

DOSSIER

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

“The world through our eyes and by our voices”: what children say about rights, discrimination and differences, gender, and poverty

“O mundo aos nossos olhos e pelas nossas vozes”: o que crianças dizem sobre direitos, discriminações e diferenças, gênero e pobreza

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the project SMOOTH – Educational Common Spaces, Passing through enclosures and reversing Inequalities (Horizon 2020, European Commission) and the subproject RED – Rights, Equality, Difference – as well as an epistemological, theoretical, methodological and ethical position, that puts in dialogue the Sociology of Childhood and Education Sciences, a qualitative research was carried out with children attending the 2nd Cycle of Basic Education, in a public school in Lisbon, within the subject of Citizenship and Development. A central aim of the Project, which is presented in this paper, is to analyse, from an active listening of the children, their conceptions about rights, discriminations and differences, gender, and poverty, and their lived/attributed subjective meanings. Methodologically, through observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, their voices, and by their proposal, materialised in the publication of a podcast episode. Qualitative content analysis enables us to exercise an understanding of what children say about these themes, what they have prioritised, reflected upon, and ignored. Their views about the world must be understood from their biographies and contexts.

Keywords: School participation. Children’s Rights. Discriminations and Differences. Gender. Poverty.

RESUMO

No âmbito do projeto SMOOTH – *Educational Common Spaces, Passing through enclosures and reversing Inequalities* (Horizonte 2020, Comissão Europeia) e do subprojeto RED – *Rights, Equality, Difference* – bem como de um posicionamento epistemológico, teórico, metodológico e ético, que coloca em diálogo a Sociologia da Infância e as Ciências de Educação, foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa com crianças a frequentarem o 2.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, numa escola pública de Lisboa, no âmbito da disciplina de Cidadania e Desenvolvimento. Um objetivo central do Projeto, que se apresenta neste artigo, é analisar, a partir de uma escuta ativa das crianças, as suas concepções sobre direitos, discriminações e diferenças, gênero e pobreza, e dos seus sentidos subjetivos vividos/atribuídos. Metodologicamente, através da observação, de entrevistas

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semiestruturadas e grupos focais, as suas vozes, e por sua proposta, materializaram-se na publicação de um episódio de *podcast*. A análise de conteúdo qualitativa permite exercitar a compreensão face ao que as crianças dizem sobre aquelas temáticas, naquilo que priorizaram, refletiram e ignoraram. As suas visões *de e sobre* o mundo devem ser entendidas a partir das suas biografias e dos seus contextos.

Palavras-chave: Participação na Escola. Direitos da Criança. Discriminações e Diferenças. Género. Pobreza.

Introduction

The recognition of children’s participation in both public and private spaces remains an unattained reality in the 21st century. Although children’s participation rights are not recent, they continue to be challenging to implement and generate both challenges and controversies. The persistence of this situation alone justifies the unequivocal significance of the children’s participation agenda as a prerequisite for acknowledging childhood and children’s citizenship. Moreover, it emphasises the pressing need for further research in this field to deepen our understanding of age-related disparities (in conjunction with other variables) and how to address them. Furthermore, it has become increasingly evident that children’s participation is inseparable from the realm of education and the roles and positions that children assume within educational institutions. In practice, educational environments, especially formal ones, represent the primary locations where children spend a substantial portion of their time, as evidenced in the case of Portugal (CNE, 2017). In fact, it has become the naturalised context for children, without corresponding to a time for the creative and effective promotion of their participation.

Indeed, as Prout has highlighted, the concept of “children’s participation” is frequently emphasised in academic discourse but often lacks effective implementation (Prout, 2003, p. 21). Extensive research has consistently emphasised the complex or even complete absence of processes and practices related to children’s involvement within their life contexts (James; Jenks; Prout, 1998; Rocha; Ferreira, 2000; Fernandes, 2009; Tomás, 2011; Cordero Arce, 2012; Trevisan, 2014; Spyrou, 2018; Sarmiento; Tomás, 2020). Considering these criticisms, the European project SMOOTH¹ – *Educational Common Spaces, Passing through Enclosures, and Reversing Inequalities*, funded by Horizon 2020 under the auspices of the European Commission, has undertaken its mission, which extends from 2021 to 2024:

introducing the emerging paradigm of “commons” as an alternative framework for values and actions within the realm of education for children and adolescents. This project critically underscores the far-reaching implications of commons in reshaping the landscape of education and societal transformation at large. Anchored in principles of equity, communal sharing, active participation, coexistence, nurturing, and freedom, this initiative delves into the realm of social inclusion through the lens of “commons in education.” We seek to explore whether these principles can serve as catalysts for rectifying societal inequalities. To undertake this exploration, our research deploys an array of methodologies, including

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pedagogical documentation, the practice of active listening, ethnographic research, and discourse analysis.

Based on this epistemological and theoretical framework, this article presents a segment of the ongoing RED_SMOOTH Project – Rights, Equity, and Diversity, currently being conducted by one of the project partners, the team from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL), in three schools located in Lisbon.

