**DOSSIER**

*Childhood(s), social movements and the city: curriculum(s) and teacher training*

# Research on childhood, children, and the city in education: research trends and challenges

## Pesquisas sobre infâncias, crianças e cidade na Educação: tendências e desafios investigativos

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, the theme of childhoods, children and the city have been the focus of research, debates, and social movements, promoting a social and academic agenda that defends recognizing children as subjects and their right to cities. In this context, understanding how this theme has become dynamic in the educational field, from the elaboration of research problems to the production of data for further analysis becomes relevant to strengthening this field of investigation, and for identifying possible weaknesses and gaps in the investigative panorama. Therefore, the objective of this study is to present the results of a meta-research carried out based on the analysis of ten studies at the doctoral level in the field of education which focused on the theme of childhoods/children and the city, indicating trends and challenges that are woven, especially in terms of their objectives (problematics) and their epistemic-methodological approaches.

*Keywords:* Childhood. City. Education. Researches. Metasearch.

### RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, a temática infâncias, crianças e cidade vem sendo foco de pesquisas, debates e movimentos sociais, fomentando uma agenda social e acadêmica na defesa do reconhecimento dos sujeitos infantis e seu direito às cidades. Nesse contexto, compreender como esse tema vem sendo dinamizado na Educação, desde a elaboração dos problemas de pesquisa à produção de dados para posterior análise e seus resultados, torna-se relevante para o fortalecimento desse campo de investigação, bem como para a identificação de possíveis fragilidades e lacunas no panorama investigativo. Assim sendo, este trabalho tem como objetivo apresentar os resultados de uma metapesquisa realizada a partir da análise de dez pesquisas desenvolvidas na área da Educação, em nível de doutorado, que se debruçaram sobre a temática infâncias/crianças e cidade, indicando tendências e desafios que se tecem, especialmente, quanto a seus objetivos (problemáticas) e a seus enfoques epistemetodológicos.

*Palavras-chave:* Infância. Cidade. Educação. Pesquisas. Metapesquisa.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between childhoods, children and the city has increasingly become the focus of research, debates, and social movements, fostering a social and academic agenda that defends recognizing children as subjects and their right to cities. This is because important paradigm shifts and the regulation of different legislations over history have provided new possibilities for investigative objects and approaches to the theme. To these changes we can attribute the emergence of the notion of the right to the city, which defends that urban spaces be inclusive and democratic, and understands the city as a non-formal educational space. The changes can also be attributed to breaks with universal ideas about children and childhood and a shift towards understanding childhoods in the plural and children as producers of culture, as subjects of rights who are capable of expressing interests and opinions. The child as a subject of rights came to be defined in 1989 as a universal right of children, expressed particularly through the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly. A total of 196 countries ratified the instrument into law; in Brazil, the document was ratified through Law No. 8.069 in July 1990. It is in this context that the discussion on childhood, children and the city has recently emerged.

To cite a few examples that show the undisputed relevance of the topic and the effervescence of research in the field, we highlight recent works published in Brazil[1], which, as a whole combine with an already significant body of research by researchers interested in highlighting and giving depth and detail to practices for constructing children's citizenship, with the participation of children. (Carvalho; Bizzoto, 2022; Gobbi *et al*., 2022; Gobbi; Tavares, 2021; Gobbi; Anjos; Leite, 2021; Gobbi; Anjos, 2020; Loeb; Lima, 2021; Lopes, 2021; Müller; Nunes, 2014).

In this context, understanding how this topic has been developed in education, from the development of research problems to the production of data for subsequent analysis, is important for strengthening this field of research, and for identifying possible weaknesses and gaps in the research landscape. As such, the aim of this paper[2] is to present the results of a meta-research based on the analysis of ten studies in the field of education, at the doctoral level, which focused on the theme of children and the city, and that indicate trends and challenges that are being faced, especially with regard to their objectives (problematics) and their epistemic-methodological approaches.

This text is organized into four central discussions. The first explains the paths of investigation of meta-research in the construction of a mapping of academic studies on the subject at hand, especially those in the field of education, and how the sample submitted to the meta-research procedures was defined. In the second section we analyze the research objectives, and examine some trends and gaps in the relationships that have structured the problematics of research in the field. In the third section we provide an epistemic-methodological overview of the research analyzed, emphasizing how it has been constructed not only theoretically and methodologically, but

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[1] It is worth noting that, although there is a vast production on the subject abroad, such as Aitken (2014); Tonucci (2015); Sarmento (2018), among others, we have chosen in this study to cite Brazilian references, to highlight how much the subject has been gaining centrality in the Brazilian context.

also in the ways in which the epistemological contributions assumed are related to the paths taken in the methodological constructions, in a comprehensive conception (i.e. one that implies methods and methodology). In the last section we debate a specific point, how the discussion about the place of schools, curriculums, and teacher education emerges in these studies, to consider the possible contributions of research into childhoods, children and the city in relation to a topic of unequivocal relevance to education.

