

Citizenship since childhood and education for democracy: from the denial of speech to the perspective of strengthening the voice of the child

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the theoretical assumptions that underlie the promotion of citizenship since childhood in school education as the basis of education for democracy. As a result of theoretical research and a qualitative approach, with data obtained from a bibliographic review, the study highlights the legal milestones on childhood in Brazil, from the end of the 19th century to the present, considering its interface with global legislation. It also seeks to answer some guiding questions about the relationship between citizenship, childhood and education, among them: what are the fundamentals for citizenship to be worked with in school as a content of education for democracy? We conclude that education for democracy must create educational opportunities and methodological alternatives in the school environment that aim at building and experiencing citizenship since childhood, and it is essential to consider and strengthen the voice of children.

KEYWORDS

citizenship; childhood; education; democracy; child's voice.

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CIDADANIA DESDE A INFÂNCIA E EDUCAÇÃO PARA A DEMOCRACIA: DA NEGAÇÃO DA FALA À PERSPECTIVA DE FORTALECIMENTO DA VOZ DA CRIANÇA

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar os pressupostos teóricos que fundamentam a promoção da cidadania desde a infância, na educação escolar, como base da educação para a democracia. Fruto de pesquisa teórica e abordagem qualitativa, com dados obtidos em revisão bibliográfica, o estudo destaca os marcos legais sobre a infância no Brasil, desde o final do século XIX até a atualidade, considerando sua interface com a legislação mundial. Busca também responder a algumas questões orientadoras acerca da relação entre cidadania, infância e educação, entre elas: quais os fundamentos para que a cidadania seja trabalhada na escola como conteúdo da educação para a democracia? Conclui-se que a educação para a democracia deve criar oportunidades pedagógicas e alternativas metodológicas no ambiente escolar que visem à construção e à vivência da cidadania desde a infância, sendo imprescindível considerar e fortalecer a voz das crianças.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

cidadania; infância; educação; democracia; voz da criança.

CIUDADANÍA DESDE LA INFANCIA Y EDUCACIÓN PARA LA DEMOCRACIA: DE LA NEGACIÓN DEL HABLAR A LA PERSPECTIVA DE FORTALECER LA VOZ DEL NIÑO

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los supuestos teóricos que sustentan la promoción de la ciudadanía desde la infancia en la educación escolar como base de la educación para la democracia. Como resultado de una investigación teórica y un enfoque cualitativo, con datos obtenidos de una revisión bibliográfica, el estudio destaca los hitos legales sobre la infancia en Brasil, desde fines del siglo XIX hasta la actualidad, considerando su interfaz con la legislación global y busca responder algunas preguntas orientativas sobre la relación entre ciudadanía, infancia y educación, entre ellas: ¿Cuáles son las bases para que la ciudadanía se trabaje en la escuela como contenido de la educación para la democracia? Concluimos que la educación para la democracia debe generar oportunidades educativas y alternativas metodológicas en el ámbito escolar que apunten a construir y vivir la ciudadanía desde la niñez, y es fundamental considerar y fortalecer la voz de los niños.

PALABRAS CLAVE

ciudadanía; infancia; educación; democracia; voz de niño.

INTRODUCTION

The analyses proposed here are based on the understanding of children as members of one of the groups participating in society, as subjects that present themselves with their own ideas, capacity to choose and to issue opinions, as well as to participate directly in decisions about the various social contexts in which they live.

The state's and society's view regarding the capacity of the youngest to participate as active agents in the reflection about, proposition, and realization of their own rights has changed over the republican period in Brazil. Regarding this initial idea, the tension between a vision of the child as a passive "object" to whom "protective actions" are directed in a paternalistic way and the understanding of the child as a subject of rights stands out in the history of our country, in the period in question. This view does not exclude the protective aspect and the responsibility of the state and society in guaranteeing the rights of children, but also proposes a view of children and adolescents as people with the capacity for self-expression and to participate in decisions in matters associated to their lives. Based on these premises, this article is organized in two complementary moments.

Firstly, the legal milestones on childhood that occurred during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century in Brazil are highlighted, in dialogue with global legislation, in order to identify the advances and setbacks in the vision of the state and of society regarding the capacity of the youngest to participate as active agents in the discussion, proposition and implementation of their rights. This item includes examples of recent experiences that reveal the possibilities of exercising citizenship from childhood on, by means of projects or specific educational actions in non-schooling spaces.

Secondly, we seek to answer three questions that guide the reflections on citizenship exercised since childhood: what is the concept of citizenship taken as reference? What are the grounds for citizenship to be worked with in school as an educational content for democracy? Which particular characteristics of the child — the majority social group within the school — should be respected in order to achieve a project of education for democracy, which enables the exercise of citizenship from childhood? These questions aim, mainly, to contribute to clarify the theoretical assumptions that lead to the defense of the possibility of exercising citizenship from childhood and justify its promotion in school education. The last part of the text is dedicated to the final considerations.

THE PARADIGM OF "MINORITY" AS A SILENCING OF THE VOICE IN CHILDHOOD

In proposing a brief critical review of the formulation of laws concerning childhood in Brazil, we considered the idea that it is possible to detect, in a society's legal system, a synthesis of the adult view of children (Qvortrup, 2010).

The comprehension adopted in this study is that the social movement resulting from the tension between different interest groups that participate in the weaving of reality, sometimes anticipates the law and influences its revision, and sometimes is anticipated by legislators. Therefore, laws cannot be considered in isolation, for it is in the relationship between different parameters that the ar-

chitecture of childhood can be understood and the actions of adults in relation to children in a society are outlined.