The primary aim of this article is to introduce a project developed within the scope of one of the case studies involving children from the 2nd Cycle of Basic Education (2nd CEB) in a public school. In this text, we provide an analysis of a process of listening to children concerning their conceptions of children’s rights, discrimination, differences, gender, and poverty – dimensions addressed in the RED Project – and their subjective meanings as experienced or ascribed. These dimensions align with the overarching themes addressed within the RED Project. Additionally, we explore the subjective meanings and interpretations attributed by the children to these concepts.

Incorporating the perspectives of Childhood Sociology and Educational Sciences, this text focuses on a subject of current scientific relevance, clear socio-educational significance, and crucial implications concerning social interactions and educational and pedagogical dimensions. Furthermore, it aspires to influence public policies because change occurs at the intersection of these dialogues.

The current scientific relevance is underscored by the fact that both Childhood Studies (Tomás *et al.*, 2021) and Educational Sciences (Lima, 1997; Nóvoa, 2022), as well as the principles advocated by Commons Studies (Ostrom, 1990; García-lopes, 2020; Pechtelidis; Kioupiolis, 2020), have been increasingly emphasising the need to reconsider the interplay between education, citizenship, and participation. Despite the polysemy and the varying meanings attributed to the concept of the Commons, its implications are manifold in challenging and generating alternatives to dominant social and educational thinking. This contribution calls into question power relations, generational orders, social and educational practices, meanings, and audiences.

The socio-educational relevance becomes evident as contemporary social conditions create paradoxical circumstances for children to exercise and express their presence-absence, particularly in the educational context. On one hand, there is discourse about the potential for children to have agency, participation, and a voice in schools, along with pedagogies that advocate for the central role of children in their learning processes (Johnson; Johnson, 1999; Arends, 2008). On the other hand, there is a misalignment with social, educational, and pedagogical practices that persist and reproduce within educational settings. In a context such as this, the battle against social inequalities remains an urgent necessity, whether due to the persistent academic underachievement, performance disparities, or the ongoing existence of discrimination and exclusion in schools. This situation is observed both in the general context in Portugal and within the specific scope of this research. The unique aspect of this research scenario is attributed to the nature of the student population in these schools, primarily composed of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the influences of their social origins carry significant weight (Abrantes, 2022).

Finally, the impact can be assessed through the integration of the knowledge produced and the case study, which we will now describe. This study was conducted with a group of 18 children and their teacher in the subject of Citizenship and Development (CeD) at the 2nd Cycle of Basic Education (2nd CEB). Among other objectives, the study aimed to listen to the children by creating conditions for this listening and the possibility of translating it into educational and pedagogical action. In this text, we exclusively analyse the process of creating a podcast² with the children and its proposal. This was an educational and methodological strategy that attempted to address the challenging relationship children had with school, characterised by numerous criticisms from the students themselves. For example, one student remarked, “Sitting without doing anything” (Madalena, 11 years), when asked about her role in school. Furthermore, it allowed us to listen to them discuss complex topics covered in CeD classes. By explicitly promoting opportunities for children’s participation and active agency within the RED_SMOOTH project, we aim to shed light on “how” children think about issues related to their rights, discrimination, differences, gender, and poverty. The alignment between the project’s themes and (some) topics in the CeD curriculum contributed to the realisation of a critical and contextual education, where pedagogical practice and the interests of children converged.

Childhood, Education, Citizenship, and Participation – Theoretical Considerations

Research involving children in the spaces they inhabit, especially schools, has experienced a significant transformation since the 1980s on an international level and since the 2000s at the national level. Three factors and circumstances have significantly contributed to this transformation. Firstly, the development of Social Studies of Childhood, particularly Childhood Sociology, has brought the social condition of childhood and children’s agency into the realm of research. However, it is not without its criticisms (James; Jenks; Prout, 1998; Ferreira, 2004; Rocha; Ferreira, 2000; Sarmiento, 2015; Spyrou, 2018; Thomas, 2021). Secondly, children’s citizenship and their participation have become important subjects of study within the Social Sciences and Education. Thirdly, echoes of the Commons paradigm in education and childhood (Pechtelidis; Kioupiolis, 2020). Indeed, childhood citizenship, as established by the legal recognition of children’s rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ONU, 1989), finds itself in an educational space that represents a *hybrid setting with both possibilities and numerous restrictions*.

As a *condition of possibility*, it is around children’s participation in the collective construction of educational contexts that this category of rights has been most prominently affirmed. This assertion of children’s participation constitutes a concept of citizenship that extends beyond the classical model advocated by Marshall (1967) – civil, political, and social citizenship – but broadens it (Fernandes, 2009; Tomás, 2011; Trevisan, 2014; Baraldi; Cockburn, 2018) through the activation of multiple logics, including educational and pedagogical ones.

² For the complete audio, the podcast is available in: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5VzCrDt6ZD778pjSdwHfye?si=2TR4sZE7Qa67ibWiArpKbA>

The notion of *multiple constraints* arises because the school is inherently a socially embedded arena of ongoing conflict, one that is experienced and continually reconstructed. This process of reconstruction, regrettably, holds the potential to be more restrictive towards children’s participation, limiting the possibilities and the requisite conditions for meaningful engagement. It also tends to reinforce the reshaping of students into passive and voiceless figures within the educational context. Additionally, conventional modes and trends of knowledge transmission, characterised by a didactic approach, further contribute to these constraints.