## Paths of investigation of the meta-research

As mentioned, this study seeks to include the field of childhood among meta-research studies, such as those being developed by Mainardes (2021), Morais and Schneider (2021), Tonieto and Fávero (2021), Jacomini and Silva (2021), Tello and Mainardes (2015) in the field of educational policies.

In relation to meta-research, Mainardes (2021, p. 20, emphasis added) defines it as "*research about research* or, moreover, research that seeks to explain the *research process* on a topic or in a specific area or field". By stating this, we are immediately announcing that this is a study that goes beyond a literature review or a review study, but, since it is based on certain procedures, it takes on unique characteristics, especially insofar as it is developed *upon* and *from* the field of childhood studies (which also has its own particularities). As such, it is a study of an existing bibliography, but it aims to analyze (and therefore more than merely summarize) certain aspects of research practices that have been operationalized in the field and thus identify trends and strengths, but also challenges and obstacles to be faced by those who consider the relationship between childhoods and cities as an investigative theme.

Following the meta-research model proposed by Mainardes (2017, 2018, 2021), the methodological procedures developed in this work were organized in three stages: a documentary survey, systematization, and analysis.

In the first stage, we mapped theses and dissertations on the subject of childhood and the city. We chose to search for works available on the Banco de Teses e Dissertações da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior [Database of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] (Capes). To search for papers on this platform we used exact descriptors and combined descriptors and a number of filters.

When using the exact descriptors "infância/criança na cidade" ("childhood/children in the city"], "infância e cidade" [childhood and city], we filtered only for the field of knowledge (in this case, education) and found eight dissertations and three theses.

In addition, the search was also carried out using combined descriptors – such as "infância/criança" *and* "cidade" [childhood/children *and* city] , "infância" *or* "criança" *and* "espaços públicos" ["childhood" or "child" and "public spaces"] – and, here, using the following filters: type, fields of knowledge, area of concentration and name of the [graduate] program (education). In the search with combined descriptors, we used a temporal filter, delimiting the period of the last 10 years (2012 to 2022). We found nine dissertations and 12 theses.

As for the choice of descriptors, our aim was not to determine in advance what consists of and what does (or does not) directly concern the relationship between childhood/children and the *city*, among so many possibilities and modulations. Proceeding in this way would imply choosing *n* other descriptors which, in turn, would lead us to *n* other universes which, as researchers, we believe also make up, in one way or another, the universe of research on childhood/children and the city. That is, our choice was to operate precisely and more emphatically with the descriptor "city" (considering the intersections and filters) with the intention of locating studies that specifically declare themselves to be in this field.

Once the search was complete, and adding up the findings obtained using the exact and combined descriptors, 32 studies were found. Of these, six were repeated in the results - leaving a total of 26 studies (12 theses and 14 dissertations).

Following the work of Morais and Schneider (2021) and Tonieto and Fávero (2021), also linked to meta-research studies, we chose to analyze only the doctoral theses. Like these researchers, we believe that doctoral theses can offer greater contributions in terms of the objectives of meta-research, because of the greater time invested in carrying out the research (and therefore the intensification and deepening made possible) in a doctoral program than in a master's program, and because doctoral courses are references in research production in Brazil.

The next step in the construction of the sample was to read the abstracts of the studies and we decided, in this stage, to work with studies that included the participation of children in their theoretical-methodological construction. This criterion, which indicates an important fact, led to the exclusion of only two theses[3]. In other words, it is possible to observe that, to a large extent, in the field research, talking about the city and childhood involves a direct dialog with children. The sample therefore comprised ten studies.

Following the definition of the sample, and as the second stage of our work, we systematically read the theses to identify the structure and broader design of each study. While conducting the readings we organized the information from the studies into spreadsheets - as materials that establish a database, considering some essential elements for meta-research (from the most basic, such as the title, author, advisor, and institution, to those involving the systematization and organization of the objectives, hypothesis/justification; research questions; theoretical and epistemological perspective; method; methodology; and analysis).

The third stage of this work consisted of reading and analyzing the texts selected for the sample, which will be presented in the following sections.

