**PAPER**

# Indagações sobre a pobreza: o que dizem as crianças matriculadas na educação infantil

# Questions about poverty: what children enrolled in early childhood education say

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## ABSTRACT

This article comes from the questions that arose in meetings with children aged 5 and 6, enrolled in a class at a Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education (CMEI), located in a peripheral neighborhood of the city of Vitória, in Espírito Santo. It investigates how children understand poverty and what they (re)produce from the social imaginaries about it while problematizing this condition by conceptualizing it as a complex phenomenon with multiple facets. As a methodology, it adopts participatory research, with conversation circles and the production of drawings by children, elements relevant to the pedagogical routine of Early Childhood Education. To support the debate, it uses authors such as Arroyo (2019), Sarmento (2002, 2004), and Rego and Pinzani (2014). The results show that children are not alien to the impoverished contexts in which they live, announcing how they interpret the condition of poverty and deal with it. Children understand that this condition presupposes the denial of fundamental rights, such as the right to housing, food, and deprivation of the use of basic social services. Considering that children are subjects of knowledge and culture; the school cannot neglect the debate on the theme of poverty in Early Childhood Education and overcome moralizing views of poverty.

*Palavras-chave:* Child Education. Research With Children. Poverty.

## RESUMO

Este artigo provém das indagações que surgiram nos encontros com crianças de 5 e 6 anos, matriculadas em uma turma de um Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil (CMEI), localizado em um bairro periférico da cidade de Vitória, no Espírito Santo. Investiga o modo como as crianças compreendem a pobreza e o que (re)produzem a partir dos imaginários sociais sobre ela, ao passo

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que problematiza essa condição social conceituando-a como um fenômeno complexo e de múltiplas facetas. Como metodologia, adota a pesquisa participante, com a realização de rodas de conversas e a produção de desenhos pelas crianças, elementos pertinentes ao cotidiano pedagógico da Educação Infantil. Para fundamentar o debate, recorre a autores como Arroyo (2019), Sarmento (2002, 2004) e Rego e Pinzani (2014). Os resultados evidenciam que as crianças não estão alheias aos contextos empobrecidos em que vivem, anunciando como interpretam a condição de pobreza e lidam com ela. As crianças entendem que essa condição pressupõe a negação de direitos fundamentais, como direito à moradia e à alimentação, além da privação da utilização de serviços sociais básicos. Considerando que as crianças são sujeitos de conhecimentos e culturas, a escola não pode negligenciar o debate sobre a temática da pobreza na Educação Infantil, buscando superar visões moralizantes.

*Palabras-clave:* Pesquisa com Crianças. Pobreza.

## Poverty and Children: Research Perspectives

This article[1] delves into the experiences of childhood in impoverished environments, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the life trajectories of boys and girls whose existence is shaped by poverty—a consequence of social inequality—and the infringement of their rights. Consequently, we aimed to examine how 5- and 6-year-old children, attending a Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education (Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil, CMEI) in the municipal network of Vitória, in Espírito Santo (ES), comprehend poverty and what they (re)produce based on social imaginaries about it. Simultaneously, we critically examine this social situation by conceptualizing it as a complex phenomenon with multiple facets.

Poverty is often perceived through a moral lens, linked to the absence of material possessions and moral values, a perspective that frequently attributes responsibility to individuals for their impoverished state, perpetuating a naturalized societal view of poverty (Arroyo, 2015).

Contrary to this prevalent perception ingrained in the social imagination, we conceptualize poverty as an outcome of historical and social processes manifesting across various dimensions of life. According to Cararo (2015), poverty is characterized by inequitable income distribution and a lack of access to essential services, proper working conditions, political and social participation, and the denial of rights outlined in the Federal Constitution of 1988. This phenomenon stems from the prevailing economic production model in our society—capitalism—which exacerbates social inequalities and structurally fosters social exclusion (Mattei, 2017).

