macro field and perhaps distant from the school environment, these instances and actions have implications for daycare centers and preschools, as they have an impact on the construction of common sense and a theoretical-practical pedagogical repertoire that circulates among teachers, agents, managers, and families.

Based on the Brazilian case, we understand that the political, socio-cultural, and theoretical-practical fields are intertwined, establishing an “identity in politics”, according to the concept of Mignolo (2008). Therefore, it is necessary to think about and design early childhood education schools by associating them rather than separating them. Furthermore,

[...] it is worth remembering that the end of the Brazilian dictatorship (1985) was followed by an intense movement of social mobilization to draft a new Constitution. In addition to traditional social actors, the so-called new social movements participated in this mobilization: the women’s movement and the “child pro-Constituent Assembly” movement. It is also worth remembering that these new social movements drafted a proposal for the Constitution, which was approved in 1988, recognizing EI (early childhood education) as an extension of the universal right to education for children aged 0 to 6 and a right of working men and women to have their young children cared for and educated in daycare centers and preschools (Rosemberg, 2003, p. 182-183).

For this reason, the struggles of the movements for public early childhood education as the first stage of basic education in Brazil are still significant today. Since this is recent history, researchers, activists, managers, and teachers are working to correct the mistakes made by past policies and seek to structure them based on the social, economic, and cultural parameters that constitute Brazilian society.

The Brazilian pedagogical proposal still needs to articulate “children’s experiences and knowledge with the knowledge that is part of the cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific and technological heritage” (Brasil, 2009, p. 12). Furthermore, it is understood that the child is a historical subject with rights who learns and develops from interactions and relationships established with different people in a space and time that equally encompasses care and education (Brasil, 2009).



Therefore, dealing with early childhood education in Brazil means having a situated perspective on children, their cultural and socioeconomic contexts, teacher training, and public policies. As Heloísa Marinho (Leite Filho, 2011) considered, observation, research, and debate in discussion groups of teachers configure a pedagogy based on knowledge about childhood and children, which is comprehensive due to social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, geographic location, and culture in such a large country. The National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 2009) were developed with this purpose: to reconcile and link the diverse and the specific, based on aesthetic, ethical, and political principles, with initial and ongoing teacher training being responsible for ensuring a democratic and quality institution.

We believe that this is the challenge for those who live south of the equator: to include the broad and the specific in ideas and practices, i.e., to have a “detachment” that guides the epistemic shift towards pluriversality (Mignolo, 2008). Therefore, in addition to observation, it is necessary to have conversations with children, i.e., listening to what they say about their perceptions and understandings of the world and what affects them. As Mignolo (2008) ponders, it is necessary to learn to unlearn, in the sense that children are those who can tell us about their living conditions, how they are learning, and other possibilities of dealing with life.

For some, it may seem strange that adults can learn from children, and we do not want to disqualify teachers’ knowledge and pedagogical practices in early childhood education schools with this idea. We understand that, through acquired and accumulated knowledge, the teachers interpret and evaluate children’s groups and translate knowledge of arts, culture, science, and technology into proposals. This process occurs in games, based on interactions between children and between them and adults through play and the languages permeating this generation (Barbosa, 2010). Therefore, observing and listening to children is of paramount importance, taking into account their socio-cultural contexts. This is what underpins Brazilian childhood pedagogy, which takes them

[...] as human beings endowed with social action, bearers of history, capable of multiple relationships, and producers of their own cultural forms constructed with their peers despite being profoundly affected by the cultures and societies of which they are a part (Barbosa, 2010, p. 1).

Educational action that considers children, their childhoods, and their contexts is a right, especially for those who are still invisible, such as riverside children, riparian children, Black children, homeless children, landless children, children from *favelas*, Indigenous children, feminine, and poor children, to name a few of those who we daily perpetrate, adults, in an attempt at control and colonialism (López, 2008). Given all this, we still ask ourselves: Why are we able to think of an abstract and colonized childhood but not as constellations? Differences should guide our life scripts because what becomes global is not the same as being universal (Krenak, 2019; Mignolo, 2008).