The current legal system focuses on several aspects related to life in childhood and teenagerhood, in a very extensive way, in terms of care, protection, responsibilities, work, education, health, and professionalization, among others. But this has not always been the case. The inclusion of the rights of children and adolescents in the Brazilian and global legal scenario was practically nonexistent until the 19th century.

The actions aimed at this part of the population, for long periods, occurred almost entirely in the field of welfare, in a caritative manner, especially by religious orders, to assist children and adolescents seen as rejected and/or abandoned (Rizzini and Rizzini, 2004). However, what has been happening over the course of history, especially throughout the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, is the significant increase in the space for discussion of diverse points of view and the proposition of laws and policies directed at children and youth.

In opposition to the hegemonic view of the child's inability to express judgments and participate in decisions, a discourse has been built in the academic and political environment, with emphasis from the second half of the twentieth century, that presents the child as capable of formulating his or her own worldview and participating actively in actions that affect him or her in daily life.

This approach has gradually influenced in the development of legal statutes that refer to the various aspects of the life of the new generations, as well as in what interests us the most in the present analysis: the propositions of educational policies and projects aimed at the construction of citizenship in the school environment, especially focusing on political training and participatory performance of the student in school management, since childhood.

The social and political construction of children's rights arises dialectically in a political arena where there is a clash between the perspectives of different actors who present divergent and, in some cases, quite antagonistic views on the subject. In contemporary times, the perspective that considers the characteristics of citizenship from childhood on, and advocates for policies and actions that respect and realize the rights of children and adolescents, in our country has been

[...] incorporated in the agenda of political actors and in the official speeches very recently, as a result of the struggle of the social movements in the context of the elaboration of the 1988 Constitution. [...] The controversies regarding policies for childhood demonstrate this conflict of visions and strategies, for example, the one that refers to the divergence between those who favor punishment and those who favor dialogue, negotiation, educational measures. (Faleiros, 2011, p. 35)

The type of policy that provides support for the full experience of citizenship presupposes a relationship between the State and society that is different from that traditionally seen in Brazil since the colonial period, lingering through the Empire and the beginning of the Republic. This "new policy", in seeking to overcome the concept of "minorization of childhood" (Faleiros, 2011), is based on law and par-

icipation, to elaborate ways to act with the child (subject of rights/ in a peculiar situation of development / seen as an active being) and not on him/her (object to be shaped / paternalistic way / seen as a passive being), seeking to balance “the autonomy of the child, with social solidarity and the duty of the State to provide and defend their rights as citizens.” (Faleiros, 2011, p. 36)

The legal context at the beginning of the republican period in Brazil still did not point to the official attention to childhood, given the non-existence of references to children in the first Republican Constitution of 1891. There are only two allusions to education in that Constitution, which refer specifically to higher education and the secondary level (Breda, 2015).

This childhood invisibility at the beginning of the Republic, in the country’s maximum law, is an intriguing fact, “since the Brazilian population of up to 14 years old already represented about 44% of the total, according to data from the 1900 census.” (Breda, 2015, p. 84)

The central government’s attention at that time was primarily concerned with “protection”. On the one hand, it was said that children had to be protected from the vices that society caused in them. On the other hand, it sought to prevent possible evils caused to society by children. But which child was that so concerning? In the words of Rizzini (2011, p. 45, emphasis mine), it was the one that “[...] personified the danger or threat itself (*vicious, perverted, criminal...*) or [...] could be dangerous.”

The concern of the official power with “dangerous children” was latent, as verified by the several references to them, with this meaning, in the legislation of the last decade of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th. Breda (2015) points out determinations aimed at children in the Criminal Code of 1890 (in force until 1940); also in the Civil Code of 1916 (in force until 2002), as well as in the decree of assistance and protection to abandoned and misbehaving minors, of 1923. A special highlight, as the first legal landmark related specifically to childhood and adolescence in Brazil, must be given to the Decree-Law 17.943-A, of October 12, 1927, which regulated protection and assistance, unifying the two previous laws and becoming known as the Minors’ Code.

The 1927 Minors’ Code synthesized the official mindset of the time regarding childhood. And the legal interest fell into two main categories:

[...] the protection of children in the several spaces occupied by them (the family, the work, the assistance and instruction institutions) and the confrontation of the problems of children who are outside the family, be it due to having been abandoned, to having been removed from their families or lost them, and even to the need to deal with those who, for being delinquent, may no longer remain with their families. (Breda, 2015, p. 91)

The population’s access to social rights, a promise of the new regime, did not succeed in the first decades of the Republic. In relation to the guarantee of public education as one of the fundamental rights for the citizenship development since childhood, it was no different, indeed being “a failure” (Faleiros, 2011). At that point in time, there was a continuity of what had been seen until then, in that

State intervention is not accomplished as a way of universalizing rights, but rather of categorizing and excluding, without changing the strategy of keeping the (poor) child at work, without leaving apart the articulation with the private sector, and without fighting clientelism and authoritarianism. (Faleiros, 2011, p. 49, parentheses mine)

The concept of “irregular situation” was consolidated as a “key concept” in the formulation of policies for childhood throughout the 20th century. Responsibility for the “irregular situation”, which ranged from mistreatment, lack of education and health conditions, to acts of infraction, always fell on the family, as a lack of parental responsibility and misconduct. In this perspective, poverty was considered a “defect” and the official attitude towards the poor had an assistential character for those considered at risk and repressive for those considered dangerous or delinquent (Faleiros, 2011, p. 172).