By attributing capitalism as a driving force behind social inequalities, Yazbek (2012) defines poverty as a phenomenon "ingrained in our daily experiences," deeming the impacts of this living situation, which affects a significant portion of the population, "destructive." For the author, the various dimensions of poverty manifest in precarious forms of employment and adverse conditions prevalent in impoverished settings, given that "[...] insufficient food, hunger, fatigue, ignorance,

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[1] The article "Inquiries about Poverty: what children enrolled in Early Childhood Education say" is associated with a broader study conducted by the Special Education Study Group: Training, pedagogical practices, and school inclusion policies, which have been duly approved by the Ethics Committee on Research with Human Beings at Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, under Opinion No. 3,625,003.

resignation, revolt, tension, and fear are indicators that frequently signal the constraints of the living situation for those excluded and subordinated in society" (Yazbek , 2012, p. 290).

Drawing on research about the theme (Yazbek  2012; Cararo, 2015; Mattei, 2017), we argue that poverty and social inequalities permeate various societal and spatial realms, whether urban, rural, or on the streets, and extend into educational institutions, emphasizing that poverty occurs at the margins of human existence. Poverty adversely impacts lives, rendering them precarious due to not meeting the basic conditions needed for a dignified livelihood (Arroyo, 2013).

Within this societal framework dominated by capital and market relations, maintaining the *status quo* of poverty for those excluded based on class, gender, and ethnicity is significant for the dominant classes. Thus, those who deviate from socially predetermined norms due to poverty find themselves deprived of access to fundamental rights (Arroyo, 2015).

Additionally, we highlight that young children, particularly those in early childhood, bear the brunt of impoverishment. For the longest time, they were overlooked in public policies, including educational and economic initiatives in the country (Rosemberg, 2006). In Brazil, thousands of children reside in contexts of poverty and extreme poverty, facing a life marked by hunger, lack, violence, neglect, and degrading conditions during childhood.

Recognizing the unique circumstances of children's lives underscores the diverse ways they experience this stage of life. Hence, we use the term "childhoods" to acknowledge the multitude of experiences in rural and urban settings, as well as in *quilombola*, riverside, and indigenous communities. This encompasses child populations living both in poverty and extreme poverty. We share the understanding that the child

> [...] has a history, exists within a geography, and belongs to a specific social class, establishing relationships defined by its context of origin and developing a language that results from established social and cultural relations. They fill a space that, more than being solely geographic, is also one of value (Kramer, 1986, p. 79).

This implies that concepts and depictions of the essence of childhood and the experience of being a child, along with the conditions of existence, undergo continual processes of redefinition. This is rooted in the restructuring of everyday lives within contemporary society, impacting families, schools, and public spaces (Sarmento, 2002).

Therefore, this work aims to critically examine the issue of poverty in collaboration with children, engaging in a process of listening and dialogue to comprehend the socially (re)produced perspectives of impoverished contexts through their narratives. We question how children perceive poverty and what they (re)produce based on social imaginaries about it. In discussing poverty and extreme poverty with children in Early Childhood Education, we initiated conversation circles, documenting their speeches and drawings to understand the interpretations they formulate regarding these social conditions.

This article stems from a research project titled *Avaliação da aprendizagem na Educação Infantil e os contextos de vida das crianças empobrecidas na cidade de Vitória-ES* (Assessment of learning in Early Childhood Education and the life contexts of impoverished children in the city of Vitória-ES), which facilitated training initiatives involving professionals working in Municipal Centers

for Early Childhood Education (CMEI) within the city network and contributed to the development of new knowledge regarding pedagogical practices that consider the experiences of children living in poverty and extreme poverty.

When carrying out the research, we recognized the importance of engaging in dialogues with children to envision school as a space that fosters a sense of belonging and meaningful relationships with their peers, adults, and the wider world. This approach aims to encourage the exercise of citizenship, emphasizing the necessity for the political and social involvement of these new generations (Sarmento, 2002).

## Method

The research *Avaliação da aprendizagem na Educação Infantil e os contextos de vida das crianças empobrecidas na cidade de Vitória-ES* was conducted throughout 2019 (March-August), allowing for engagement with 70 education professionals interested in enhancing their theoretical and practical knowledge regarding the interplay between childhood, Early Childhood Education, and impoverished contexts. In collaboration with one of the teachers involved in the broader study, we focused on investigating children's narratives about their life contexts, the areas where they reside, and their perceptions of poverty. Notably, the CMEI is situated in a peripheral area of the city of Vitória.