In this sense, colonialism must be a central theme to be understood and combated in the education process when children and childhood are seen as abstract images, as something that they are not yet, subjugated, imperfect, without singularities, considered

for their faults and, at the same time, saviors of a future envisioned by adults, which will never be reached. The future is a gamble because, firstly, when they get there, they will no longer be children, and secondly, their ways of understanding the world come from the culture in which they participate and are not slavishly reproduced. In social interactions and relationships, children accept, ensure, and rework fractions of culture, which form the social being and their personalities (Fernandes, 2004). Therefore, a diverse educational apparatus guarantees varied experiences and actions that each child will signify in the collectives in which they participate.

In the Brazilian context, schools and teacher training ensure theories and practices produced in human sciences, with pedagogy being a central point for understanding and instituting educational processes (Scheibe, 2010). Therefore, in early childhood education, knowledge, experiments, and techniques are used according to the children and the contexts in which they are inserted – which, as already pointed out, is equally broad, complex, and unequal. Thus, we can think of a dialectical relationship between theory and practice that is not of the order of epistemic obedience since it starts from an exteriority, from who one is and where one is, and encompasses the social, historical, and subjective problems of America, which construct an “identity in politics” based on conceptions and the organization of political actions based on our identities, which are Afro-indigenous (Mignolo, 2008).

Therefore, we persist with the thesis that children, their rights, and early childhood education schools need to be decolonized, thought of from the time of childhood, which does not subjugate desire and lack, which asserts itself in poetry, in another creation and in the experience that is not progress, linear development or just preparation for life, but that is the art of living together (López, 2008). A decolonizing childhood pedagogy is a pedagogy that does not intend to be abstract, that does not start from a scientific atmosphere with a single color, aesthetics, or religion, and with “natural” attributes, such as playing, for example – for what kind of child and childhood would these be? (Abramowicz, 2020).

Thinking politically about the contexts of *Carioca* early childhood education

It is legally established that the curricula of Brazilian municipal early childhood education schools must be based on the principles indicated in national documents. Among them, we mention the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, defined in 1999 and revised in 2009 (Brazil, 1999; 2009), which are based on the following guiding principles:

Ethical: autonomy, responsibility, solidarity, respect for the common good, the environment, and different cultures, identities, and singularities.

Political: citizenship rights, critical thinking exercises, and respect for the democratic order.

Aesthetic: sensitivity, creativity, playfulness, and freedom of expression in different artistic and cultural manifestations (Brasil, 2009, p. 16).



The city of Rio de Janeiro is guided by these principles to structure the *Carioca* Early Childhood Education Curriculum, with its first draft approved in 2010 and subsequently revised in 2020 (Rio de Janeiro, 2010; 2020). The *Carioca* project organizes early childhood education in daycare centers and Child Development Centers (EDI), serving children from 3 months to 5 years of age. The *Carioca* education policy deals with extreme socioeconomic inequality – which affects its four geographic zones, North, West, South, and Center – with precarious objective and subjective conditions for teaching work and the existence of a large number of children per class. The curse of Sisyphus is still present due to a historical legacy of cheapening services for poor children and precarious teaching (Rosemberg, 2003; Nunes; Corsino, 2020).

Even in this challenging scenario, autonomy, anti-racist education, decolonizing pedagogy, and participation are some of the provisions present in the pedagogical proposals of early childhood education schools and a path taken collectively in constructing a pedagogy of *Carioca* childhood. In this trajectory, concepts and knowledge of childhood, children, education, politics, and culture are based on theoretical frameworks articulated with practice (Corsino, 2020).