The situation of childhood and children within the school, as a structured social space with its internal contradictions, becomes particularly visible in the models, strategies, and control mechanisms that govern how teaching, learning, and relationships are established. These dynamics manifest in both formal and symbolic prohibitions placed on children, rooted in overarching ideologies that pervade Portuguese schools. These ideologies prioritise promoting academic performance, defending standardised testing, focusing on outcomes, cognitive assets, and deemed utilitarian forms of learning, among other aspects (Quaresma; Torres, 2017; Torres, 2022; Diogo; Ferreira; Melo, 2023).

There is a clear tension between these prevailing ideologies and what is advocated in the Student Profile upon Completion of Compulsory Education (Portugal, 2017), as well as the Citizenship and Development (CaD) discipline, as we will explore further. This tension is exacerbated by the continued passive role that children and youth play in schools, which persistently remain, to a certain extent, spaces designed “for” children.

In summary, the status of childhood within educational settings can be viewed as a social barometer with two key dimensions: i) their voices or their absence within these contexts; ii) educational practices that ideally should be guided by a careful observation of children and active listening to their voices. This is because children’s voices not only unveil their concerns and worldviews but also showcase various forms of participation. This, in turn, shapes a broader conception of citizenship, fosters critical education, and nurtures a high-intensity democracy. It is against this backdrop that the podcast episode “The World through Our Eyes and in Our Own Voices,” as mentioned earlier, emerges. This podcast seeks to disseminate and share the perspectives and voices of children on topics like *children’s rights, discrimination, differences, gender, and poverty*. It represents a deliberate effort to listen to children’s viewpoints on social realities, drawing from their unique insights, emotions, and experiences.

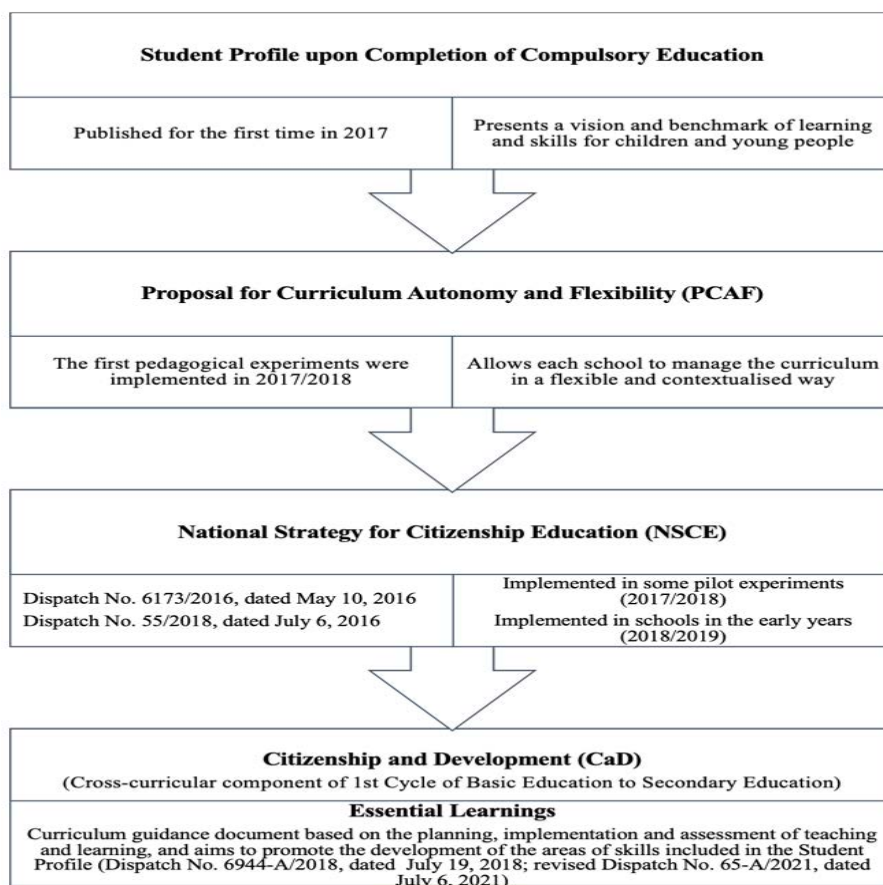
Citizenship and Development as a Space for Self and Other Construction

Normative framework

The promotion of active citizenship for all citizens, including children, in the Portuguese national context is guided by a sense of contemporaneity and has also gained significance based on UNESCO’s (2015) recommendations for a more sustainable world. For all children to develop transversal skills in the present and future through school and formal education, the XXI Constitutional

Government initiated a National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC), as proposed by Dispatch No. 6173/2016, dated May 10th. This strategy had its first pilot experience in both public and private schools in the academic year 2017/2018. As evident, the explicit focus on the holistic and humanistic education of children and youth is a recent concern. If we look back a bit in history, we can see the timeliness of the explicit efforts in terms of ministerial guidelines in this area (See Figure 1). While the educational policy actions taken regarding the attention given to the development of children and youth are of great importance and innovation in the Portuguese context, they are still in their early stages. The initial impacts/results of these actions are now beginning to be analysed in some pedagogical practices. Often, these practices are “driven” more by external and internal guidelines than by the necessity to adjust pedagogical practices to the realities of school and social contexts.

