

**Narratives of an Early Years Teacher: A Search for Childhoods'
Responses in Pandemic Times / *Narrativas de uma professora de bebês:
a busca por réplicas das infâncias em tempos pandêmicos***

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to reveal how the responses of the others compose and expand the narratives of an early years teacher and also how these responses appear in narratives in the context of non-face-to-face and asynchronous support, due to the covid-19 pandemic. The narrative methodology of research in education, in dialogue with the contributions of the Bakhtinian philosophy, was used to interpret the responses materialized in the narratives and the way the teacher reorganizes her work based on them. It was shown that whereas the narratives were related to face-to-face work, the babies' responses came up from the unfinishedness utterances that the teacher produced from her experience with them; as regarding the narratives about non-face-to-face work, the responses came from the utterances produced by the families, based on what they experienced in their relationship with the babies. In both situations, the teacher tried to reorganize her work in relation to the responses of her others.

KEYWORDS: Child education; Babies; Pedagogical narratives; Response; Covid-19 pandemic

RESUMO

O presente artigo objetiva revelar como as réplicas dos outros compõem e ampliam as narrativas de uma professora de bebês e, ainda, como essas réplicas apareceram nessas narrativas no contexto de atendimento não presencial e assíncrono devido à pandemia de covid-19. A metodologia narrativa de pesquisa em educação, em diálogo com os aportes da filosofia bakhtiniana, foi a utilizada para interpretar as réplicas materializadas nas narrativas e a maneira como a professora reorganizava seu trabalho a partir delas. Revelou-se que, enquanto as narrativas eram referentes ao trabalho presencial, as réplicas dos bebês apareciam a partir do acabamento provisório que a professora produzia do vivido com eles; já, nas narrativas que tratavam do trabalho não presencial, as réplicas eram os acabamentos produzidos pelas famílias, a partir do vivido na relação com os bebês. Em ambas as situações, a professora buscou reorganizar o trabalho na relação com as réplicas de seus outros.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação infantil; Bebês; Narrativas pedagógicas; Réplica; Pandemia de covid-19

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Introduction

As a result of the pandemic period that we are living in due to the infectious disease caused by the new coronavirus, measures such as social isolation were adopted to face the covid-19. In this context, the policies related to early childhood education in many municipalities have also changed, sometimes resulting in the temporary closure of daycare centers and schools, of which support was turned to non-face-to-face, thus hampering the interlocution among babies, children, educators and families.

We understand that we are dialogical beings, constituted in an other-‘I’ relationship, in which the ‘I’ becomes aware of myself and becomes the ‘I’ by “revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a ‘thou’)” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.287).¹ In this sense, we understand that the curriculum is built by subjects in child education; that is in the relationship among babies, children, families, and educators. To build a curriculum that is made and remade based on reflections on educational processes, instead of strategies already pre-determined, is to think of the curriculum “in the perspective of the *encounter* between adults and children in the space for collective education of the daycare center.” (Richter; Barbosa, 2010, p.88; author’s emphasis)² It is also necessary to take into account the Article IV of the resolution that sets out the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, the content of which indicates that:

The pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education must consider that the child, who is the center of curriculum planning, is a historical subject of rights, who, in the interactions, relationships and daily practices experienced, builds their personal and collective identity. They play, imagine, fantasize, wish, learn, observe, experience, narrate, question and build up meanings about nature and society, producing culture (Brasil, 2009, p.18).³

¹ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984a.

² In Portuguese: “na perspectiva do *encontro* entre adultos e crianças no espaço de formação coletiva da creche.”

³ In Portuguese: “As propostas pedagógicas da Educação Infantil deverão considerar que a criança, centro do planejamento curricular, é sujeito histórico e de direitos que, nas interações, relações e práticas cotidianas que vivencia, constrói sua identidade pessoal e coletiva, brinca, imagina, fantasia, deseja, aprende, observa, experimenta, narra, questiona e constrói sentidos sobre a natureza e a sociedade, produzindo cultura.”