Two *Carioca* EDIs are mentioned to understand this issue. The first, the Professora Maria Cecília Ferreira EDI, affectionately called CECI EDI, is located in the Realengo neighborhood (Rossato; Vianna; Medeiros, 2022), and the second, the Pedra da Panela EDI (fictitious name to preserve the school's identity), is located in Jacarepaguá (Menezes, 2023). Both are located in the vast North Zone of the city and serve families from peripheral communities but are separated by approximately 20 kilometers. They are institutions committed to free, high-quality, secular public education for all, with significant educational proposals that cause transformations when they overcome the conditions in which they find themselves and “are found to pronounce the world” (Freire, 1987, p. 166). This is what is manifest in the proposals of the two EDIs: a pedagogy of childhood characterized by decolonizing actions and a policy of identity, according to Mignolo's concept, since they seek to know the history of children “and, from them, think, construct and/or confuse, ‘together and mixed’ in their plurality, the multiple ways and conceptions of living childhood” (Rossato; Vianna; Medeiros, 2022, p. 17). The CECI EDI takes the ethnic-racial issue as one of the pillars of its pedagogical proposal, constantly seeking to “disarm” racism (Freire; Alves, 2022, p. 92) and does so through actions and studies with children from the moment they arrive at school with their families, regardless of their age. In turn, the Pedra da Panela EDI, based on democratic management, takes on a dialogical action as part of its pedagogical proposal (Menezes, 2023), which can be seen in the following situations.

The first case was extracted from the article published by Freire and Alves (2022). As teachers at the school, the children, between 1 and 2 years old, made them realize how they routinely used the beanbags in a drumming ritual, an action repeated by the children several times a day with laughter and synchronization. Thus, Freire and Alves delved into Afro-Brazilian culture to learn more about *batuques*, *batucadas*, and drums. In addition to instruments and information about the Black movement, the teachers provided other

materials so the children could drum until they reached Maculelê, an Afro-indigenous dance from the Recôncavo Baiano.

The second example is addressed in Menezes's research (2023), which aims to understand the aesthetic, ethical, and political forms of the relationships between children and adults at the Pedra da Panela EDI. In her analyses, Menezes assesses that, in the educational space, children and adults are constantly challenged to try out different roles and positions. When observing the snack time and the refusal of one of the children to eat, the teacher, with sensitivity and respect for her interlocutor, switches roles, gives the spoon to the child, and asks for food. The child finds the situation funny, feeds her, and then accepts being served by the adult.

Both cases involve political, ethical, and aesthetic aspects present in the *Carioca culture*, understanding that

[...] a Pedagogy of Childhood understands that any and all educational actions require considering children and the socio-cultural contexts that define their childhood. [...] It affirms childhood as a generational, social, historical, and geographically constructed category, heterogeneous, crossed by variables of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity (Barbosa, 2010, p. 1).

In the first example, children produce, disseminate, and rework fragments of the ethnic-racial culture so present in the city's daily life. *Batuque* is present in Afro-indigenous religions, music, language, and the arts; it is no wonder that the children brought it into school, and together with the teachers, they spoke and sought to understand the beauty, creativity, freedom, and respect in this cultural manifestation. By presenting, revering, and respecting Brazilian Afro-indigenous culture, children and teachers address ethnical-racial subjects and form their identities in politics.

The second example exposes, above all, the ethical and political principles by presenting a time and space of care, respect, reciprocity, and delicacy in the relationship shared between generations. "The time of delicacy is also a time of listening, or rather, of being witnesses to experiences that, if not heard, may remain forever silenced" (Gusmão; Souza, 2008, p. 30).

Although brief, these situations affirm childhood pedagogies in *Carioca* early childhood education schools and reinforce that the collective protects us from the

[...] arrogance of single-minded thinking, the crystallization of partial and incomplete perspectives, and the production of a story in which the other does not recognize himself. [...] We know that teaching work with children requires constant attention and is made up of emergencies and demands that are not always possible to resolve given the conditions in which education gains its institutional materiality. However, in each tiny gesture of everyday life, an imperceptible embroidery is woven with the diversity and adversities of the lines that make up the stories of the people who constitute Early Childhood Education (Aquino; Ribes, 2022, pp. 9-10).