## A brief presentation of the theses analyzed: what drives research that involve childhoods, children, and cities?

Gobbi (2018, p. 24) argues that "childhood and the city have been presented as themes whose relationship is quite fruitful and increasingly necessary to compose social studies of childhood". So,

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[3] One of the theses was dedicated to researching the intersectorality of public policies aimed at children based on a theoretical study (Almeida, 2010) and another looked at the place of children in the polis based on a theoretical study considering Socratic references (Serute, 2017).

we ask: how have researchers in the field of education been investigating the subject of childhood and the city? What research issues mobilize these studies? Considering these questions, in this section we discuss three important aspects that we have analyzed. Two of these aspects are important stages in the development of the studies: I) research problems; II) research objectives. The third aspect concerns the presence or absence of different markers, such as class, gender, and ethnicity-race.

It is possible to say that one of the main hallmarks of the objectives of the research analyzed, because of the nature of the subject, is the fact that they are based on an understanding of and about childhood that goes beyond institutionalized spaces that, for a long time, served as the preponderant spaces for approaching and dealing with childhood and where choices about it are made. Although an institutional bias (institutionalized and institutionalizing) is present to a greater or lesser degree in the definition of research problems, children's experiences *in* the city in a situation of mobility (or in relation to it), children's direct perspective *about* the city and, equally, analyses of the use of city spaces and the construction of spatialities by children are highlighted. More precisely we found doctoral theses that sought to investigate in a variety of multiple ways: the experiences involving alterity of walking with children and the dialogues that emerge on these walks that express the children's forms of belonging and participation (Muniz, 2018); the daily practices of mobility, the use of public spaces and the socio-spatial characteristics of the city, as experienced by children (Farias, 2016); aspects present in the region where the children live (such as: socioeconomic and cultural conditions and the dialogues woven between children's cultures and local traditions) and how these influence their urban experience (Souza, 2017); the times and spaces most used and interactions established in the landscapes of the city from the children's point of view (Evangelista, 2020); how gender permeates children's relation to the social construction of the city (Poubel, 2021); children's contributions and understanding of the social, institutional and individual relationships that are constituted in and through the city (Müller, 2007); the daily lives of children who live along water courses, and the ways in which they appropriate spaces for themselves, among themselves and with adults (Trindade, 2020).

Nevertheless, even when we find institutionalized spaces as spaces present in research constructions, it is worth highlighting how far beyond them the objectives are set. This can be seen in those studies that seek to give visibility to the experiences of children and teachers from a public early-childhood education institution, in different spaces of the city (Campos, 2019). It is also seen in the official play spaces used by children and by understanding the spatiality exercised by them in these places (Meloni, 2018). It is also present in the ways in which urban public spaces are occupied by homeless children, the tactics of survival, refusal and resistance of homeless children and youth, and in the public policies aimed at them and for them. (Andrade, 2014).

As far as the research problems presented by the researchers are concerned, in our view they are mobilized by an interest in investigating elements (as unique as they are broad) that have an impact on the constitution of a childhood that has a complete right to the city. This gives rise to a complex approach to certain themes, largely due to the practically required choice for children's participation, insofar as they are considered to be social actors capable of expressing their experiences in public spaces. This affirms another important aspect that is recurring in research in

the field: that which focuses on the consideration of an important social and political place of the child *pari passu* with the organization and support of the research problematics. This emerges from the assumption that, for this contingent of research, directly or indirectly, "investigating the lives of children in cities demands a dual research commitment, both academic-scientific and *political*" (Müller; Nunes, 2014, p. 660, emphasis added). In fact, in addition to producing scientific knowledge about relationships that are established between children and the cities they inhabit, it can be said that the knowledge produced by these studies participates, along with many other academic and social movements, in the recognition of children as citizens with rights.

Furthermore, we can say that problematizing childhood as an experience constructed on an expressive set of markers has been a strong point of research in the field. As suggested by Gobbi *et al.* (2022, p. 18), "being a child in the city" is less than a categorical fact *from which* to start, but rather emerges as a problem to be developed, multiplied, and challenged, *by means of which* universes of experience produce distinct relationships with cities.

Still considering the objectives of the studies (and challenging them with some of their results), seven of the ten doctoral theses present discussions related to social differences and how these produce different relationships between children and cities. In four studies, the research exclusively looked at children from the peripheries or peripheral zones (Andrade, 2014; Muniz, 2018; Souza, 2017; Trindade, 2020). In their conclusions, the researchers present the different ways in which this (social) marker has different impacts: economic deprivation interferes with broader experiences of the city, restricting children from getting to know and circulating in other spaces of the city other than the territories they inhabit (Muniz, 2018). Even if a peripheral region where they live is marked by poverty, violence, robberies and drug trafficking, for example, children use other narratives to tell about this place, and produce meanings that go beyond these aspects (Andrade, 2014; Souza, 2017). Their ways of playing are narrated by the children in an almost inseparable connection with their modes of subsistence (as is the case with children who live along rivers, who engage in activities such as fishing, canoeing, and climbing trees to pick fruit, which are considered by the children almost inseparably as work and play) (Trindade, 2020).