The policies directed to childhood, practiced from 1930 on and remaining for many years, had as their focus “the family as a participatory element in the development of children and adolescents, and society as responsible for ensuring the right to their protection, thus exempting the State from any responsibility.” (Poletto, 2012, p. 5)

After the first Juvenile Code of 1927, a period began between the 1930s and 1970s in which the establishment of laws directed to childhood in Brazil became intensified and several public institutions were created, in some cases, in partnerships with the private sector, the Church and civil society organizations, to operate policies directed to the population that was in “irregular conditions”. Table 1, organized by Perez and Passone (2010), illustrates this scenario in relation to the assistance to marginalized children and adolescents, going through phases of the Republic, in which paradoxically, advances in the expansion of social rights, based on the pressure and struggle of more progressive sectors of society, alternated with setbacks in relation to civil and political rights, under the yoke of more authoritarian governments, in this case, after two coups: that of Vargas, which established a populist-authoritarian government between 1937 and 1945; and the civil-military coup of 1964, which established the dictatorship in the country until 1985.

At this point, it is important to clarify how another view of childhood was developed and strengthened in Brazil, in counterpoint to the paradigm of minority. The latter was sustained by both the hygienic discourse of “protection” and the legal discourse of “repression” and “morality” that was being outlined and was officially assumed during practically the entire 20th century.

THE “INTEGRAL PROTECTION” PARADIGM: CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AS SUBJECTS OF RIGHTS

The exponential growth of the abandonment and exploitation of children and adolescents in Brazil and in the world, since the end of the 19th century — which worsened in the first decades of the 20th century, with industrialization, and especially in the post-World Wars period, added to the non-existence of a protective

Table 1 – Historical contextualization of childcare in Brazil (1889–1985)

Periods	Main regulations and legislations	Main characteristics
First steps: legal frameworks and normatizations (1889–1930)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criminal Code of the Empire (1830) - Free Womb Law (1871) - Penal Code of the Republic (1890) - Minors' Code (1927) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Childhood as an object of state attention and control - Medical-legal-social welfare strategy
Populist Authoritarianism and the Child Welfare Service (1930–1945)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Children's Department (Decree-Law n. 2.024 of 1940) - Service of Assistance to Minors (SAM) (Decree n. 3.799 of 1941) - Establishes the Brazilian Legion of Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State advance in childcare social service - Organization of maternity and childhood protection
Populist democracy (1945–1964)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Placement Service (Law n. 560 of 1949) - National School Meal Service (Decree n. 37.106 of 1955) - Adoption Institute (Decree-Law n. 4.269 of 1957) - Educative Guidelines and Framework Law (Decree-Law n. 4.024 of 1961) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of the legal apparatus - Regulation of adoption services
Military dictatorship and the National Foundation for Minor Welfare (1964–1985)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Foundation for the Welfare of the Minor (Decree No. 4.513 of 1964) - Lowering the penal age to 16 years (Law n. 5.258 of 1967) - Agreement between the United Nations Children's Fund and the Government of the United States of Brazil (Decree n. 62.125 of 1968) - Juvenile Code (Law n. 6.697 of 1979) – “Doctrine of the Irregular Situation of the Minor.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repressive institutional reorganization - Institution of the Minors' Code of 1979 - Contradictions between the current reality and the recommendations of international conventions on children's rights.

Source: Perez and Passone, 2010.

system or the ineffectiveness of those already existing in some countries — became a reason for concern for governments and the population in general.

The most vulnerable and youngest children were subjected to a deplorable situation as a result of wars, exploitation of child labor, extreme poverty resulting from the economic inequalities inherent in the capitalist system, among other factors. The scenario described above led to the guarantee of special rights for children gaining an increasingly more relevant space for discussion and action in society.

Worldwide, one of the main milestones in the beginning of the movement for the defense of children's rights was the founding, in 1919, of the Save the Children Fund International Union¹ — an organization that played a key role in drafting, in 1924, the first internationally adopted declaration, known as the Geneva Declaration, which strengthened “the premise of the child first.” (Sani, 2013)

It comes to 1946, right after World War II, under the strong influence of the international movement in defense of children, the United Nations Children's

1 Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/about-us/our-story>. Accessed on: 6 Mar. 2018.

Foundation (UNICEF) is created, an international organization that, according to Fernandes (1998), aims primarily to improve the lives of children by fostering, developing and supporting projects that offer health, education, nutrition and well-being services. UNICEF set up an office in Brazil in 1948 and started to support and finance projects directly in this country.

The approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 served as a backdrop for the United Nations, in 1959, to approve and officially adopt the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Despite the hegemonic view of passive childhood, the fact is that, already in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the members of the new generations began to appear as subjects bearing rights who, beyond the mere exercise of such rights, should be heard in their opinions on various aspects of the achievement of a life worthy of its fullness. However, the first advances in terms of ensuring in official documents the vision of children and adolescents as active participants in the construction of their citizenship would only become effective in practice from the engagement of civil society, over many years, in the struggle for the commitment of each state to protect childhood and develop policies “adapted to the new, emerging conceptions of the child, which dictated new dimensions to be taken into account.” (Sani, 2013, p. 79)

In Brazil, the debate in the educational field was resumed after the Vargas period, with the drafting of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDBEN) in 1946, based on liberal and democratic principles established by the recently promulgated Constitution. The Ministry of Education was created in 1953, disconnecting from the Ministry of Health, and the LDBEN, after several substitutive bills, was regulated in 1961, after years of heated debate among several interest groups.

Due to the chaotic situation in the country in terms of access to public education, in the early 1950s, the contingent of illiterates reached 50% of the population over 15 years old, and only 26% of children and young people between 5 and 19 years old were educated (Romanelli, 1991 *apud* Perez and Passone, 2010, p. 660). The educational scenario was still worrisome and, in 1960, there were still 39.5% of people between 15 and 69 years old who were illiterate (Faleiros, 2005, p. 173).

Even with the struggle of the movements of educators and other social actors who militated in favor of meeting the demand for primary education, with its compulsory nature and gratuity — both pointed out as essential conditions to take an initial step towards the establishment of the “minimum conditions for any democratic regime” (Perez and Passone, 2010, p. 660) — other interests prevailed in that LDBEN of 1961.