Italian early childhood education and autonomy

The educational system and approaches to education for children up to 6 years of age are not uniform and are complex in Italy. It is a system that has only integrated daycare and preschool since 2017 (Correia, 2024; Itália, 2017). Thus, reflecting on Italian early childhood education's meanings and significance is neither trivial nor obvious. This reflection involves observing the world, the present, and, immediately, our daily lives in a questioning and critical way. Taking an interest in children and the way they understand their existence and growth, paying attention to the formal and informal ways in which they develop their educational experiences, requires adults to make a great effort not to place themselves at the center and be inflexible, and therefore requires a changeable stance.

Therefore, when reflecting on Italian early childhood education, we need to have a perspective situated in the present but simultaneously projected toward the future. It means reconciling and linking diverse and coexisting perspectives: early childhood education constantly challenges openness and willingness to welcome new things and changes. In this sense, childhood brings to the adult world a “disturber of the established order” (Montessori, 2004, p. 271). It involves us in relationships rooted in the present, but at the same time focused on the future, leading us to imagine and make possible the new, which will be without us.

Children live and are of the present, but at the same time, they anticipate the world that will be, not a conservative repetition of what we already have, the here and now. Early childhood education is, therefore, by its nature, a challenge and a critical experience for the adult world: it deals with the dual capacity to welcome and intervene here and, at the same time, to know how to leave future possibilities open. Considering early childhood education in these terms, we still need to understand how it is permeated by constant actions and by its own tensions, which manifest themselves as a line of flight, sometimes opposing and contrasting, taken from pedagogical thought – more specifically in European development – to fix it in dichotomous polarities. Some examples include autonomy-dependence, individual-group, and cognitive-emotion.

Early childhood education is permeated by these issues, which we have reflected on and taken on important forms in the educational experience of the 20th century. In this sense, Maria Montessori, Elinor Goldschmied, and Emmi Pikler are particularly considered. They specifically made childhood a privileged core of their ideas. These interpretations of early childhood education, placed within the broad and varied scope of the universe of active education, initially highlighted the need for the emancipation of childhood. In the early years of the last century, attention was focused on the problems of childhood, understood as a specific phase of life, distinct from that of adulthood, to which adequate and deep attention must be given, as Montessori's words point out when she calls for the urgency of “seeing the child”:

The adult has not understood the child or the adolescent and is therefore in continual strife with him. The remedy is not that the adult should learn something intellectually, or complete

a deficient culture. He must find a different starting-point. The adult must find in himself the -hitherto unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child (Montessori, 2004, p. 14).

However, what does it mean to “see the child”? In the interstice of active education experiences, this stimulus translates into the need to choose the polarity to which we refer, particularly the opposition between dependence and autonomy. In this way, balances are redefined for the benefit of childhood, and obstacles and limitations to the assertion of children’s freedom from an early age are removed, freedom that, above all, takes the emancipatory form of adult autonomy and independence. Based on Montessori’s thought, this stimulus is very clear when she says that “one cannot be free without being independent⁶” (Montessori, 1999, p. 60).

Making them independent and autonomous means putting into action educational practices aimed, in the first instance, at favoring and respecting children’s spontaneous movements and actions. Throughout these texts, a plurality of educational experiences aimed at childhood matured in the last century. In Piklerian pedagogy, the centrality of the value of motor development as the achievement of spontaneous movements is assessed, or the idealization, by Elinor Goldschmied (1996), of the “treasure basket” and the “heuristic play” as concrete situations in which the centrality of actions and initiatives are attributed to children while the adult has the role of accompanying and supporting them respectfully, strictly oriented toward non-intervention.

Goldschmied (1996), when developing his “treasure basket” proposal, provides explicit instructions in this regard, assigning the adult the task of “not interfering, but of being calm and attentive”. Likewise, during the “heuristic play”, the teacher plays the role of facilitator but must remain “sitting calmly in her chair, observing attentively. [...] The teacher does not encourage, give suggestions, praise, or stimulate the children to use materials⁷” (p. 112).