Figure 1: A concise overview of educational policies concerning citizenship and development in education from 2017 to 2019



Source: Authors' Elaboration

Across the educational spectrum, adopting a holistic perspective on children within their role as students, the Ministry of Education in Portugal introduced the “Perfil do Aluno à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória” [Student Profile upon Completion of Compulsory Education] in 2017. This document outlines a set of fundamental principles structured into Principles, Vision, Values, and Competency Areas. The principles serve as guiding principles for “curriculum implementation

and management in schools across all subject areas.” The Vision explicitly articulates the desired outcomes for young people as citizens upon completing their compulsory education. The Values encompass ethical elements and characteristics, while the Competency Areas encompass a diverse range of cognitive, metacognitive, social, emotional, physical, and practical skills (Portugal, 2017, p. 9).

Within this framework, students are expected to

cultivate and solidify a foundation of humanistic-based scientific and artistic culture. To achieve this, they draw upon values and competencies that enable them to engage in the lives and histories of individuals and societies, make informed and independent decisions regarding natural, social, and ethical issues, and possess the capacity for active, conscious, and responsible civic participation (Portugal, 2017, p. 10).

In alignment with this document, the Proposal for Curriculum Autonomy and Flexibility (PCAF) was introduced (Dispatch No. 5908/2017, July 5, 2017), encompassing all educational institutions within the public and private networks. The PCAF aims to promote improved learning experiences conducive to the development of higher-level competencies. It places schools, their students, and teachers at the centre while allowing for flexible and context-based curriculum management (Portugal, 2017, p. 13881).

Consistent with these new guidelines, which have not been without criticism – such as the external and internal imposition of specific practices without necessarily considering their suitability – the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (NSCE) was also implemented, notably through Dispatch No. 6173/2016, dated May 10, 2016. The initial pilot implementations occurred during the 2017/2018 academic year in educational establishments that embraced PCAF. However, under Decree-Law No. 55/2018, dated July 6, 2018, ENEC began to be implemented in both public and private schools for the initial and subsequent years of each cycle starting from the 2018/2019 academic year.

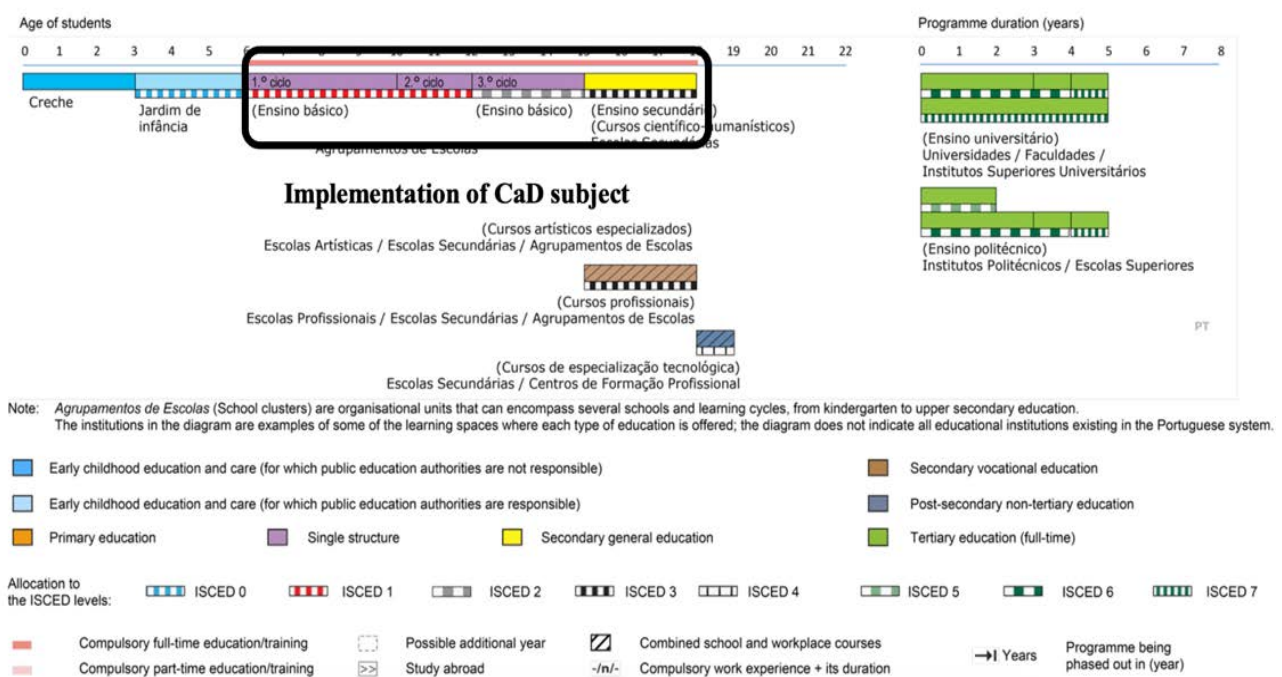
In practical and visible terms, NSCE is manifested through the curriculum component with the introduction of the Citizenship and Development (CaD) subject, which was first piloted in the 2017/2018 academic year. It aims to establish a solid foundation for students’ humanistic education, enabling them to assume their citizenship while upholding fundamental democratic values and human rights, both at the individual and societal levels (DGE, 2021). Following this initial phase, the CaD subject was extended to all public and private schools during the 2018/2019 academic year, becoming an autonomous and mandatory subject, either for one trimester or one semester. Although it does not have a fixed time allocation, it typically involves 45 to 50 minutes per week. Under the PCAF, each school has the autonomy to decide how to organise and manage this subject. It’s worth noting its transversality across all levels of education, being taught from the 1st Cycle of Basic Education to Secondary Education and featuring content that is equally comprehensive.