Given the opportunity to engage with 5- and 6-year-old children, we implemented conversation circles to grasp their understanding of poverty and its impact on the social contexts in which they live. Employing the principles of participatory research, we recognized that this methodology allows for the observation and analysis of narratives produced by children on the central theme of the study. We cultivated connections with the researched group by adopting a role where we, as researchers, refrained from directly steering the conversation. Instead, we placed ourselves more as observers of the events unfolding in that space. This "[...] does not imply that observation lacks consciousness, direction, or a specific purpose. The procedure has a systematic character" (Marconi, Lakatos, 2003, p. 193).

Thus, we embraced the use of conversation circles as a strategy for engaging with children, fostering dialogue, and facilitating the exchange of experiences among them and with adults.

> Conversation circles bring us joy because they provide children with the opportunity to express their thoughts, listen to teachers, and establish dialogical relationships. Through this, teachers can gain insights into the cultures, habits, curiosities, interests, and/or questions that children may have (Vargas; Pereira; Motta, 2016, p. 123).

The premise is that conversation circles serve as an opportune time and space for dialogue among participants, fostering meetings, knowledge exchange, and active, sensitive listening to what children think, feel, and understand (Bombassaro, 2010).

We conducted observations of the children's group between May and July 2019, engaging in dialogue with the teacher and the pedagogical team throughout this period. To facilitate the conversation circles, we used the classroom where the children studied as the designated space-

time. Over the observation period, three conversation circles took place, involving the following number of children aged 5 and 6 years old: 12 on the first day, 10 on the second, and 11 on the third. The teacher organized the participants in a circle, encouraging a conversation about topics not typically discussed, and initiated the dialogue with the question "What is poverty?", triggering narratives and further questions.

The structure of this moment assumes that "[...] a new topic can be introduced by any participant in the circle and will be discussed by everyone involved. These speeches stimulate conversations, dialogues, and reflections" (Vargas; Pereiras; Motta, 2016, p. 123), not only among children but also the adults present in this dialogue.

Building on this premise, during the meetings, our focus was on ensuring that the children's expressions unfolded organically so that the little ones could freely articulate their emotions and perceptions concerning the given topic. Simultaneously, these sessions aimed to acknowledge the diverse cultures among the children, prompting us to (re)think and (re)create spaces and times that align with children's ways of being, thinking, and acting in the world (Hernandez-Piloto, 2008).

Therefore, we agreed with the teacher that, in the initial moment with the children, we would just listen to the children without interference, allowing them to express their opinions about their daily lives. Observation, in this context, extends beyond the practices of watching and listening. By observing, the researcher detaches from preconceived notions, enabling the recognition of emerging issues (Minayo, 2013)

In addition to the conversation circles, another method employed to gather data involved organizing the children to express their understanding of the phenomenon of poverty through drawings. Within this framework, drawing (or pictorial recording) serves as a means of representing the impressions children have about the world, how they construct meanings from their experiences, and an avenue for their language and communication (Santos; Silveira, 2016).

The chosen instrument for recording data was the field diary, used to document the children's narratives and the researchers' impressions of the context experienced. We opted against incorporating visual resources, such as photographs and filming, to avoid diverting the class's attention. The objective was to assess how the term "poverty" takes shape in the social imagination, drawing from what children hear and discuss with their peers and the adults present in their daily lives — be it at school, in the family environment, or other spaces.

The investigation was rooted in conceptions of childhood and Early Childhood Education, as contemplated by the sociology of childhood, referencing the works of Sarmento (2002, 2004) and Hernandez-Piloto (2008), and understanding childhoods within the diverse contexts of children's lives. In the discourse surrounding the analysis of poverty as a category, we further explore the studies conducted by Arroyo (2013, 2015, 2019), Cararo (2015), and Rego and Pinzani (2014), portraying poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by historical and social factors.

## Early Childhood Education in Impoverished Contexts

Emerging from the grassroots movements of women in the 1970s and 1980s, the entitlement

to early childhood education found recognition in the 1988 Federal Constitution. Since then, Early Childhood Education has evolved as the foundational stage of basic education, solidifying its position through public policies as an integral component of the Brazilian educational system, which is designed to ensure quality care for children aged 0 to 5 years old.