As Montessori (2004) indicates, “seeing the child” implies a respectful way of taking a distance – within a possible space –, observing and understanding the experiences children can develop spontaneously and autonomously, based on initiatives not conditioned from outside. This could be defined as self-determination, which opens up the possibility of independence from adults.

The theme of autonomy-dependence is central to these experiences and defines the lines of development of pedagogical thought, specifically systematized for childhood, from which the idea that education can develop functions of liberation and emancipation arises. The idea is that education has the function of favoring the progressive overcoming or reduction of the state of dependence on adults to guarantee children conditions to be able to experience and mature spaces of independence and autonomy in which they can do, try, and experiment without interference and constraints from adults. This principle stands out in Lóczy’s experience.

6- “Non si può essere liberi se non si è indipendenti” (free translation).

7- “seduta tranquillamente sulla sedia, osservando attentamente. (...) L’educatrice non incoraggia, non dà suggerimenti, non loda né esorta i bambini ad un certo uso del materiale” (free translation).

In Pikler's pedagogy, developed in the post-war period at the Lóczy Institute in Budapest, children's freedom is the foundation of the educational method. It is expressed above all in absolute respect for freedom of movement:

Correct development is possible only if the child is free to choose in which position they will move and play, without imposed rules or interventions to correct postures assumed spontaneously or other limitations on their desire to act⁸ (Pikler, 1996, p. 129).

Children's spontaneity and motor resourcefulness require non-interventionist behavior on the part of the adult:

Not only do the adults avoid helping the child in concrete terms, but they also do not encourage the child to assume certain positions or to practice certain movements. [...] With this behavior, we prevent the child from finding themselves in positions or moving in such a way that they need to be helped or guided by the adult: the direct and modifying effect of the adult on motor development is thus eliminated⁹. (Pikler, 1996, p. 42).

The condition of dependence is predominantly interpreted with a negative and coercive meaning, from which children must free themselves to emancipate themselves and gradually conquer ever broader spheres of autonomy and independence from adults. Growth is represented as an evolutionary line that progressively separates from dependence until the conquest of autonomy. Thanks to this perspective, historically situated in the course of the 20th century, a period permeated by diffuse social emancipatory pressures and affirmations of rights, it was possible to gain critical educational experiences aimed at children, which, based on the principle of respect for children as social, active beings with rights, inspire many educational realities to this day.

Autonomy-dependence-interdependence

In line with these lines of interpretation, early childhood education, as considered here, also encompasses other areas of thought based on the following assumption:

a) The educational contexts that children receive in their early years are places of significant plural, social, cultural, and relational density, in which the relationships between the adult world and the world of childhood are altered when the group of children becomes the majority. We can think of early childhood education schools as specific organizations, not comparable to others, suitable for childhood, with *daycare and preschool being the majority groups*;

b) Early childhood education, whether in the theoretical field or practical knowledge, does not deal with singularity but with the plurality of small, medium, and large groups of

8- "Lo sviluppo corretto è possibile solamente se il bambino è libero di scegliere in quali posizioni muoversi e giocare, senza regole imposte, né interventi finalizzati alla correzione di posture assunte spontaneamente, né altre limitazioni al suo desiderio di agire" (free translation).

9- "Non soltanto l'adulto evita di aiutare concretamente il bambino, ma nemmeno lo incoraggia ad assumere certe posizioni o ad esercitarsi in alcuni movimenti. [...] Con questo comportamento evitiamo che il bambino si trovi in posizioni o si sposti in modo tale da dover essere aiutato o diretto dall'adulto: l'effetto diretto e modificatore dell'adulto sullo sviluppo motorio viene in questo modo eliminato" (free translation).

children who, in the socio-relational relationship of everyday life, face different moments of experience: *daycare and preschool are childhood communities*;

c) Everyday life, its densities, rituals, and socio-cultural recurrences offer a plot, i.e., a structure of meanings to the educational experiences of the children's community in a line more or less connected to the social world of which educational services are a part: *in daycare and preschool, everyday life is educational*.