On the one hand, to the detriment of the expansion of access to primary education and its compulsory nature, what prevailed was the interest of the technical education branch, as a strategy to meet the demands for professionalization of the industrial sector. In turn, the alliance between private establishments and the Church, until then holder of the educational monopoly, provided a relation of forces in the political scenario, which maintained “private access to the resources of education” (Perez and Passone, 2010, p. 660) and consequent discrediting of public education.

In Brazil, between the 1950s and the early 1960s, there were advances in policies aimed at childhood, under the influence of multilateral agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with actions "to preserve the health of the child and the participation of the community, rather than being only repressive and welfare" (Perez and Passone, 2010, p. 660). A mark of this influence, starting in the 1960s, was the creation of "recreational centers and community participation in the programs themselves, as a mechanism for social and community development of social organization." (Perez and Passone, 2010, p. 660)

On the other hand, after the new institutional order resulting from the coup of 1964, the articulation of the movement for the defense of policies that recognized the universal rights of children was made more difficult. Within the scope of the National Security Doctrine, the National Policy for the Welfare of the Minor (PNBEM) was established, which introduced the national network of the Foundation for the Welfare of the Minor (FUNABEM) in 1970.

The second "Minor's Code", promulgated in 1979, only reinforced the previous policies by establishing the Doctrine of the Minor in Irregular Situations. This law did not have a proposal of care for all children and adolescents of universal scope, as it was restricted to those "who were in the situations described as irregular, among them, victims of mistreatment, victims of the omission of parents or guardians and perpetrators of criminal offenses." (Faraj, Siqueira and Arpini, 2016, p. 730)

After the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the international movement in defense of children's citizenship grew stronger and, in 1976, the United Nations (UN) Social Covenant on Civil and Political Rights came into force, which also ensured these rights for children, but in cases of family dissolution and/or discrimination. The year 1979 was declared by UNICEF as the International Year of the Child, a new and important milestone, with the proposal of a Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would be written and approved only in 1989.

The document became an important instrument of pressure in several countries, including Brazil, one of its signatories, for the implementation of new laws that would provide children with "more than the word on issues that concern them. The Convention grants an official degree of recognition to the idea that the child should be involved in decisions concerning his or her well-being and living conditions" (Sani, 2013, p. 79). The document itself, in its art. 12, presents: "States Parties must assure the child who is able to formulate his or her own views the right to express their opinions freely on all matters related to it, and such opinions should be considered, depending on the age and maturity of the child." (UNICEF, 1989)

It is undeniable that the Convention on the Rights of the Child has become a historic milestone in promoting children's voice and in defense of their protection and in the assessment of their needs. However, the document is not a manual, a closed guide, with a unique meaning to be followed on what is "the best interest of the child" (Sani, 2013). Instead, it presents itself as a guiding parameter that opened the possibility for each signatory State to promote adaptations in its legislation on children's rights. Moreover, in each particular context, one should seek the proper

construction of situations in which the child has recognized and guaranteed his/her rights and can enjoy them.

In this sense, taking into account the characteristics of the age groups (to consider biophysical, affective and cognitive development), as well as the sociocultural and political contexts in which the child lives, we can think of the expression of their rights in “manifestations as simple as, for example, giving the opportunity for the child to make choices, shaping his/her life and influencing others; or understanding the desires, feelings and views of the child.” (Sani, 2013, p. 80)

The models of implementation of the new paradigms for children’s rights proposed by the Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child should seek to articulate, in a balanced way, the relations between adults and children, so that young citizens can exercise participation and a certain level of power to give their opinion and influence decisions about their lives, in a way compatible with their maturity, while still feeling protected by the elders in their peculiar condition of development.

Despite the setbacks suffered as a consequence of the official policies imposed during the military regime, various sectors of society continued to organize themselves around the struggle for freedom and democracy, including those that claimed full citizenship rights for childhood.

The late 1980s and 1990s mark, in the country’s history, the resumption of the democratic regime. The struggle of civil society for advances in the conquest of political, civil and social rights was increasingly consolidated. And the notion of the rights of children and adolescents was also strengthened again.

The proposal to incorporate into the legislation the article of the Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child, which attributes to children and adolescents the fundamental rights of the human person, was the result of intense mobilization of society (Faleiros, 2005). Finally, the recognition of children and adolescents as subjects of rights in the legal system in the country only came to occur with the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Faleiros, 2011). Thus, article 227 states:

It is the duty of the family, society and the State to ensure the child, the adolescent and young people, with absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community life, besides keeping them safe from all forms of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Brasil, 1988)

Also in 1988, the Permanent National Forum of Non-Governmental Entities for the Defense of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, or simply DCA National Forum, created from articulations that occurred during the constituent process, brought together 34 entities. The DCA Forum currently represents approximately one thousand entities, including affiliated organizations, forums and state fronts (with their affiliated NGOs) (DCA Forum, 2018).

The action of the DCA Forum was fundamental in the mobilization that led to the approval of the article of the 1988 Constitution that deals with the guarantee of the rights of children and adolescents. The entity’s work continues to have great importance “in mobilizing society and in the struggle for the effective

implementation of the Statute of children and adolescents” (Forum DCA, 2018). In this sense, the forum’s website states that: “only with civil society playing its role will it be possible to build a country that guarantees the fundamental rights of children and adolescents.” (Forum DCA, 2018)

Finally, the reflections of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child in the Brazilian legal system were observed more concretely only after more than 30 years, with the advent of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), Law 8.069/1990. The ECA represents a rupture with the then predominant clientelist and repressive view.