Three studies were concerned with dialoguing with children from different social classes as research subjects (Evangelista, 2020; Meloni, 2018; Müller, 2007), making it possible to raise comparative elements that at times marked an expressive difference, and at times a proximity in ways of living the city. In these studies, for example, although the children belonged to different social classes, there were situations in which the children's opinions of the city's play spaces were similar, regardless of social class (Meloni, 2018). On the other hand, Müller's research (2007), for example, showed that for more than 15 years children from lower social classes (who travel around the city on foot or by bus) and those from higher social classes (who generally travel by car) experience the city differently and appropriate it in different ways. These conclusions are also present in a recent study by Evangelista (2020), albeit from a different angle, which shows that to some extent children from peripheral regions have more autonomy in terms of mobility, specifically in the neighborhood where they live. However, their access to other parts of the city is more restricted. On the other hand, children from more central and higher income regions move around a larger urban perimeter (even if they do so in cars) (Evangelista, 2020).

As for gender markers, three doctoral theses discuss the relationship of boys and girls and their ways of experiencing the city. Of these, one in particular takes this theme as an investigative lens to research the relationship between childhood and the city, seeking to understand to what extent the gender dimension is present in the social architecture that children elaborate about the city. At the end of the study, the researcher points to the existence of different cities for girls and boys, with girls being allocated spaces for protection and relaxation, while boys are reserved spaces for adventure and leisure (Poubel, 2021). Similarly, Muniz's thesis (2018) reflects on how schools reinforce gender markers by determining the formation of lines for girls and boys. In a study that followed school outings taken by children in different parts of the city, Muniz (2018) shows that this same formation was repeated beyond school walls, causing both teachers and children to repeat this as a criterion for their own "organization".

In only one study did we find reflections on ethnic-racial markers (Andrade, 2014) – although these discussions were strongly present in the development of historical aspects of the social history of Brazil – in an effort to compose one of the core debates of the study (children and young people living on the streets), and as elements for describing the children and adolescents who were the subjects of the research.

As we have already pointed out, especially when we presented the descriptors we used to search for the theses, although there are probably many studies that deal more extensively with the intersections between childhood, the city and ethnic-racial relations, perhaps we can point to the urgent need for these studies to be more incisively registered in the field and thus to broaden and strengthen the ethnic-racial issue in the construction of future investigations.

## The epistemic-methodological panorama of the theses about childhoods, children, and cities

In this section, we will present the epistemic-methodological panorama of the theses analyzed, in an attempt to identify, understand and present the theoretical-methodological paths chosen by the researchers. For Tello and Mainardes (2015), in meta-research, "the epistemic-methodological approach is the way in which the research is methodologically constructed from a particular epistemological perspective and an epistemological position" (Tello; Mainardes, 2015, p. 158). In other words, we understand that the way in which a researcher defines the method and methodologically organizes their research, anchored in theoretical references, reveals the epistemic-methodological approach of their research (Tonieto; Fávero, 2021).

Thus, we will systematically show the elements extracted from the research that give us clues for identifying and analyzing the methodological paths of the set of theses that compose our sample: I) fields of knowledge; II) research locations; III) research subjects; IV) children's participation; V) methods used; VI) technical procedures; VII) theoretical references.

We first consider the prevalence of the fields of knowledge involved in the presentation of the research. The number of times the fields were mentioned in all of the studies was as follows: sociology of childhood (7); anthropology (4); geography of childhood (3); education (2); sociology (2);

geography (2); social studies of childhood (2) and social studies of the city (1); anthropology of the child (1); pedagogies of childhood and early childhood education (1); philosophy (1); social psychology (1); and architecture and urbanism (1).

As can be seen, the fields of sociology of childhood, followed by anthropology, are those most used and articulated by the researchers. Meanwhile, the analysis of this topic reveals the extent to which researchers in this field use theoretical references from different fields for the epistemic-methodological construction of their research. This, of course, is a characteristic of the field of education, but here, and in terms of the link between theory and methodology, it takes on special significance, given that it is precisely the understanding of childhood as a social, cultural and historical phenomenon that ends up supporting methodologies that make an effort to give depth to the different ways in which the experience of childhood makes children's relationship with the cities they inhabit unique.