These three thematic cores encourage early childhood education to focus on issues that invest in the need to operate a critical vision of education and its relations between the adult world and that of childhood, calling for a more radical position than that developed in the last century, which called adults to "see childhood". More than seeing childhood, perhaps today, the problems and themes that question education are, in a broader and more political interpretation, the dialectical dynamics between social groups. These are spaces of reciprocal dependence and interconnections between the world of childhood and that of adults, but, from a more complex perspective, between us and other living beings (animals or not), the planet, and the technological dimensions, which, in an increasingly persuasive way, become part of our lives.

Given the global complexity of the phenomena we are experiencing, which expose us to serious crises linked on a worldwide scale (such as the interconnections between pandemic, ecological, economic, and political crises), seeing childhood and promoting children's autonomy seems a fragile and out of order perspective compared to these critical issues that move our time. In fact, education needs to make a radical push to overcome binary and opposing views and begin to adopt positions such as rhizomatic – as defined by Deleuze and Guatarri (2017). The image of the rhizome, i.e., of plants that have stems and roots growing not along a vertical axis but in horizontal and strongly branched lines, effectively restores the multidirectional, entangled and intertwined, confused and chaotic nature of the phenomena of life and of which we are a part. We are also in this environment when we want to study them, investigate them, and understand them to mark certain directions in a planning effort.

If, in a rhizomatic scenario, one wanted to interpret the Montessori recommendation of "seeing the child", one would feel the need to go beyond the adult/child dynamic, and a multiplicity of plans and lines of coexisting and simultaneous directions, made of reciprocity, would take shape. It would no longer be possible to consider an adult who "sees the child" but who sees them and at the same time is seen, and the way they are seen interacts with their way of seeing in a dense web of reciprocal connections. The adult/child relationship must be understood from another dependence-autonomy dynamic to bring out the processes and plans of interdependence and reciprocity that permeate it. Autonomy-dependence-interdependence could be reciprocal, non-linear, mutually linked movements. Therefore, it would not be a question of promoting early childhood education along a line from dependence to autonomy but of taking part, as adults, in the processes of reciprocity with children to experience the multiple possibilities of the dynamics of autonomy-dependence-interdependence.

Thinking about and practicing early childhood education from a rhizomatic perspective leads to valuing the intertwining and interconnection of multiple dimensions

(social, cultural, and relational) that are linked at various levels (individual, group, and social) and along different lines (affective, cognitive, and social), making research impractical and senseless based on a prevailing tension, centered on a single emerging element. Paying attention to the collective dimensions of everyday life, considering that children are the majority group in early childhood education, helps teachers and assistants shift their attention from individual processes to broader procedural flows to which everyone is integral. This effort allows for dynamic observations and self-observations, moving from the micro to the macro context and *vice-versa*, embracing the constant movement and change throughout educational experiences. Therefore, it is not a question of preferring a singular-centered view to a view oriented toward the group and collective dynamics but of actively engaging in dialogue between more points of observation, with the knowledge that the processes in early childhood education, like those of all human events, are not conducted from a single objective, valid and neutral point of view, but consider and include everyone as inevitably involved parties.

If, at the end of the 20th century, systematic philosophies and epistemologies of complexity had extinguished the myth of objectivity and the supposed existence of specific, objective, and universal knowledge, now, with the contributions of post-structuralist and post-humanist thought, we can imagine relationships with situated, partial and provisional knowledge to reflect that “knowledge is rhizomatic, i.e., it is multiple and advances in all directions, creates connections and deviations, and also possible fractures. There is no center, but nodes and branches¹⁰” (Benozzo; Priola, 2022, p. 74).

This shows how teachers and assistants position themselves within the daily life of schools for children, with a research approach that is open and available to encourage lines of interest and incentives for aspiration of initiatives expressed by groups of children when they are in action at different times and in different situations of everyday life.