Nevertheless, as of today, Early Childhood Education for 4- to 5-year-olds has not achieved universality due to a shortage of available spaces across the country. For children aged 0 to 3, the first target set in the National Education Plan (2014-2024) to expand places by 50% has not yet been met. Data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Pesquisa Nacional de Amostra por Domicílio Contínua, PNADC) and Fundação Maria Cecília Souto Vidigal (FMCSV), both from 2021, reveal that approximately 5 million children need care in daycare centers. Of this total, 75.6% are from the poorest and most vulnerable groups.

The Transforming Education with Equitable Financing report (UNICEF, 2023) highlights that these underprivileged children face greater challenges in accessing schools. This is attributed to residing in more remote or inaccessible areas, having limited access to digital technologies and media, and enduring precarious living conditions. In this context, it is evident that children from impoverished backgrounds bear a significant impact from the failure to secure their right to Early Childhood Education.

Conversely, Early Childhood Education, following the promulgation of the Education Guidelines and Bases Law No. 9394 from December 20, 1996, and subsequent frameworks like the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, grounds its pedagogical approach on the conception that

> [...] the child, placed at the center of curriculum planning, is a subject of history and rights. Through interactions, relationships, and daily experiences, they construct their personal and collective identity, engage in play, imagination, fantasy, wishing, learning, observation, experimentation, narration, questioning, and the construction of meanings about nature and society, thereby producing culture" (Brasil, 2009, p. 1).

Grounded in the understanding that children are historical-social subjects, it becomes imperative, in developing pedagogical approaches for such young individuals, for early childhood education institutions to familiarize themselves with the families and communities they belong to, drawing from the identity and memory of each social group. It is equally crucial to grasp the distinctions in class, ethnicity, religion, family structure, language, history, and culture, along with the interrelationships of children within the community constitution (Brasil, 2013).

These practices enable both children and teachers to assimilate the knowledge produced by their cultural group and society. Thus, pedagogical initiatives in Early Childhood Education are "[...] intricately linked to children's surroundings and daily lives, expanding their possibilities for action in the world and outlining avenues for them to experience their childhood" (Brasil, 2013, p. 89).

In this context, we reaffirm the diversity of childhoods and the establishment of the school as a social space that values various existing cultures, fostering an affirmative relationship between children and their group, making Early Childhood Education into a space-time that allows children to learn about the contributions of different peoples and cultures to society, creating conditions for

boys and girls to broaden their perspectives, actions, and social participation in the world (Brasil, 2013).

Sarmento (2002) underscores that children are embedded in different social and cultural contexts, such as peasant, *quilombola*, indigenous, and landless movement childhoods. Consequently, they develop plural identities and distinct characteristics shaped by their interactions with the environment they inhabit. Childhood undergoes transformative processes but remains a social category, solidified in social status based on rights directed at these subjects. Recognizing children's rights to health, education, and housing is crucial to ensuring the right to live childhood with dignity (Arroyo, 2019).

How can we conceive educational processes that take into account a childhood marked by poverty, hunger, and the denial of rights? We acknowledge that addressing this challenge "[...] is not an easy task [...] to be carried out in a world continuously permeated by systematic violations of fundamental rights and the normalization of inequalities, poverty, and social exclusion" (Mendonça, 2015, p. 36).

Nevertheless, education serves as a public policy that facilitates the promotion and defense of rights and life. The school, as a significant agent, plays a crucial role in disrupting the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Thus, it is imperative to ensure educational processes that recognize the inviolability of the human being in its diverse dimensions: social, affective, cognitive, and political.

When engaging in reflections with children about the concept of poverty, adults' perspectives are also directed toward this crucial issue, allowing teachers to contemplate the realities experienced by children and fostering a deeper understanding of the authentic childhoods that enter school spaces. By doing so, it is possible to transcend moralizing and stereotypical views, facilitating genuine conversations with children about their actual life trajectories.