In addition to the ECA, the main legal framework for respect for childhood, the current LDBEN (Law 9.394 of December 20, 1996), also aims to ensure the citizenship of the student.

After the first years of the approval of the ECA, an issue was raised for the reflection of Brazilian society that remains currently important, almost three decades after the validity of this law:

[...] with the ECA, which considers children subjects of rights, and with the democratization process of the country, there were *de facto* changes in the articulation of unequal economic development with policies for childhood. In fact, the recognition of children and adolescents as citizens changed the legal benchmark, but it was the broad mobilization of society for children’s rights that led to the development of new policies. (Faleiros, 2005, p. 174)

The advances in children’s rights in recent decades in the country are remarkable. However, there is still much to be done in practical terms to effect these rights placed on paper, so that children and young people are truly seen “as social actors, whose protection must be synonymous with the promotion of their individual, economic, social and cultural rights.” (Sani, 2013, p. 82)

In this direction,

[...] it is necessary to guarantee a virtuous circle for the development of children and adolescents: in addition to vacancies in schools and quality in education, to an inversion of the tendency to deepen social distances with the insertion in a decent job, to access to cultural opportunities and the guarantee of public policies of health, transportation, housing, aiming to reduce the periferization of territories of social exclusion. Children and adolescents from urban peripheries have a potential for the transformation of their environment, because they easily absorb new digital technologies, the Internet, language knowledge, cultural production. It is necessary to ensure their access, with quality. (Faleiros, 2005, p. 176)

From the perspective advocated in this article, it is not enough to affirm, under the questionable argument of protection, that the best is being done for our children, whether the possibility of their participation in central issues of their lives is accepted. In this way, I make my own the words of Sani (2013, p. 83) when he asks: “If legislation reinforces the right of children to have a voice, why is the paradox still sustained in some areas of adults being the ones to reproduce their voices?”

In practice, when the exercise of participation and autonomy, as pillars of what I define as an education that provides the exercise of citizenship since childhood, is not effective, there are clear social implications in the political formation of citizens. I line up with Sani (2013, p. 83-84) to argue that: “the deconstruction and reconstruction of childhood is not something that should occur only in our own minds — this involves a struggle in order to increase the practical choices of children and transform the social and political context in which every child lives.”

CITIZENSHIP SINCE CHILDHOOD: EDUCATIONAL MEASURES IN NON-SCHOOLING SPACES

I now present some experiences of valuing the exercise of citizenship from childhood on, in projects or educational activities developed by civil society organizations, or at the behest of the public authorities, or even as a result of partnerships between the two instances, sometimes with the support of the business sector. These are all initiatives that have as a common feature the development of forms of active and effective participation of the new generations of citizens, aiming to favor the achievement of autonomy, protagonism, and citizenship, through the strengthening of family and community bonds and collective learning developed since childhood.

One of these audacious and transforming initiatives in terms of educational projects, from a perspective of exercising the political dimension of citizenship for children and adolescents, is the holding, since 1999, of the Ludic Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents² — as an extension of the National Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents, held every two years and organized by adults since 1994, following previous stages in state and municipal

2 In the effervescence of the Movement for the Struggle for Children's Rights in Brazil, “since 1994, adults have been holding Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents. The results of the discussions are passed on to the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA) to continue the construction of the policy for the care of children and adolescents. The political recognition of these conferences in Brazil is still recent: it came in the context of the enactment of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent in 1990” (Pini and Favarão, 2012, p. 9). “The first children and adolescents who participated in the Ludic Conference were in street situation, and, therefore, were able to see there a way out, a mechanism that gave the right to participation, a space that is usually ignored by adults. In 1999, in the valley of Anhangabaú (a neighborhood located in the center of São Paulo and famous for sheltering boys and girls living on the streets), about 130 adolescents coordinated by organizations and people linked to the State DCA Forum participated in the 1st Ludic Conference in Brazil, and from then on the advances were gradual. In 2001, we had the first adolescent to participate in the National Conference, in 2002, the Conselho Estadual dos Direitos das Crianças e Adolescentes (CEDECA) held the 1st State Playful Meeting with the purpose of promoting political formation of adolescents in order to raise rising issues such as child labor, criminalization of adolescents, combating sexual abuse and exploitation and several other topics. In 2003, CEDECA embraces the initiative of the Ludic State Conference and starts to consider its referrals as official. In 2007 we had the participation of the first children in the DCA Conference process, and in 2010 for the first time an adolescent coordinated the Ludic State Conference, which had the participation of 52 children and 450 adolescents.” (Available at: <<https://rededesabafosocial.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/conferencia-ludica-avancos-e-desafios/>>. Accessed on: 7 Jan. 2018).

conferences. The conferences, both of adults and of children and adolescents, have been progressively joined by municipalities throughout the country and

[...] present an intersectoral, transversal and deliberative nature — that articulates all public policies capable of ensuring the fundamental rights of children and adolescents (health, education, culture, social assistance, etc.) and establishes a great differential: to ensure the participation of children and adolescents in all spaces of deliberation and debate. (Adriano and Góes, 2012, p. 9)

As an example, the Ludic Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents that have been held in some municipalities in the metropolitan region of the city of São Paulo can be mentioned. The municipality of Osasco, São Paulo, has been officially committed to holding them since 2007, through the Municipal Secretary of Education. According to Adriano and Góes (2012, p. 10), the Conference in Osasco:

It is ludic because it presupposes the involvement of all the children from the municipal network's schools, who debate, in a pleasurable and creative way, through recreational activities and games, improvements to education based on their points of view. Unlike the Conference on the Rights of Children and Adolescents, the Ludic Conference of the Municipal Education Network of Osasco takes place annually, with the participation of the Educational units. Everything that is discussed and approved by the children is forwarded to the Secretariat of Education, which incorporates, together with the schools, the contributions of the students.