Interdependence

The theme of autonomy-dependence-interdependence as a unitary and dynamic process manifests itself with new nuances when moving into the field in the concrete implementation of educational processes. For the description of some educational situations, reference is made to the nursery school of the Oplà Cooperative¹¹, which has proposed an education open to research and innovation for years. In particular, it considers a repertoire of observation and documentation in which we analyze two situations observed in the external space in its garden (Infantino, 2022).

In the first situation, the school team organized a specific educational proposal in its external area, designing the space as a place for the development of individual and collective initiatives and research by children, using the lawn, trees, and earth as space, i.e., without marking them with actions of “domestication” or artificial molding and with

10- “[...] la conoscenza è rizomatica, ossia è molteplice e avanza in tutte le direzioni, essa crea connessioni e deviazioni, anche possibili fratture. Non possiede un perno ma nodi e diramazioni” (free translation).

11- The nursery school is one of the services offered by the Oplà di Vimercate Social Cooperative, located in the municipality of Monza-Brianza, in the northeast area of Milan.

excessive mediation by adults. At the same time, an educational line was chosen that, distancing itself from a rigid model of non-intervention, could define the active presence and participation of the educational team in the various experiences, which, based on a spontaneous initiative and promoted by teachers and assistants, involved the children individually or collectively.

This kindergarten garden has no traditional toys like swings, slides, seesaws, and tricycles. Therefore, the proposal is, on the one hand, to allow a broad possibility of heuristic dialogue between children and the plurality of natural elements – stones, mud, earth, insects, leaves, branches, uneven surfaces, pieces of tree trunks, for example – and, on the other hand, to enable the exploration of open spaces in which their thinking bodies experience multiple movements – running, jumping, rolling, finding balance, going up, climbing, and many others. In this scenario, considering that early childhood education is a context of collectivity in an educational routine, there are multiple situations in which children share their findings, experiments, games, and projects of various types in a group, learning about relationships of dependence-autonomy-interdependence with their peers and with the adults at school, as can be seen in the following situation¹².

First situation: two three-year-old children, one next to the other, have the palms of their hands resting on the surface of a tree trunk, cut a few days ago and left in the garden. The piece of log is enormous and heavy, but the two children are trying to move it and make it roll. This is a considerable effort, even if they join forces. Imagine what it would be like for a child alone! They need to join forces. Being in contact with an object of such dimensions and weight makes children deal with their own limits and with the strength they can produce when they push and help each other.

Second situation: three 5-year-old children are in the garden. They plan to have lunch together and build a table. To do this, they select a series of useful materials from the garden: a flat piece of wood and some pieces of logs of various sizes. Once they have found them, to carry out the joint project, it is necessary to deal with a series of problems, coordinating various interventions with precision and attention, such as stacking the pieces of log so that they are at the same height and balanced to form the legs of the table; Place a flat piece of wood by fitting it into the right spots on these “legs” of the table, being careful not to trap their fingers, and checking that the structure is well positioned horizontally, without unevenness or inclinations.

In these two sequences, we can see that there are many interconnected levels, such as (a) spontaneous initiative, which leads children to plan a common plan and share it to find a collaborative agreement among them; (b) conjecturing a plan that becomes possible thanks to group sharing and not from an individual perspective; (c) dealing with one’s own limits and experiencing dependence on others with whom it is necessary to build a level of agreement and collaboration, on which the success of the project depends; and (d) realizing that others also need and ask for help, because no one can do it alone.

It is an educational choice, not a random result, to present children with situations and materials that are heavy, large, difficult to transport, inaccessible, difficult to handle,

12- Some situations are documented with images. See: Infantino (2022, p. 113, p. 134).



difficult to use individually, and that involve situations in which, reciprocally, one depends on the other. One needs the help of the other. Therefore, children are led to participate in a relationship of common and reciprocal dependence, good and favorable dependence, which is typical of the human condition. Along with accessible materials, instruments, objects, and proposals that are also “tailored to the child”, as learned in Montessori pedagogy, the early childhood education school aims to offer challenging materials and situations that are not managed or handled individually. This allows the child to experience individual limits and the value of interdependence.