## In Conversation Circles and Drawings, What Do Children Tell Us?

By initiating discussions about poverty among children, the idealized notion of childhood as pure, sweet, and innocent is shattered, creating space for authentic life trajectories and allowing children to articulate their daily life experiences. Arroyo (2015) emphasizes the need to step beyond romanticized and overly simplistic images created about children, images that do not align with their survival strategies, thought processes, and behaviors, as such images may also hinder people from truly listening and understanding what children convey through various channels of interaction. Children, it seems, are challenging us to reconsider our perceptions of their childhoods, prompting us to build alternative images that better capture the complexities of their experiences.

The organization of the meetings facilitated the exchange of knowledge, and the narratives "[...] were not merely heard or confined to a particular theoretical and/or political framework but comprehended, allowing us to recognize that these narratives carried contextual influences inherent to the children's daily lives (Gonçalves, 2019, p. 132).

Within the teacher-led conversation circles, children engaged in singing familiar songs from their routine, discussed classmates who did not attend school, narrated events from their daily

lives, and organized the day's activities on the calendar. During the first conversation, the teacher explained the diversity of living conditions worldwide, noting that not everyone experiences life in the same way. She then said that some live in poverty, while asking the children: "What is poverty?" Emphasizing that everyone could share their thoughts and ideas without judgment, the teacher encouraged active listening among the children. A moment of silence lingered in the group before the children[2] began to respond, as depicted in the following narrative:

L.: "It's when a person becomes poor!"

Teacher: "But what does it mean for a person to be poor? What is poverty?"

H. listens carefully and raises a finger: "When people don't have money to buy food."

M., who sits by their side, adds: "Yes, teacher. Poor people ask for money on the street to buy food."

Following the conversation circle, the teacher encouraged the children to further articulate their thoughts by creating drawings. In addition to conveying their comprehension of poverty and its association with hunger and destitution faced by impoverished people, the children used their drawings to share their perspectives on the dehumanizing aspects of life experienced by those in extreme poverty. Santos and Silveira (2016) shed light on the significance of drawing in the context of Early Childhood Education, emphasizing that pictorial records serve as a means for children to express and represent their thoughts.

K.'s drawing (Image 1) vividly captures the harsh conditions of starvation to which impoverished individuals are exposed, providing a glimpse into the lived realities as perceived by the children.

**Image 1** — Drawing by K. depicting poverty and deprivation



**Source:** *K.'s drawing vividly illustrates a boy sleeping on cardboard, a girl begging for money, and a person searching for food in a garbage can.*

A representation of poverty emerges through K.'s depiction, highlighting the deprivation of fundamental rights, such as access to nutrition and appropriate housing. In line with the insights

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[2] We chose to use capital letters to designate the children participating in the initiative.

from Rego and Pinzani (2014), it is argued that hunger represents the most degrading aspect of experiencing poverty, as individuals lack the basic means for daily nourishment. The authors assert that situations of hunger and poverty expose those affected to shame and humiliation, a condition arising from the actions or neglect of both the State and society. This denial of the right to food, as imposed by the State and society, places individuals in a state of starvation that jeopardizes their physical integrity and lives.

Children's narratives also underscore the economic dimension, particularly in the current socioeconomic landscape — of capitalism —, where the lack of "money" leads to social exclusion. This pattern concentrates income for some while generating poverty and social inequalities for a significant portion of the population. It is added that "[...] perpetuating the poverty situation of these groups has been, throughout our social and political history, the most brutal method of keeping them in a state of inferiority, oppression, and unequal access to social, political, and economic rights" (Arroyo, 2015, p. 17).

Consequently, the absence of "money," as highlighted by the children, denies individuals in poverty the ability to make choices. A shortage of income to meet basic needs compels those in situations of extreme material or physiological deprivation to persist in this ongoing cycle of poverty (Rego; Pizzani, 2014).

Resuming the ongoing dialogue with the children and armed with pen and paper, the teacher once again prompts discussions about the meaning of poverty, stating: "I will write down everything you tell me! Go ahead, T.!"

T.: "Poverty is when a person has nowhere to live!"

AL.: "Yes, teacher. People sometimes live on the street!"

K. again responds to the teacher saying:

K.: "There are some people who even sleep in cardboard boxes."