Before delving into the specific domains to be developed within this subject, it’s important to note that the curriculum components are governed by the “*Aprendizagens Essenciais*” [Essential Learnings], as outlined in Dispatch No. 6944-A/2018, dated July 19, 2018, with revisions in Dispatch No. 6605-A/2021, dated July 6, 2021. This document serves as the foundation for planning,

implementing, and assessing students’ learning throughout their educational journey. It contributes to the development of competencies outlined in the key document, the “Perfil do Aluno à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória” [Student Profile upon Completion of Compulsory Education].

To gain a better understanding of the transversality and breadth of CaD, it’s essential to consider the organisation of the Portuguese education system (Figure 2). As depicted in the figure, the implementation of the CaD subject spans twelve years of education, encompassing various educational domains, as will be presented subsequently.

Figure 2: Organization of the Portuguese education system and implementation of Citizenship and Development Education (CaD)



Source: Adaptation made by the authors from de Euridyce (2022/2023)

In the context in which it operates, the CaD subject “aims to contribute to the development of attitudes and behaviours characterised by dialogue and respect for others, grounded in ways of being in society that reference human rights, particularly the values of equality, democracy, and social justice” (DGE, 2021, p. 6). It aligns with the vision advocated by the Student Profile upon Completion of Compulsory Education and puts into practice, within the school context, the promotion of holistic and humanistic development for those attending school in Portugal. The Essential Learnings for CaD are guided by principles such as the conception of active citizenship, identification of essential citizenship training competencies, and identification of essential domains throughout schooling. These principles encompass a range of themes to be addressed in this subject, organised into three groups (See Table 1).

Table 1: Organization of citizenship education domains to be addressed in the citizenship and development subject

Organization of Citizenship Education Domains		
1.º Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Rights • Gender Equality • Interculturality • Sustainable Development • Environmental Education • Health 	2.º Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexuality • Media • Institutions and Democratic Participation • Financial Literacy and Consumer Education • Risk • Road Safety 	3.º Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship • World of Work • Security, Defence, and Peace • Animal Welfare • Volunteering • Others, as identified by the school’s needs for citizenship education.

Source: Adapted from the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (Portugal, 2016).

According to the guidelines outlined in the National Strategy for Citizenship Education, the domains within the 1st thematic group are compulsory for all levels and cycles of education, while the 2nd group should be addressed in at least two cycles of basic education. Finally, the 3rd group is optional and can be implemented in any school year. In the context of the research presented in this article, the themes explored by the children fall under the 1st thematic group, specifically focusing on human rights and gender equality. These themes originated from projects developed in Citizenship and Development (CaD) classes and have evolved into the results presented here.

Another aspect to mention concerns the role assigned to the teacher of this subject, as they have a “mission to prepare students for life, to become democratic, participatory, and humanistic citizens in a time of growing social and cultural diversity, with the aim of promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, as well as suppressing violent radicalism” (DGE, 2021, p. 2). This signifies that the teacher is not exempt from the responsibility of implementing pedagogical practices, and they are also expected to adopt an active approach to ensure that their practices are not conventional. Their role includes promoting active participation among students, thus addressing the situations witnessed by the children in this study. As an example, we recall the children’s testimonies when they mention having nothing to do or when a teacher doesn’t respect their pace or pay attention to their needs, especially those who do not have Portuguese as their mother tongue: “This year, when we didn’t have a [subject] teacher, they arranged for us a teacher who is very bad for us. In our class, there are foreign boys and girls, and he speaks to them as if they spoke Portuguese normally. And that...”

Who, Where, and How? – Methodological, Ethical, and Contextual Journey

The qualitative research conducted from March 2022 to March 2023 with the children and the CaD (Citizenship and Development) teacher adopted an interpretative stance and adhered to the methodological principles of research involving children (Christensen; James, 2000; Ferreira; Tomás, 2022).

To understand what the children say and think about children’s rights, discrimination, gender, and poverty – categories inherent to the RED_SMOOTH Project – interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations were employed in two specific periods: in the third term of 2021/2022

(from March to June) and in the first term of 2022/2023 (from October to December). During these moments, attention was given to what the teacher and the children were doing and saying, especially when the analysed themes were being addressed or discussed. These themes were subsequently subjected to content analysis.