With regard to the locus of the research, seven theses had different public spaces in the city as their locus and thus spaces visited included squares, museums, the central market, the public archive, natural reserves, water parks, shopping malls, beaches, markets, streets and avenues. Three studies used family homes as a place to meet children for interviews and conversations. Four researchers conducted their investigations in educational institutions, one of which included the children's outings in the city, accompanied by the class teacher, as a field of research. One of the studies chose to carry out its research with children who attended the facilities of a non-governmental organization (NGO). In addition, three studies added bibliographical and documentary studies to their research.

The data above indicates a tendency to choose different public spaces, in addition to institutionalized ones, as a field of investigation, as mentioned above; but it also allows us to trace important elements regarding the construction of the concept of the city that, together with the children, the studies construct.

In this context we highlight some of the concepts about the city that emerge in the studies in our sample. We have identified arguments about the city as a powerful space for learning, sociability, and positive experiences for children. Farias (2019) points out that children's mobility in the city is an activity with social significance, as it is understood that in these displacements children are in the company of another, with whom they interact, and build their hypotheses about the world from this relationship. The same author states that in conviviality with others in the city, children learn values and strategies that add to their individual social identity. Thus, this thesis suggests that this conviviality with others in the city could be expanded if cities provided safety for walking or cycling, for example (Farias, 2019).

This concept is also visible in Souza's (2017) work, which shows that the production of knowledge occurs in contact with the street environment and in the encounter with the other, because through this experience with alterity, children enter social arrangements and establish relationships with the world of adults and then begin to invent, imagine and build architectures about the world they inhabit, while simultaneously transforming it through their interactions and play. In this sense, Campos (2019) presents an understanding of the city as a tangle of relationships in which, from the intertwining of movement and event, children live experiences that create meaning.

On the other hand, some studies have shown that cities are fragmented and restricted to certain groups, as Poubel (2021) reveals, discussing a city that does not offer equal opportunities for interaction for children in general. On the contrary, the way cities are constituted allows for the establishment of one city for girls and another city for boys. These are distinctions that, as a whole, determine different social prescriptions and spaces for each gender. In this same perspective of different cities for certain groups Muniz (2018) points out that, even if there is children want to broaden their experiences in the city, not all of them are able to enjoy different places in the city, because of limits created by their financial conditions.

As for the subjects of the studies, it can be seen that the vast majority of studies choose children aged 4 to 12: 80% of the surveys chose this age group; the 4 to 6 age group accounted for only 20% of all the children surveyed. As for gender, 67 children were girls and 84 were boys. As for the research subjects, in addition to the children, two studies included the participation of adults (in one of them, parents, teachers and administrators of the school where the research was carried out; in the other, social educators linked to a Street Education Unit and the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance to the Homeless/CREAS-POP).

With regard to the participation of children, it is worth highlighting the lack of reference to the period of early childhood, which includes children from zero to three years old. Although we can consider that academic productions on the subject of childhood and the city are still emerging, the studies show a tendency to give priority to children between 5 and 6. This is also a gap in the field of early childhood education and studies on childhood more broadly. Gobbi (2018) has problematized the scarcity of research that focuses on listening to children in early childhood. According to Vasconcelos (2015), the privilege given to the participation of older children in research often affects the participation of children insofar as they "signal their ideas through speech, drawings and productions" (Vasconcelos, 2015, p. 24). Similarly, Fochi (2013) problematizes the scarcity of research that focuses on pedagogical practices with younger children, especially babies. Thus, the data reveals a challenge to be faced by future studies that conduct research with children, considering the specificities of the younger age groups, as well as an important academic movement to strengthen and/or mobilize other instances for the social recognition of babies and very young children as subjects of rights in their relationship with the city.

In relation to the research method, we sought to understand it beyond a technical-instrumental dimension (Tonieto; Fávero, 2021; Jacomini; Silva, 2021). That is, "the choice of method reveals the path chosen by the researcher to construct a response to their research problem, which must be logically and theoretically valid" (Tonieto; Fávero, 2021, p. 60). Therefore, when considering the studies in our sample, we sought to understand the assumptions that theoretically supported the point of view with which the researchers operated in their investigations, especially insofar as these (the assumptions) subsidized the technical choices and the instruments used, and, finally, the evaluation of the study's findings. When analyzing these studies we perceived that in general the theses made no clear explanations of the methods they chose. On the other hand, the researchers in our sample revealed, through an epistemological positioning, precise theoretical conceptions for the development of their studies – what we have chosen to call "methodological perspectives". In this respect, 60% of the studies announced that they were inspired by ethnography (6) as the guiding

principle of their investigations – which already indicates the predominance of one methodology in particular (which is understandable, given the nature of the topic). Other researchers defined their research as either intervention research (1), phenomenological research (1) and case studies (2).