Another remarkable educational experience in Brazilian history that I would like to emphasize was that of the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls (MNMMR).

It was created in 1985 from a collective of people and institutions engaged in alternative care programs for street children. Considered as the first national-level interlocutor on the issue, the MNMMR emerged with a very clear purpose: to fight for citizenship rights for children and adolescents (Gohn, 1995, p. 134-135).

The proposed action of the educators of the MNMMR directed to children and adolescents was organized around the mobilizing idea that the boys and girls themselves can and should participate in the construction of alternatives that make it possible to fully guarantee their rights (Mesquita, 2001).

Besides the organizational structure of the educators, which included the national council and coordination, the state committees (instances of coordination of the different groups that act in the movement in the same state) and the local committees (units of organization of the adults that act in a city), there was an organizational structure of boys and girls themselves, in co-management with the educators. In the places where the MNMMR was active the Base Groups were created, which were the legitimate space “for the organization and participation of boys and girls in their community.” (Mesquita, 2001, p. 67)

The educational experience in the Base Groups was reinforced as a possibility of direct participation of children and adolescents in the identification, reflection, and elaboration of proposals for solutions to the problems that directly affected them, based on basic principles such as openness to the freedom of expression of ideas from children; respect for their peculiar characteristics as developing human beings; and the adoption of languages from their own local cultures.

The Base Groups represented the concretization of the reason of the very existence of the MNMMR, expressed in one of its objectives as an organization within the popular movement of fight for full citizenship in Brazil, that is: “To enable spaces of organization and formation of children and adolescents from the popular classes, especially street boys and girls, favoring their participation in the reflection and search for solutions to the problems that affect them, in order to reflect and exercise their rights of citizenship.” (Mesquita, 2001, p. 67)

Another outstanding contribution to the valuing of citizenship since childhood is the work of the Association of Residents of Heliópolis and Region (União de Núcleos, Associações dos Moradores de Heliópolis e Região (UNAS)). When it was founded in 1990, it officially represented, before the public authorities, the interests of several groups of residents, already organized since the 1970s in that region of the city of São Paulo. These interests were related to the conquest and enforcement of social rights.

Initially, the objective of the struggle was more restricted to the right to housing and land tenure. Currently, UNAS develops important work on several fronts, including the citizenship of children and young people. According to the statement of UNAS (2018) itself, on its website, the association acts “believing in the person as a subject of rights regardless of age, strengthening their autonomy for the realization of citizenship, thus seeking to break the invisible walls that separate the peripheries from the other neighborhoods of the city.” (UNAS, 2018)

The projects directly reach more than 12 thousand people monthly, through 50 social projects, as indicated by the aforementioned website. Children and adolescents are benefited in many of these actions. Among the dozens of activities of the entity, the Center for Children and Adolescents (CCA) stands out, which includes, according to information on the UNAS website (2018), “about 1,560 children and adolescents from 6 to 14 years old” and aims to “contribute to the personal and social development of children and adolescents, through socio-cultural and educational activities after school that provide opportunities for the achievement of autonomy, citizenship, and strengthening of family and community ties.” (UNAS, 2018)

The three experiences in citizen education — Ludic Conferences on the Rights of Children and Adolescents, Base Groups of the MNMMR, and educational projects with children and adolescents of the Unas — represent real demonstrations of work aimed at the construction of initiatives that make it possible to advance from formal expression (laws and political-pedagogical projects) to the concrete conception of children and adolescents as subjects of rights with: unique capacities for active participation in the evaluation of their life reality; expression of ideas with their own language; creativity in proposing solutions to

the problems they experience; and political action to win and guarantee their citizenship rights.

CITIZENSHIP SINCE CHILDHOOD AND ITS CONSTRUCTION IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL

The analysis that follows distances itself from the pretension of performing a broad historical review of the concept of citizenship, but seeks to answer three guiding questions for reflections on citizenship exercised since childhood, indicated in the introduction of this article: what is the concept of citizenship taken as a reference? What are the foundations for citizenship to be worked with in school as a content of education for democracy? What particular characteristics of children — the majority social group within the school — must be respected in order to achieve a project of education for democracy, which enables the exercise of citizenship since childhood?

We start from two assumptions in dialogue with the theoretical framework on conceptions of child and childhood and research in this field. First, the conviction that citizenship has a different meaning in each context and for each age group, coordinating this initial assumption with the notion that children have the capacity to express their feelings and understand what is the experience of rights and duties. Therefore, as the predominant age group in the school universe, they must be heard in the construction of citizenship of that social and cultural environment.

The origins of the notion of citizenship in the Western world, dating back to ancient Greece, refer to the experience of rights and duties of free residents of the city. The debate on citizenship resurfaced in modernity as one of the foundations of the ideological struggle of the bourgeoisie which, at a given historical moment, was the politically organized social group that led the counter-hegemonic struggle in the West. From its reappearance in modernity, citizenship has developed linked to the achievement and the exercise of social, civil, and political³ rights. These rights have reached nowadays synthesized in the broad notion of “human rights”.

Citizenship, understood as living fully in a democratic society is, as Manzini-Covre (1997, p. 11) alerts, a right for all “that needs to be collectively constructed, not only in terms of meeting basic needs, but of access to all levels of existence, including the most comprehensive, the role of man/men in the Universe.”