In respect to ethical practices, the research was approved by the Directorate-General for Education (nº 0691300001). Consent/assent was sought from all participants, and the social research relationship with the children was continuously negotiated. Anonymity was ensured for the school, teacher, families, and children, and the results were provided to them. In all research interventions proposed and conducted by the research team, the children volunteered to participate in interviews and focus groups.

A public school, part of a TEIP³ program, is in the city of Lisbon, in a parish characterised by gentrification, touristification, privatisation, and socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity. The teacher has 35 years of service, has been working at that school for 5 years, and has been teaching the Citizenship and Development (CaD) subject to this group of children since the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year. When asked about her actions and methodology, the teacher recognizes herself as being

I can say that my teaching approach is more traditional. Indeed, it has marked my career, but I can't say that I don't pay attention to other methodologies as well. The truth is, sometimes it's difficult to change, isn't it? Thirty-five years of experience. (...) What I try to do is to have students learn on their own. So, it's more along the lines of constructivism. They should arrive at knowledge themselves by questioning and constructing their own understanding. I try to keep that in mind. But, in practice, I am aware that it often ends up being more directed. (Interview)

The group of 18 children, consisting of 8 girls and 10 boys, comes from families with various structures, including nuclear (11), maternal single-parent (6), and paternal single-parent (1). Their nationality is also diverse, with Portuguese (11), Brazilian (3), American (1), São Toméan (1), Indian (1), and Nepalese (1) (7 children in total).

As Seabra and Mateus (2010) argue

family attributes like social class, ethnicity, or the educational resources within the family serve as substantial factors in social differentiation within educational systems. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that these attributes exert a structural influence on the system of opportunities and inequalities that emerge during educational processes.” (p. 412)

It's important to note the lack of information regarding the employment status of 5 mothers and 8 fathers. Regarding their educational backgrounds, there is also a diverse range: 2nd Cycle

³ “The Priority Educational Territories Program [Programa Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária or TEIP] is a government initiative implemented in school groups/individual schools located in economically and socially disadvantaged areas characterized by poverty and social exclusion, where issues like violence, discipline problems, dropout rates, and academic failure are more prevalent. The main objectives of the program include preventing and reducing early school dropout and absenteeism, decreasing discipline issues, and promoting educational success for all students. It was first introduced in Portugal in 1996. Legislation: Normative Dispatch nº 20/2012 (Portugal, 2012).

of Basic Education (1 mother and 1 father), 3rd Cycle of Basic Education (3 mothers and 1 father), Secondary Education (7 mothers and 6 fathers), and bachelor’s degree (1 mother and 1 father). Here again, there is a lack of information for 6 mothers and 6 fathers. A common trend among these families is the prevalence of multiple vulnerabilities, except for 1 family. These vulnerabilities include low socioeconomic resources, employment in low-skilled professions with low wages and job insecurity. Additionally, 3 mothers are unemployed. Consequently, it’s not surprising that 12 children in the class receive socio-educational support through the School Social Action (ASE) program: 6 in the A subsidy tier, 4 in the B tier, and 2 in the C tier⁴.

In institutional terms, the group of children is characterised by age homogeneity, as most of them are 11 years old. However, there is internal heterogeneity concerning other variables (see Table 2).

Table 2: Institutional pathways of children by age and gender

Ages	1st time in school		2nd time in school		TOTAL
	Boys	girls	boys	girls	
10 years old		Isabela	Gonçalo		2
11 years old	Gursimran Leo		Endy Henrique Nedilson Samuel Santiago Micael Raúl	Inês Lara Leonor Letícia Madalena Melissa Shivika	18
TOTAL	2	1	8	7	18
	3		15		

Source: Authors’ Elaboration.

This heterogeneity is reflected in gender – more boys – and institutional experience, meaning that there is a significant number of children who are in that school for the second time and with the other members of their group. In addition, it is also important to mention the different linguistic profiles of the group, even though, at first glance, they have Portuguese as a non-native language, except for the children of American and Nepalese origin, their language proficiency levels do not correspond to the standard language taught in school. These children come from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or migratory movements, which makes them have weaknesses in the official language domain (Silva; Gonçalves, 2011; Gonçalves, 2012). The children of Brazilian origin and African descent, despite having Portuguese as their native language, also have difficulties in understanding and mastering the language of schooling. The former because they speak a variant of Portuguese, and when they immigrate to Portugal, the language becomes a barrier to their integration, and they have difficulty understanding the European Portuguese variant. The children of African descent, even if born in

⁴ The School Social Action (ASE) is a support measure that provides subsidies to help cover school expenses, including those related to school meals, transportation, and the purchase of school supplies. In 2023, the A-tier of social action corresponds to students whose family households have an annual income not exceeding 3102.40 euros. The B-tier includes students from family households with annual incomes ranging from 3102.41 to 6204.80 euros. The C-tier includes students from households with annual incomes ranging from 6208.81 to 9307.20 euros.

Portugal, second or third-generation immigrants, speak a creole with a Portuguese lexical base at home with their families and at school with their peers, suffering negative linguistic interferences in the use of Portuguese. Or even when families speak Portuguese at home to promote the use of the standard language, their proficiency has weaknesses due to the interference of Creole, and its effect on the use of Portuguese ends up being counterproductive (Gonçalves, 2011; Gonçalves, 2012).