As for the technical procedures and data collection tools, all the studies made their choices based on recognized theoretical references in the field. In terms of technical procedures, six studies used a hybrid approach. This means that they combined more than one approach, as did Meloni (2018), Andrade (2014), Souza (2017), Müller (2007) and Evangelista (2020), who used field research combined with bibliographic/documentary research. Campos (2019) combined collaborative research with participant observation. The studies that mentioned an ethnographic approach used participant observation as their main technical procedure (6), following the methodological conceptions announced by the theoretical frameworks that anchored their investigations. The researchers also used interviews and other data collection instruments. The investigations that proposed case studies also used observations and interviews to produce data, as well as other instrumental resources. Thus, almost all of them used a combination of resources, such as: walks, conversations, drawings, photographs, filming, the composition of illustrated and subtitled texts, poems, maps, models, focus groups, photo elicitation, field diaries, lists of places in the city, self-portraits, charts of their routines, and charts of their equipment. All the tools mentioned here involved children in their production to a greater or lesser extent.

With regard to children's participation, we would like to point out that, in all ten studies, there is evidence of children's freedom of choice in relation to the methodological tools: for example, in the studies by Muniz (2018), Souza (2017) and Trindade (2020), the children chose the places and routes in the city to be visited during the research; and in the studies by Meloni (2018) and Evangelista (2020) the children choose what they would like their city to be like or the spaces for play outside the home in their city of residence. Moreover, in the Campos (2019), Farias (2019) and Müller (2007) studies, children were the protagonists in the photographic and filmic recording of the city's spaces, both in terms of using the necessary tools and in choosing the imagery that would be captured by the lenses of these tools.

In more detail, with regard to the observations, the researchers proposed observing children in their daily lives at school, during school activities, field classes, recess; on school outings to different institutions in the city; at random, in the city's official play spaces; on the street in places where the children beg or work; and in the children's daily movements around the city using GPS (Global Positioning System). As for the conversations with the children, the researchers used them to discuss photographs they took of city spaces (play spaces recognized by local government, and different spaces in the city/neighborhood), and about those taken by the children during their walks.

With regard to the children's authorship when it comes to producing data, the analysis of the studies show that the children produced records of the city's locations in different media, requiring different forms of expression: through drawings (that were done before and/or after the outings); using a "place collector's notebook for collecting places" proposed by one of the investigations, for example, in which they had to draw the route they take to get to school, the spaces in the city they knew, and what they did on weekends; by taking photographs of places in the city during outings in the company of the researchers, as well as moments when they went around the city individually

or with their families (when they were instructed to photograph places they liked / aspects of the places they visited that most interested them or caused some discomfort / and those that they thought were important in their lives); videos of their movements during outings, on buses and in the spaces they visit with the school/on their daily routes; illustrated and subtitled texts describing their play spaces located outside the home; through the creation of "poems of desires" – drawings that contemplated the sentences "My city is..." and "I would like my city to be... " about how they would like the play spaces outside their home to be in their city; a list of places they like and dislike in the city; a table of appliances to define socio-economic class; a table of routines; maps/mock-ups of their cities; realization of a photo-elicitation exercise, based on the images selected from the film they made about their journeys and conducted online participatory mapping using Google Earth, where they marked spaces they liked and thought were good and those they thought were bad or that they didn't like and would like to get to know.

As for the theoretical-methodological references, all the doctoral theses mention the authors who support the paths they have taken. We found that the methodological perspectives, procedures, and data collection instruments are anchored in multiple theoretical references. The most recurrent references in the ten theses were: Corsaro (5), Alderson (5), Carvalho; Muller (4), Lopes (4), Gueertz (3), Sarmento (2), Cohn (2); Christensen (2), Gobbi (2), Saramago (2), Qvortrup (2), Malinowski (2), Prout; James (2); Chizzoti (2), Ventura (2), Pires (2). These authors, among others, provided the most expressive theoretical support for the perspectives that guided the investigations, and at times were cited to justify the adoption of procedures or instruments[4]. It should be clarified that the authors listed here are those authors who were mentioned as the theoretical and scientific basis for the methodological choices (since we are highlighting aspects linked to the epistemic-methodological dimension).

The survey of the theoretical frameworks used in the theses shows a multiplicity of authors who compose a theoretical foundation from different fields of knowledge, as mentioned earlier. In most of the theses analyzed, this systematization took place in a chapter dedicated to methodology, which presented the methodological choices in conjunction with the theoretical bases adopted.