Thus, we do not agree with the idea that in early childhood education the curriculum should include adult-centric, hygienist and schooling proposals, but rather proposals that recognize babies and young children as active subjects, producers of knowledge and cultures.

This conception that at this early stage of education the curriculum needs to be built based on the relationships among all participants of the school community is in line with the writings of Jorge Larrosa (2010) about childhood: the childhood as ‘other’, in the sense of something that is “always beyond any attempt to capture, which disturbs the security of our knowledge, questions the power of our practices and opens a void down which our well-structured institutions fall” (Larrosa, 2010, p 184).⁴

Understanding the childhoods as others and the curriculum as a construction between others and ‘I’ (from encounters, discoveries, games, creations through the most diverse languages that occur in the early childhood school), there is no consistency in determining prescriptive proposals in which babies and children are expected to fit, being and acting in a predetermined way as expected by a curriculum defined in advance.

In this context, a non-face-to-face early childhood education poses difficulties in the practice of early childhood teachers who respect the specificities of the children aging from zero to six years and that are based on the theoretical assumptions we brought up earlier.

The practice of a narrative writing about the relationships established by the subjects belonging to the school routine, and which seeks to respond to the others involved, may enhance the construction of a work that aims to listen responsively (Ponzio, 2010; Simas; Serodio; Fujisawa, 2020) to these others, even in non-face-to-face contexts. This narrative, by bringing the interpretation of the expressions of baby boys and girls, of their families by the teacher-narrator, may be amplified by those others of the school routine.

The act of narrating may foster the organization of work in favor of the baby boys and girls and children. This act must come together with paying attention to the expressions of the others involved in the relationship while it must recover past

⁴ In Portuguese: “sempre além de qualquer tentativa de captura, inquieta a segurança de nossos saberes, questiona o poder de nossas práticas e abre um vazio em que se abisma o edifício bem construído de nossas instituições de acolhimento.”

experiences coming from other spaces and times, that is, taking in a distance (Simas, 2018). Considering all that is said and heard in the act of narrating, the construction of a curriculum is better enabled viewing and responding to a ‘thou’.

This paper is situated in the field of writing narratives about established relationships regarding babies and their families, the school routine, and the pedagogical practice of an early years teacher.⁵ The text is also limited to the contextual specificities of the pandemic period. We deal with the particular case of the early years teacher who narrated what she was experiencing in the school routine during the period of non-face-to-face asynchronous work, and, from the responses she received from others, she continued to write narratives so as to reorganize her work. Based on the materiality composed of narratives written at different times – before and during the pandemic –, using the narrative methodology of research in education (Serodio; Prado, 2015), we try to understand about how the responses of others in relation to the early years teacher became part of her pedagogical narratives in these two different moments.

1 Pedagogical Narratives and the Narrative Methodology of Research in Education

We are all unfinished beings by definition, we relatively finish our lived moments by producing various materialities related to these experiences, though. In this paper, the materialities, which aesthetically and relatively finish life, are the pedagogical narratives of the early years teacher, as we have already said. We understand that the thematic content, the style, and the compositional structure of the pedagogical narratives “are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.60; author’s emphasis),⁶ in this case, the day-to-day life of daycare centers and early childhood education schools. Speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986a)⁷ are always born out of relationships, bringing characteristics of a specific communication field. In the case of pedagogical

⁵ The early years teacher we are referring to is also one of the researchers who authored this paper. We chose to write the paper in the first person plural – ‘we / us’. On referring to the early years teacher, we will use ‘she / her’. This is done not to mistake the subjectivity of the early years teacher with the subjectivity of the researchers.

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, First Edition, 1986a.

⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

narratives, the utterances that compose them are those that circulate through the discursive field of school daily life. When narrating what is experienced in the school routine, education professionals incorporate and elaborate primary genres (Bakhtin, 1986a)⁸ present in immediate discursive communication.