The children's perception of poverty, specifically as the absence of housing, is also evident in the drawing (Image 2) created by E. The illustration depicts an individual sleeping on the street, surrounded by garbage, on a makeshift bed of cardboard. This portrayal sheds light on the realities present in urban contexts, where population groups living on the streets are observable in various city spaces such as streets and squares.

**Image 2** — Drawing by E. depicting poverty and homelessness



**Source:** Drawing by E. that represents a person sleeping on the street, on a makeshift bed of cardboard, next to a garbage can.

The analysis of both drawings and the accompanying narratives prompts a critical examination of the limited perspective of poverty solely defined by economic bias. This scenario underscores the urgency of integrating discussions on poverty into pedagogical practices. Starting from Early Childhood Education, it is crucial to provide children with opportunities to comprehend the various facets arising from the phenomena of poverty and extreme poverty. As subjects in training, the children's understanding of the analyzed subject reveals the absence of meaningful discourse within the school curriculum, underscoring a gap that needs addressing in the initial and ongoing training of teachers. It is imperative to broaden the discourse to encompass a comprehensive understanding of poverty

> [...] as a structural and intricate phenomenon, characterized by its multidimensional and multifaceted nature. It should not be viewed solely as a deficiency in income but also as a manifestation of inequality in the distribution of socially generated wealth, limited access to fundamental public services, information, dignified employment, and opportunities for meaningful social and political participation (Cararo, 2015, p. 141).

The absence or insufficiency of income is a determining factor for the deprivation of access to basic supplies needed for survival. However, poverty should not be viewed solely from an economic perspective that exclusively contemplates the lack of income or the failure to achieve it. "Certain aspects of poverty can be deemed ethical, revolving around notions of self-respect and autonomy, and which need to be considered." For these reasons, it is opportune to consider the different facets of poverty in Brazil (Rego; Pinzzani, 2015, p. 23).

The narratives produced by the children during the meetings also highlighted correlations they made between poverty and access to employment. In this context, KW., while looking at the

teacher, relates the issue to the lack of jobs: "It's just that sometimes, people don't have a job." With this, G. adds: "There are people who pick up trash!"

The absence of employment and/or the challenging working conditions faced by adults living with economically disadvantaged children are depicted in L.'s drawing when portraying an individual collecting garbage (Image 3) for survival. Furthermore, in the illustration, the facial expression and the positioning of the arms convey a sense of sorrow, providing insight into the emotional impact of poverty on the subjects.

**Image 3** — A child's drawing depicting poverty and labor



**Source:** L.'s drawing represents a person "picking up trash."

While some narratives and drawings may narrow down poverty to economic aspects, the works of KW., G., and L. exemplify an understanding that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. In this perspective, the lack of material possessions and the denial of rights signify the absence of adequate living conditions. According to Rego and Pinzani (2014, p. 49), "[...] the experience of injustice is that of violation of a series of fundamental normative expectations and, therefore, represents a qualitative experience."

This implies that the state of poverty presupposes the infringement of fundamental rights, including housing, food, and other necessities, as well as the deprivation of the use of basic social and public services, such as adequate transportation, basic sanitation, water supply, energy and cleanliness, access to education, leisure, and employment.

This understanding of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon is also reiterated in the narratives of other children and described from a child's perspective.

Upon noticing a silent child in the circle, the teacher inquires: And what is poverty for you, KS.?

KS.: "Most people in poverty can't take a shower."

Attentive to his colleague's speech, JM. adds: "Yes, they even walk barefoot on the street!"

We comprehend the ordeals of poverty as shared by millions of children, teenagers, young people, and adults existing on the brink of survival. The profound social inequalities in the country exacerbate poverty, pushing thousands into critical subsistence situations. For children, poverty manifests in the presence of individuals without homes who rely on financial assistance from others to survive. This context prompts us to link the situations depicted by the children to the scarcity of employment and the absence of the State as a guarantor of social rights.