The studies in the sample thus present a significant range of investigative practices and procedures, in their interweaving with the construction of the epistemic-methodological panorama. We sought to show that not only is there a link between the schemes that mobilized the studies, the theoretical references and the methodological issues, but also an insistent affirmation of this relationship given that the studies were conducted with a variety of original strategies in their effort to give prominence and, in some way, an active role to children's cultural practices in their relationship with the city.

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[4] Regarding the methodological choices of the research, a total of 48 authors are referenced in the theoretical discussions that support it, with Alderson (5), Sarmento (4), Müller (4), Corsaro (3) as the most cited in the different studies analyzed.

## Childhoods/children, the city in relation to the school, curriculum, and teacher education: outstanding dialogs

Recently, Gobbi and Tavares (2021) proposed a dialogue that brought together professionals/researchers who work directly in the education of children and university professors who educate teachers and researchers on topics related to childhood that culminated in "a device for thought, reflection and, [...], action in defense of a dignified, fair, urban life that is culturally and environmentally considered in a way that is favorable to children's experiences" (Gobbi; Tavares, 2021, p. 18). The discussion deserves to be highlighted, as it instigates a conjugation of childhood and its right to the city to be imagined collectively with all those directly involved in children's lives (Gobbi; Tavares, 2021, p. 19). Among the professionals indicated by the authors, in this section we would like to highlight teachers, as we believe that the relationship between childhood and the city goes through, or should go through, the school. So, although it is not the primary objective of a meta-research, we have chosen this specific discussion to finalize our analysis of the group of theses in our corpus, as we understand it is a powerful investigative path to be further expanded.

In other words, we sought to identify in the studies that compose our sample how the relationships emerge between childhood, the city, the curriculum and teacher education - especially since we identified that eight of the ten studies analyzed emphasize the place of the school, education and teachers in the relationship between *children and the city*. To address this, we grouped the discussions into two axes: "School, education and curriculum" and "Teacher education and practice". In the first axis we present discussions involving the three issues announced in the title itself, which were developed by the researchers in their investigations. In the second axis we reflect on the place of teachers in children's relationship with the city and schools, which emerged in the studies analyzed. We chose this organization because, although we understand that these aspects are related, they were identified in the research as small focuses of discussion and detached from each other. Furthermore, by problematizing them in our meta-analysis, we emphasize the importance of future investments in these aspects, both as objects of academic research and as elements in public actions and policies that strengthen/guarantee children's right to the city.

In relation to the axis "School, education and curriculum", six studies make it an issue of debate. The studies by Souza (2017) and Muniz (2018) invest significantly in the understanding of a school that considers the city as a learning space. Both studies use the concept of a school that extends learning to the streets and different spaces of the territory in which it is located, recognizing these places as arenas for new knowledge - and therefore talk about schools that allow children to appropriate public spaces and thus actively and intensely insert them into the tangle of local knowledge (Souza, 2017). In this sense, Muniz (2018) goes so far as to talk about an "urban curriculum" that recognizes the city as an educational environment. Moreover, the study advocates broadening the school with life by presenting the concept of "citizen literacy" (Tavares a*pud* Muniz, 2018).

Meanwhile, three other studies discuss how children's experiences at school contribute to their understanding of the cities they inhabit in a restrictive way. More specifically, and from another important angle of analysis, these are studies that understand that limiting children's experiences

to those lived only through school (or only through the family) can create a series of limitations for children in their experiences. In other words, such research talks about experiences that end up fragmenting children's concept of the city (Müller, 2007), restricting their right to the city (Evangelista, 2020) or even reinforcing gender stereotypes present in society (Poubel, 2021).

In other words, Müller (2007) argues that children who experience the city only through family and school and in a way that is not only fragmented but also separated (in its meanings and experiences, as if they were different "cities") end up presenting a fragmented view of the city. Meanwhile, as Evangelista (2020) affirms, it is important to consider the limits imposed on children in terms of their enjoyment of cities, especially when we consider the long periods in which children remain institutionalized. Poubel (2021) shows that this restriction may also be related to children's gender, since, while girls develop hypotheses about the city based on the narratives of adults, for example, boys build their concepts based on direct experiences in the city. Schools wind up reinforcing the distinction between boys and girls through everyday practices based on this gender distinction that insists on seeing girls as fragile, passive, and sheltered, and boys as strong, active and adventurous. Based on the results of his research, Proubel (2021) argues in favor of a school education that guarantees equality between genders, as he sees the possibility of building an urban diversity capable of promoting city experiences for all children.