What the Children Say – Data Analysis

Understanding what children have to say about rights, discrimination, differences, gender, and poverty is (and continues to be) an essential research and educational challenge within the scope of the ongoing research because children are not accustomed to being heard, and their participation is not widely recognized in that context. In this study, this condition is depicted both by the teacher and the children:

I don't believe they actively engage much, in my view. They follow fixed schedules, coming in at the same time every morning, and leaving school with a clear intention of going home. They view school primarily as a place for studying, not necessarily for fully experiencing it. (Teacher Interview).

The children often appear surprised when we seek their input and opinions on various topics. They exhibit shyness, especially the girls, perhaps due to concerns about providing 'right or wrong' answers. It seems that active participation from students is not a common practice within the school, and they frequently express the belief that decision-making is the responsibility of adults. (Observation Diary).

The very concept of the podcast also involved a process of authorship by the children, in the sense that they acted as both interviewers and interviewees. They didn't merely provide their testimonies on a subject. Instead, they sat down together, guided by an interview script, and collectively reflected on and shared their perspectives on these topics. They also expressed their concerns and questions about some of the (in)consistencies in contemporary society.

From an analytical perspective, there are four themes that constitute the corpus of analysis in this text:

- Rights from themselves or how children talk about children's rights

When the question “Do children have rights? What rights are these?” arises, the conversation between Gonçalo and Leonor helps us understand that it is the more common conceptions of rights that emerge in the discourse:

“Freedom,” Leonor says immediately. “Gonçalo ads, “Learning. All children have the right to learn.” “And to make friends and not to be judged,” Leonor asserts. “To be free... to have the same equality, food, and housing,” Gonçalo interrupts.

“When and where did you hear about children's rights?” triggers a discussion among the children about markers like age and memory. Leonor says “At 6 years old when I started to have memories, like all children, and then I started talking... and my mother heard me.” Gonçalo ads “Two years ago... when I felt like I was being heard by adults... as if I were also an adult... I felt like

I was growing up, feeling more like an adult.” These are also the ages mentioned by the children in the class, especially 6 years old, as the milestone when they start to be taken more seriously, always referring to the family context.

The school is one of the absences felt in the children’s discourse as a space that promotes rights. On the contrary, references to school always echo in favour of duty, responsibility, and behaviour as students:

“- Only on some occasions. When we behave reasonably well,” Santiago explains, referring to the few instances when they engage in group research.

- No, it’s only when we behave well... It means not making too much noise in class, showing respect to our teachers, and not copying things from the board,” Clara states.

Their views, life experiences, and understanding of the world are based on a conception of rights that starts from themselves, where age and memory emerge alongside the recognition of another status they aspire to achieve, namely adulthood. This is where social expectations are drawn, and the association of adulthood with specific abilities (competence, knowledge, and decision-making) and a certain social position they also aim to attain.

In terms of where they first heard about children’s rights, the family and school are mentioned in that order. Within peer groups, during social interactions in the school environment, they discuss violations of rights, especially when the sense of belonging within the peer group is questioned. This aspect is mentioned by all of them: “My right is being violated when my friends don’t listen to me” (Gonçalo), “When they don’t let me speak in the game, and that has already happened to me at this school” (Leonor).

- Discrimination and Differences or how skin colour and disability differentiate

When it comes to the Social Sciences and Education Sciences, the place that discriminations and differences occupy in the discourses legitimising social relationships is recognized. These discourses can either perpetuate oppression and exclusion or promote emancipation and inclusion among peers. For instance, the experiences shared by the children in the study highlight instances of racial discrimination, such as being told to “go away because you are black” or “go back to your own race” and experiencing differential treatment from both fellow students and the teacher due to their racial or ethnic background. These examples underscore the prevalence of such discriminatory attitudes and actions within the school environment.

The discrimination based on skin colour is evident through conflicts among children, reflecting a behaviour of non-acceptance towards those who are physically different. As Leonor recounted, “a friend and I went there and told them not to make fun of that child’s appearance,” referring to a child with Down syndrome. This dimension of acceptance and respect for others is precisely an aspect that the Citizenship and Development Education (CaD) discipline and the school should address.

Adults, including teachers and school staff, who inhabit the school environment also manifest daily discriminatory and racist practices (Araújo, 2023) when it comes to recognizing and interacting with children from disadvantaged backgrounds or different ethnicities, as reinforced by this child’s testimony. Indeed, negative beliefs that teachers may hold about children have an impact not only on their learning but also on their motivation for studies. There seems to be a contradiction between

the desirability and the need for more democratic pedagogical practices, based on the much-desired humanistic approach, and a certain resistance or even “bewilderment” in dealing with children who do not fit the profile of the standard student. There is resistance in recognizing and including the Other, who appears to be different from oneself. However, the contradiction in attitudes is not static because those who have exclusionary practices also have inclusionary ones. The teacher, who may not always succeed in including everyone in the classroom, is also the one who intervenes when there are fights among children:

“When a fight happens, the teaching assistants don’t want to get involved. They say, ‘It’s not my job. It’s the other assistants out there.’ And it’s the teachers or older students who break it up because [they] don’t want to see that.” (Henrique)

- Gender or how heteronormative performance matters in peer relationships

When asked about gender differences, Lara and Inês initially recognize that there are no differences “because everyone has the same rights”, and they see gender discrimination as “unfair” (Lara). Despite an initially consensual discourse, when they talk about their experiences at school, they identify episodes in the peer relationships network where gender plays a significant role in conflicts during games (soccer and basketball). *“When I played soccer, they criticised me for being a girl. The ball wouldn’t come to me... the same thing happened to a classmate of ours last year, Leonor.”* (Lara).