Manzini-Covre (1997, p. 33-34) contributes to the understanding of this possibility in the sense of universality of citizenship by arguing that:

[...] citizenship is not a bourgeois category in the strict sense. It is a category that can also be elaborated, appropriated and used by workers, as it was by the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and then by the dominant bourgeoisie in the sense

3 Marshall (1967) related the historical development of citizenship with three elements that make up “human rights: the civil element, related to civil rights of individual freedom; the political element, embodied by rights connected to participation in the exercise of political power, and the social element, concerning rights connected to economic welfare and social inheritance.” (Corrêa, 2002, p. 214)

that suited it, and again re-edited in our century (20th century) by the technocrat capitalists. In fact, it should be emphasized that citizenship can be reedited by the workers more in its universal sense, because only then will it really serve them. This depends on a continuous and effective struggle to universally enforce civil, social and political rights (parentheses mine).

The achievement of citizenship is becoming universalized as a banner of struggle for all social strata in democratic societies. In this regard, the meaning of citizenship as a democratic achievement in a given society effectively emerges when it can be “shared by all individuals to the point of guaranteeing everyone accesses to the public space and conditions for dignified survival, having as its source value the fullness of life” (Corrêa, 2002, p. 217). It is necessary to clarify that citizenship, understood as an achievement, is not something given *a priori*. Citizenship is the result of a “conflictive process of construction of a public space that provides the necessary spaces for each human being to live and realize himself, in effective equality of conditions, but respecting the differences of each one.” (*Ibid.*, p.221)

The historical contribution of the bourgeoisie must be comprehended in a broad way, in the period in which it represented a group that fought against the established domination. This contribution to humanity is the “historical libertarian and revolutionary sense in the struggle for the definition of civil spaces by new emerging groups” (Corrêa, 2002, p. 217) and was the first step in a long path that is outlined until today and, certainly, in the future, for the achievement of the universal and democratic sense of citizenship.

This will be a conquest to be undertaken by all of humanity, now with new emerging actors, who seek to organize themselves to effectively participate in citizenship. Thus, citizenship is not a particular representation of this or that individual or group, already included in the exercise of social, civil, and political rights. Citizenship is understood as the experience of an “emancipated man, bringing out the autonomy of each historical subject, as the struggle for political spaces in society from the identity of each subject” (Souza Junior, 1986 *apud* Corrêa, 2002, p. 217). In this sense, it can be pointed out as a general rule, analyzing the literature on the subject, that “citizens are the bearers of rights, among them the discriminated ones” (Corrêa, 2002, p. 217). Therefore, we start from the premise that citizenship, as a universal concept, is not the property of this or that group or this or that social class.

The understanding of citizenship as a full experience of life in society is still an achievement to be reached by many groups nowadays, including here the age group of children and adolescents.

Manzini-Covre (1997) presents the notion of “citizenship under construction” as a proposal for contemporary citizenship, in an attempt to overcome the traditional view of citizenship founded on rights tied to the State, with abstract rules of democracy. From this perspective, the understanding of citizenship in the daily life of formal and non-formal institutions is expanded and goes beyond the exercise of rights and duties determined *a priori*. Citizenship, seen this way, is in a constant process of (re)elaboration by the actors who are mediated by interpersonal relationships in each particular context.

But in what spaces can the construction of citizenship in childhood occur, and with what characteristics? By placing the multiple possibilities of citizenship construction, by different interest groups and in different spaces, the school is one of these contexts, in which the child can and should experience this exercise.

What I have been presenting as a perspective of citizenship to be singularly constructed and lived, with its own sense and meaning for the subjects involved in each intersubjective experience of social coexistence, is allied to the thought of Padilha (2008) when he defends that citizenship education, or education for the exercise of citizenship as carried out at school, must be thought in terms of “citizenship transversality”. This type of transversality presupposes that we do not start from predefined contents and subjects in the programs, or from transversal themes chosen by specialists according to “pseudo-social urgencies”, but from the consideration that the themes related to citizenship education emerging to the educational praxis are born, in a Freirean perspective, from the “previous reading of the world”. Reading “defined and realized in the relationship between educators and students, and between educators and students and the world in which they live as subjects of the educational act and subject of/in the world.” (Padilha, 2008, p. 97)

Benevides adds an important contribution to the reflections on the relationship between democratic education and the full exercise of citizenship, by presenting the concept of active citizenship as “that which establishes the citizen as the bearer of rights and duties, but, essentially, as the creator of rights to open new spaces for political participation.” (Benevides, 1994 *apud* Mesquita, 2001, p. 93-94)

Citizenship is thus being constituted in the formation of social spaces of struggle, where the citizen has his own behaviors and also creates rights, but in the collectivity. Today, one can affirm that the notion of the importance of citizenship continues to expand, however, as Benevides (1996, p. 2) alerts:

[...] political action continues to be undervalued and the citizen can be seen only as the taxpayer, the consumer, the claimant of individual or corporate benefits, and not of the common good. And not even the constitutional principle of school for all can be fulfilled.

In the same way, “education for citizenship” emerges as a goal to be achieved in any official Education program, whether at state or municipal level; however, there is no guarantee of achieving it, because its inscription in the officially prescribed curriculum document does not depend on the explicit commitment of the governors or educational leaders with democratic practice. In this sense, Benevides (1996, p. 3, italics mine) asserts that “in our reality we are far from an education for democracy in which all citizens learn, without distinction, both to be governed and to be governors.”