During the day at the preschool, children have the opportunity to experience a plurality, variety, and multiplicity of situations that allow them to experience the articulated dimensions of the profoundly interconnected relationships of autonomy-dependence-interdependence, as can be seen in the flow of situations in which children and adults at the school are involved. Therefore, the processes of autonomy, as suggested by the perspective oriented in the post-humanist and post-structuralist sense, are a dimension closely interconnected with the dynamics of dependence and interdependence at a time when experience is never monochromatic, nor is it the result of the protagonism of a single, solitary, and self-sufficient individual. On the contrary, if one looks critically at the present, the need to connect and recognize the bonds and interdependencies that unite people to others, the planet, and an increasingly technologically modified environment becomes increasingly evident. While the current times require us to think about educational practices that embrace and value not so much autonomy in isolation, the processes of autonomy-dependence-reciprocity in their continuity allow children to learn to affirmatively live the relationships of dependence and interdependence as constitutive and essential dimensions of our human condition. If we agree that the human being is not the center of the universe, that he does not occupy a position of superiority and self-sufficiency, then early childhood education can make an essential contribution to a broad renewal that, as Rosi Braidotti says, addresses the need

[...] to design new social, ethical and discursive models of subject formation to face the profound changes that we are going to experience. This implies that we must learn to think about ourselves differently. The post-human condition is, therefore, an opportunity to encourage research into models of thought, knowledge, and self-representation as alternatives to the dominant ones. The post-human condition urgently calls us to critically and creatively rethink who and what we are becoming in this process of metamorphosis¹³ (Braidotti, 2014, p. 16).

Conclusion

As a way of concluding this article, it was not our intention to qualitatively compare what is done here and what is done there, but to present how the Brazilian and Italian scenarios show us that it is in the specific micro-worlds of early childhood education

13- “progettare nuovi schemi sociali, etici e discorsivi della formazione del soggetto per affrontare i profondi cambiamenti cui andiamo incontro. Questo implica che abbiamo bisogno di imparare a pensare in modo diverso a noi stessi. La condizione postumana è allora un’opportunità per incentivare la ricerca di schemi di pensiero, di sapere e di autorappresentazione alternativi a quelli dominanti. La condizione postumana ci chiama urgentemente a ripensare, in modo critico e creativo, chi e cosa stiamo diventando in questo processo di metamorfosi” (free translation).

schools, that we find the differences and characteristics of childhood pedagogies, which need to address decolonization as well as value the collective. The Milanese context reveals how children still disturb the balance established in the adult world (Montessori, 2004), especially in their social relationships, which involve the processes of autonomy-dependence-reciprocity. In turn, in the *Carioca* context, they call for an identity in politics, detached and oriented toward an epistemic shift and training for life, as Heloisa Marinho pondered (Leite Filho, 2011; Mignolo, 2008).

Since our goal was to propose a theoretical-practical reflection on educational contexts, we sought to reveal that the work of early childhood education is based on concepts and practices that consider the child in the here and now, objectively and subjectively, which establish socio-cultural relationships of dependence and interdependence. This is important to the extent that school education has always been thought of as the production of the human being that will be. Changing this perspective is relevant as it disseminates the idea that early childhood education is a space and time of deep respect, commitment, and care. Teachers and children demonstrated this in the elucidation of some situations that occurred in the schools presented here. These are feelings and actions that circumscribe life in society and are fundamental in the processes of learning, knowing, and developing.

Therefore, we support Gusmão and Souza (2008), for whom early childhood education is necessary to think of as a time of delicacy, i.e., a time to listen to and observe others, seek to understand their actions and words and witness and prioritize experiences that are significant for childhood. We must collectively make this knowledge and practice emerge since it is the art of living together (López, 2008), in which learning, caring, and developing are strictly interdependent actions.

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