Apparently, they seem to have difficulty identifying other episodes, which is also a sign that it is necessary to continue discussing these topics. Inês mentions, *“I don’t know if this counts, but they say that women have to do the housework.”* They unanimously state that in their families, both fathers and mothers share household chores. As a proposal for intervention in combating gender inequalities, both believe that *“we need to respect all people”* (Inês) or *“they should come together to take action.”* (Lara), referring to adults in general.

- Poverty or School as a “Lifeline”

When they raise the question of the meaning of being poor and being rich, as well as their differences, the dichotomy of poor versus rich naturally emerges, with a focus on financial possessions that allow families to meet their basic needs, as Madalena puts it, “being poor is having financial difficulties or even not having a home, food, or money to support the family. Being rich means having all these ‘things’”.

However, being rich also corresponds to, in Luísa’s words, having a family. In this context, the family is a “wealth” and a source of “happiness” that compensates for the absence of material possessions. Here, it is also possible to hear about their precarious situations when the unemployment of some parents is mentioned. On one hand, this situation prevents the acquisition of material goods, but on the other hand, it allows the children to have the “company of their parents at home” and of the family, which brings them happiness. In contrast, rich children “become sadder” because they don’t have their parents at home.

In response to the question “What do you know about children’s poverty?”, although they acknowledge the existence of poor children in Portugal, their concern is primarily focused on poverty experienced in other regions, particularly in African countries.

To combat these situations, the children point to education as a form of social mobility, essential for addressing school, social, and economic inequalities among children, in that it helps them escape poverty. Education provides them with a future, and thus, they can help their family members (both close and distant). “Education is essential for all children, and it can help them have a better future” (Madalena).

Final remarks

The proposal of the children to create a podcast, which was realized within the Citizenship and Development (CeD) discipline, allowed for several theoretical and methodological advancements: i) It enabled the characterization of the understandings that children develop regarding the four social aspects under consideration, which structure their experiences and the ways they live their childhood; ii) It provided an analysis of the social and educational processes that construct their multiple identities as children within that school; iii) It countered the idea that children lack the capacity to think about complex subjects like those analysed, or that their discourse is simplistic or exotic; iv) It contributed to the adoption of more active pedagogical strategies in which everyone is regarded as democratic subjects because they are listened to, work in groups, and make decisions (for example, the podcast’s dissemination was initiated by the children in the class’s WhatsApp group, in addition to formal sharing with the school and the lead teacher); v) It encouraged reflection on the challenges inherent in the research process involving children within a school context (such as the role of adults and adulthood, coexisting different temporalities – those of research, school, adults, and children, among others – which are not always aligned).

The attentive listening to the voices of children regarding rights, discriminations, differences, gender, and poverty allows us to outline, in a synthetic way, a set of dimensions that have as much relevance as concerns and preoccupations in their testimonies about these subjects. Regarding children’s rights, one can understand a conception starting from themselves, i.e., from their life experiences and an idealised vision. Regarding discriminations and differences, the coexistence of discriminatory practices in school between peers with limited intervention from adults is observed. When discussing gender issues, despite recognizing discriminatory practices in their daily lives, especially from boys towards girls, the topic does not seem to have sparked much discussion.

Finally, looking at and talking about poverty/wealth through the eyes and voices of children once again refers to their worlds and networks of relationships, with the family playing a significant role. The balance they make between ‘time and money’ stands out, meaning that the value of time outweighs the value of money. The lack of recognition of contexts of poverty ‘here and now’ ended up being absent from the discussion.

In this alignment and considering that social relationships among children in school are often permeated by issues of power, violence, and discrimination, often overlooked by both adults and children, it deserves greater educational and pedagogical attention. This entails numerous challenges, placing education professionals in the unavoidable need to confront and engage with a diversity of children who carry with them a set of representations of themselves, the world, and others.

The ongoing research leads us to assert the need to rethink contextualised educational and pedagogical practices, where listening to the real needs and interests of each group of children is considered and where participation is not mere rhetoric, a trend, or a passing fad. Even though projects are promoted based on citizenship that does not exclude social groups, these continue to be exceptions rather than the regular practice experienced in schools. As for the Citizenship and Development subject, there is a reinforced need for a critical analysis of educational policy references, as well as processes that promote greater engagement in creating a teacher-student community. This is important to prevent directed practices from absolving themselves of the responsibility to guide children in the construction of their knowledge. This aligns with what Nóvoa advocated in an interview with Lomba and Filho (2022, p. 6), where he stated that “each teacher is not alone with their students but in a collaborative, cooperative situation”.

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