For the due criticism of the dualist school — a school for those who should command and another for those who should obey —, which represents a conception that goes against a truly democratic society, I highlight the words of the Brazilian educator Anísio Teixeira (1956), against what he calls the “paternalistic school”, that is, the one that is

[...] designed to educate the ruled, those who would obey and do, as opposed to those who would command and think, thus failing, in this way, the democratic concept, which should guide it, of a school for the formation of the people, that is, of the sovereign, in a democracy. (Teixeira, 1956, p. 6, italics mine)

Anísio Teixeira himself emphasizes the characteristics of the school as a means of sociocultural coexistence, which, if explored and worked on pedagogically, can contribute to providing all who interact there with an education for life in a democracy, as long as the purpose is to overcome the aforementioned “paternalistic school”. In this sense, he teaches that:

The school is a community with its members, its interests, its government. If this government is not a model of democratic government, it is clear that the school will not educate for democracy. Principals, teachers and students must be organized in such a way that everyone participates in the task of government, with the division of labor that is most advisable. The participation of all, the feeling of common interest is essential to the happy performance of the school’s educational mission. (Teixeira, 1956, p. 5)

The short definition of democracy as a political regime founded on popular sovereignty and full respect for human rights has the advantage of adding political democracy and social democracy. And education, as a concrete basis for the full realization of democratic values in a society, is understood by Benevides (1996) as oriented in such a way as to intentionally form the human being to

[...] develop his potentialities of knowledge, judgment and choice to live consciously in society, which also includes the notion that the educational process itself contributes both to conserve and to change values, beliefs, mentalities, customs and practices. (Benevides, 1996, p. 3)

Two crucial dimensions of education for democracy are highlighted here. One is “the formation of republican and democratic values”, which should be linked to the other dimension of this process, “the formation of political decision-making at all levels” (Benevides, 1996, p. 3). Education for democracy, therefore, is not limited to the mere exercise of social and civil rights, but is understood also and, I would say, mainly, as education to know how to discuss and choose.

And at school, if children and adolescents have the opportunity to exercise their communicational, cognitive, social, affective, ethical, and creative capacities, in situations of discussion and choice, and, consequently, of decision, in the scope of rights and duties that affect them personally, or the interests of the collective they belong to, there will be an approximation with one of the principles of this education for democracy closely articulated with the exercise of citizenship. Reinforcing this idea, in the book *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, Paulo Freire (1996, p. 106) teaches that “it is by deciding that one learns to decide.”

On the relationship between the construction of a democratic society and education, the educator Anísio Teixeira (1956, p. 1) postulated, as early as in the first

decades of the 20th century, that democracy “links the program of life that it represents to a program of education, without which a democratic organization could not even be dreamed of”. And he based his political statement also on the recent discoveries (at that time) that the human being is an extremely educable animal. Teixeira (1956, p. 1) argued that “all men are sufficiently educable to conduct life in society, so that each and everyone shares in it as equals, despite the differences in their personal histories and individual differences.”

Notwithstanding the defense that I have made of the child’s capacity to actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect him/her, it is necessary to state that, in education for democracy, adult intervention is essential in offering options, creating pedagogical opportunities and methodological alternatives that aim at the construction and experience of citizenship from childhood on.

The importance of adult intervention in this process lies, first and foremost, in the adult’s attitude of dialoguing with the child, on the same level, not above them, not interpreting their feelings and interests, and not responding on their behalf to the challenges that arise in the wonderful process of learning. It also happens in the daily professional practice of planning and developing educational actions that enable the child’s participation in the daily school decisions. I believe, then, that the complicity of the adult with the child is fundamental. They will be both educators and learners at the same time. As Freire (1989) states, “nobody educates anybody, people educate each other in communion”. However, with distinct responsibilities and roles.

About education as a meeting point between the perspective of adults and the new generations as participants in the construction of a common world, I highlight the proposition of the thinker Hannah Arendt (2009) when she emphasizes that:

Education is the point where we decide whether we love the world enough to take responsibility for it and, by such a gesture, save it from the ruin that would be inevitable were it not for the renewal and coming of the new and the young. Education is also where we decide whether we love our children enough not to drive them from our world and abandon them to their own resources, nor to snatch from their hands the opportunity to undertake something new and unforeseen for us, but instead to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing the common world. (Arendt, 2009, p. 243)

Arendt defends that love for the world and love for children are justifications to think about an education committed to the “task of renewing the common world”. In this sense, Paulo Freire (1983, p. 93) presents the “love for the world and for men” as one of the presuppositions for dialog. Dialog is defined as “the meeting of men mediated by the world in order to pronounce it, and is not exhausted, therefore, in the relation me-you”. Still quoting Freire: “Being the foundation of dialog, love is also dialog.” (*Ibid.*, p. 94)

To love children is to commit to their cause. It is to open oneself to encounter the new. It is to pronounce education as possibility and not determinism. It is, above all, to create conditions for their citizen participation, for the exercise of their

citizenship. For them to be recognized and, above all, to be recognized as subjects with rights, to feel worthy, and to establish critical, creative, political, and democratic cultural relations, and to participate in citizen experiences and coexistence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The path “from the denial of speech to the perspective of strengthening the voice of the child” goes through the understanding that the change from one paradigm to another consists in the understanding of a non-linear process, of a transforming nature and that carries controversies in its core. It implies disagreements, conflicts, contradictions, and tensions, as it is an inevitably dialectical process. However, the actors who take a stand in defense of democratic education as a way to achieve the transformations that allow the exercise of citizenship and, more specifically, the exercise of citizenship from childhood on, must place their hope in the concrete experience of citizenship and democracy building in progress.

School management has been configured as an adult decision space. However, it is in this same space, of dialectical nature, constituted by the debate of ideas, that adults can be convinced of the educational importance of choosing and deciding, within the political-pedagogical project, in favor of children’s participation, in a systematic way.

It is necessary to understand the school as an institution subject to change, and, therefore, to see the students as active subjects in this space, with their own interests and able to contribute actively to this movement of change.

The search for citizenship is a lifelong process, perhaps similar to the transformation of a grain planted and fertilized that, dying, is born as wheat and, in turn, living, dies as bread. Citizenship, thus, at each stage, is reborn, revived and re-signified, becoming food for overcoming new challenges and for seeking new achievements, new goals. We become grain, wheat, and bread in the process of being citizens in the world in search of the common good.

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