**Image 4** — Drawing by K. depicting poverty and lack of rights
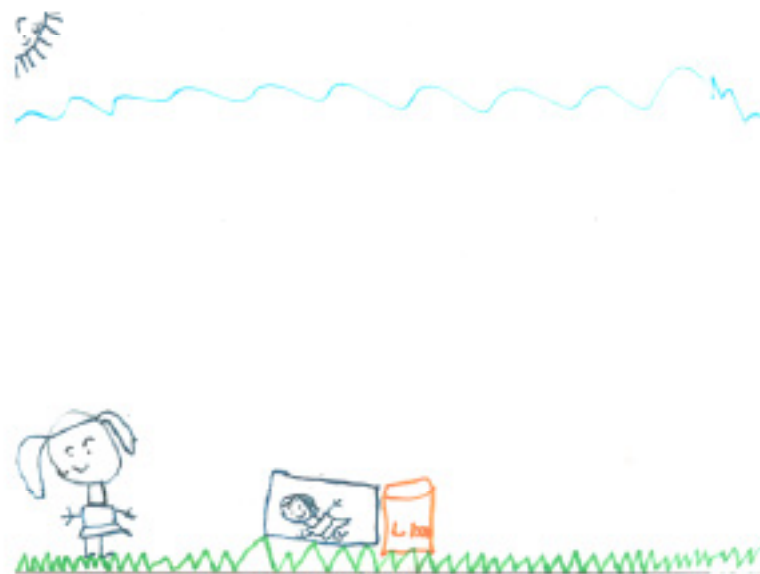


**Source:** In K.'s drawing, a girl is depicted sleeping on cardboard, while another girl is shown begging for money.

In light of this, we advocate for the necessity to overcome moralizing perspectives in society, where impoverished individuals are unjustly held responsible for their own situation of poverty and extreme poverty. In recent years, the escalation of social inequalities, stemming from factors such as unemployment, poverty, Brazilian economic instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic, among others, has led to a surge in the number of people living on the streets in urban centers.

Statistical data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE) via the Social Indicators System (SIS) on poverty reveal that in 2019, 24.7% of the population lived at or below the poverty line, with the largest portion being in the northeastern region and among black and brown women.

In 2021, during the global pandemic and worsening economic crisis in Brazil — marked by the cessation of emergency aid[3], increased unemployment, high inflation, and deepening inequalities — over 62.9 million Brazilians had a *per capita* household income of up to BRL 497. This elevated the rate of the Brazilian population below the poverty line from 24.7% to 29.6% (IBGE, 2022).

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[3] The emergency aid served as a vital benefit provided by the federal government in Brazil to ensure a minimum income for the most vulnerable population during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was approved by the Federal Chamber and Senate through Law No. 13,982 on April 2, 2020.

In addition to the previously discussed productions, another drawing has captured our attention given this social configuration. Through the portrayal of "everyone in poverty," Child G. offers a social interpretation of the city in which he lives. It reveals a keen awareness of the living situation of many people experiencing poverty and extreme poverty, dispelling any notion of indifference or insensitivity on his part.  The illustration serves as a visual representation of the inhabited territory, depicting various scenes of individuals or groups grappling with the absence of housing, food, protection, health, and education. It signifies an impoverished, peripheral, and marginalized context that encompasses diverse facets of poverty.

As depicted in the drawing, individuals resort to searching for food in trash cans, begging for money, and sleeping on the streets—illustrating the harsh realities witnessed by children in their impoverished daily lives. This representation provides researchers, like us, with a synthesis of situations depicted by other children. It emphasizes how poverty affects individuals in distinct ways, resulting in social subalternity and deprivation of both material and immaterial goods.

Arroyo (2015) contends that society engenders processes of inferiorization and marginalization from childhood, with classificatory practices rooted in social, economic, and historical relations. According to Arroyo (2019), childhoods in poverty are imperiled lives, subject to historical tensions where some lives are recognized as worthy of living, while others are seen as potential threats deserving of extermination and deemed unworthy of existence.

**Image 5** — Drawing by G. depicting people in poverty



**Source:**  Drawing by G., which he refers to as "everyone in poverty."

The narratives and drawings have provided invaluable insights into how children articulate the concepts of poverty and extreme poverty. They have underscored the children's connection to a non-idealized world, vividly depicting the deprivation of social rights. Given this backdrop, the debate on the social conditions experienced by thousands of Brazilians in situations of poverty and extreme poverty becomes urgent. This discussion is essential and should not be overlooked in educational institutions, including Early Childhood Education. It is necessary to consider that

> [...] the knowledge and experiences emerging from the social practice that individuals encounter daily constitute a crucial starting point for the acquisition of knowledge embedded in the school organization, which pertains to objectification 'towards oneself,' emphasizing the increasing recognition of this process (Sperandio, 2019, p. 206).