The thesis by Melani (2018), which was conducted in a school, concludes this section. The choice to do research in a school and the way in which the methodology was executed - highly involved with children's participation in terms of ways of expressing aspects that, from their perspective, should be improved, modified, or expanded in the cities they inhabit - suggest possibilities for thinking about the terms of partnerships between schools and public authorities, especially with regard to listening to children's opinions and points of view in relation to the city and the planning of actions and maintenance of public spaces.

Another line of discussion examines how "teacher education and practice" is present in the studies analyzed, particularly in two of them, although not as the main focus. In Campos (2019), we find aspects present in the other studies mentioned (and which are related to the first line of focus): evidence of a school that recognizes the city as a space-time for new experiences and knowledge; that has included the city context in its curriculum as a locus for learning (based on a proposal for "excursions" to different spaces in the city). However, we understand that this is predominantly a discussion about teacher education and practice, since, in the study, these excursions required the mediation of teachers and teaching teams. Moreover, the solidity of this teacher training was decisive for allowing powerful experiences that provided opportunities for consistent aesthetic and cultural learning. In other words, this is learning that extends to the teachers: teacher education is also based on teachers' experiences in urban spaces. The study by Campos (2019) also advocates curricula and actions that make the school and the city privileged spaces for children to exercise their citizenship, while considering the construction and exercise of the teachers' citizenship (Campos, 2019).

Finally, Andrade's thesis (2014) argues that it is also the function of the teacher and school to value the students' knowledge, which is socially constructed in community relations. It is precisely by working with a population on the margins of the traditional school model (homeless children and

adolescents) that allows the author to reflect on the place of teachers in the relationship between children who live the city intensely and the school. This is a teacher who is aware that, for children who experience a kind of freedom on the streets, being trapped in institutionalized spaces can be extremely demotivating. In addition, what we understand to be the knowledge of children who live on the streets goes beyond the oppressive assumptions that still persist in school, of a model student, inscribed in a culture of writing and discipline. In short, the experiences of street children suggest not only another school model, but also another type of training for teachers.

We realize that the discussions in the doctoral theses on the relationship between children and the city allow us to see schools in different ways and curriculums and teacher education that are involved with the very different ways of living in the city, building practices that value children's city experiences and offer them consistent ways of experiencing the city, and appropriating it as aspects inseparable from the construction of their citizenship.

## Final considerations

This text highlights the results of a meta-research study that mapped and analyzed a group of ten studies carried out at doctoral level, which focused on issues involved in the relationship between childhoods, children, and the city. The central focus of this examination was the research problems and objectives that these studies articulated, as well as the epistemic-methodological approaches that guided the investigative paths.

The meta-analysis conducted allowed concluding that the research objectives and problems were materialized by a rigorous conformity between the theoretical assumptions about the plurality of ways of living childhood and the construction of studies that sought to give academic visibility to plural ways of living the city. As far as the epistemic-methodological panorama is concerned, we found aspects that can be understood to be characteristic of the field itself, namely the researchers' choice of theoretical references from different fields, with the field of sociology of childhood prevailing, followed by anthropology. In addition, we found: that the studies did not identify, explain or justify the methods they adopted; and a prevalence of a hybrid approach in the choice of technical procedures and data collection instruments, i.e. the data was produced from a combination of two or more approaches, as well as through varied technical instruments, anchored to a heterogeneity of theorists. In general, we can affirm that the studies revealed an articulation between theoretical references and methodology, the latter being a strong point in the field.

We would also like to highlight some of the aspects present in the studies which give shape to extremely important questions regarding the place of children in research in the field and that assume a social, ethical and political commitment to these subjects: I) an understanding of childhood that goes beyond institutionalized spaces; II) an understanding of children as social actors capable of expressing themselves about their experiences in the city and expressing opinions about public spaces; and III) the problematization of different markers (social, gender, ethnic-racial) and their impact on how children live and experience the city.

However, we highlight other aspects that should be given attention in future research on the issues in question: I) the presence of an institutional bias, albeit to a greater or lesser degree, in the construction of research problems, which in our view represents the preponderance of notions of institutionalized childhood; II) the emergence of new research that pays attention to markers such as gender, race and ethnicity - since that related to social class is already prominent; III) the near absence of research on babies, which suggests that we should pay attention to how these subjects have been made invisible in our work, and the need to build specific methodologies that can consider the unique ways infants experience cities and participate in them.

In general, the research is in line with other movements, both academic and social, to recognize children as citizens with rights by producing data that has an impact, or should have an impact, on the constitution of childhoods that have a complete right to the city.

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