In the tensions present within school contexts, Arroyo (2015) underscores two significant movements for integrating the discourse on education and poverty into schools and incorporating it into pedagogical practices. The first involves recognizing poverty as a historical and social process, characterized by a concentration of income and power. This understanding aims to overcome the moralizing view of poverty as a fault of impoverished individuals, ensuring that they are *aware* of their lower economic status. The second movement entails conceptualizing the curriculum as a compilation of knowledge socially and historically produced by humanity, which encourages the contemplation of pedagogical practices that seek to challenge both the hegemonic and exclusionary conceptions. This approach could pave the way for poverty to be gradually acknowledged as part of the curriculum and pedagogical practices, shaped by historical-social relations of poverty.

According to the author, school curricula have historically neglected impoverished groups and the concept of poverty. This oversight has led to the perpetuation of pedagogical practices that are disconnected from the lifestyles of those living in poverty. It underscores the essential understanding of who these individuals are, delving into their stories and life trajectories. Moreover, it emphasizes the consideration of these life stages and experiences within the school context, contemplating children from various dimensions: social, cultural, affective, emotional, and cognitive.

These urban scenarios vividly portray the reality witnessed in Brazilian cities and mirror the knowledge generated by children through their interactions with and within the city, prompting us to recognize that the city holds multiple meanings. Examining these meanings through the lens of children "[...] is a method of shifting perspectives, honing sensitivities, and challenging the school to break free from the totalization of its knowledge (Araújo, 2019, p. 321).

## Some Considerations

Through the analysis of narratives and drawings, we acknowledge how children perceive the social reality around them, making reflections on these scenarios, hence the importance of recognizing them as individuals situated in history, influencing and being influenced by various conditioning factors of social life.

Examining children's narratives and drawings within the theoretical framework leads to the understanding that social inequalities stem from the existing economic system. They are rooted in the denial of basic rights and societal neglect, prompting reflection on the urgent need to address poverty in schools.

Delving into reflections on poverty in Early Childhood Education involves integrating teaching with diverse subjects and varied experiences. Poverty cannot be naturalized or overlooked in school contexts. As schools are spaces for affirming rights, it necessitates new perspectives, teaching approaches, and pedagogical practices with children.

The analysis of children's creations suggests their capacity to comprehend the society they inhabit and articulate how they perceive various manifestations of poverty, discerning its impact on societal life. Sarmento (2002) emphasizes the necessity of viewing children as subjects embedded in history, actively contributing to cultures and knowledge. This entails recognizing children as social beings navigating diverse contexts, articulating and expressing how they interpret and cope with poverty and extreme poverty.

Through conversation circles, we grasped that poverty permeates various aspects of life — in the streets, under bridges, on the outskirts of cities, and within schools. It is imperative to confront this issue and adopt a political stance regarding the reality faced by millions of children who, despite having access to education, lack guaranteed rights to an education that considers their social contexts (Garcia *et al.*, 2017).

We also contemplate how children perceive themselves in these impoverished scenarios and conclude that they produce or have produced perspectives that distance them from poverty contexts. It appears as if they believe they are in better condition than the subjects depicted in the drawings. In essence, children do not identify themselves among the impoverished individuals they represent, perhaps because they do not scavenge for food or sleep on cardboard or in makeshift shelters. Despite this lack of self-identification with poverty, our observations, gathered from the children's statements, indicate their sensitivity to the inhumane conditions prevalent among individuals experiencing extreme poverty. This discomfort arises from the awareness that some people must subsist on discarded food and lack adequate shelter or a place to live.

Critical and reflective consideration of poverty is imperative. It involves contemplating what poverty entails and how educational institutions, specifically through curricular initiatives and the implementation of pedagogical practices, can collaborate with other public policies to create opportunities for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The ultimate goal is to foster an inclusive education that embraces everyone.

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