In this movement of incorporating and elaborating the lived moments, relatively and aesthetically finishing them, materializing them into a narrative, the author of the narrative necessarily places herself in a place far from the immediate lived moment and, from that place, she assimilates time, space and values (Bakhtin, 1981)⁹ from what previously happened. The teacher, placed in another time, space and with another axiological position (Bakhtin, 1993)¹⁰ gains an excess of seeing¹¹ (Bakhtin, 1984a;¹² Bakhtin, 1990)¹³ about herself, the knowledge she has about the established relationships, and about the lived experience. Moreover, as she apprehends the expressions of others and, considering her “apperceptive background” (Vološinov, 1973, p.118),¹⁴ the teacher builds a better understanding about her experiences in relation to her others.

The excess of seeing of the other in relation to the ‘I’ conditions “all those inner and outer actions which only [the other can] perform in relation to [me] (...) all those actions, that is, which render the other complete precisely in those respects in which he cannot complete himself by himself” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.24).¹⁵ Thus, when the ‘I’ contemplates the other and his actions, this other also perceives aspects of themselves and

⁸ For reference, see footnote 7

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel (Notes toward a Historical Poetics). In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.84-258.

¹⁰ BAKHTIN, M. *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*. Translated by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

¹¹ Regarding the surplus of vision concept, Bakhtin states: “When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide (...) I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression) (...) This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world” (BAKHTIN, 1990, pp.22-23).

Thus, when we become other of ourselves, looking at what has already been lived in other spaces and times, we perceive other aspects of us, of relationships, of something that was previously inaccessible to us.

¹² For reference, see footnote 2.

¹³ BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov. Supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.4-256.

¹⁴ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka, I. R. Titunik. London: Seminar Press, 1973.

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 14.

of the relationships based on the interpretations this other produces. “Self-consciousness happens considering the consciousness that ‘I-myself’ have in respect of the vision another one has of ‘I-myself’” (Petrilli, 2019, p.77).¹⁶

The narratives that make up the materiality to be interpreted in this paper were periodically written by the early years teacher, since she considered herself a teacher-researcher (Stenhouse; Rudduck, 1985;¹⁷ Geraldi; Fiorentini; Pereira, 1998; Freire, 2006), who builds knowledge and understandings about the practice (Cunha; Prado, 2007; Schön, 2010) in the daily life of the school with many others and had also perceived that the act of narrating allows her to be self-aware (Simas, 2018; Simas; Prado; Domingo, 2018).¹⁸

In addition to narrating about the educational routine, the teacher based her research on the narrative methodology of research in education (Serodio; Prado, 2015). When elaborating the experienced moments, “the narrative utterances are conducive to the singular production of unexpected or unplanned contents (...) [since excess of seeing moments perceived by the narrator] gives vent to the possibility of producing new knowledge in the event of writing” (Serodio; Prado, 2015, p.107).¹⁹ When narrating the school routine, the teacher reorganized her work and constructed knowledge from the experience (Zambrano, 2008; Contreras, 2013; Simas; Prado; Domingo, 2019). When looking at these narratives from another time and space, comparing them to those with the research question (how the responses of babies and families compose and expand her narratives, that were written before and during the pandemic period), the teacher narratively researched her practice. The interpretations of the materialities presented hereafter took place in the exercise of quoting the teacher-researcher’s concrete utterances. Those utterances were built including not only the responses the teacher-researcher received from the childhoods and their families, but also the concrete

¹⁶ In Portuguese: “A consciência de si é realizada na consciência que o eu tem da visão de si por parte de um outro.”

¹⁷ STENHOUSE, L.; RUDDUCK, J. *Research as a Basis for Teaching: Readings from the Work of Lawrence Stenhouse*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985.

¹⁸ SIMAS, V. F.; PRADO, G. do V. T.; DOMINGO, J. Possible Dimensions of Consciousness in Narrative Inquiry and in Self Narrative - a Bakhtinian Perspective. *Bakhtiniana, Rev. Estud. Discurso*, São Paulo, v. 13, n. 1, pp.113-131, Apr. 2018. Available from http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2176-45732018000100113&lng=en&nrm=iso. Access: 20 Apr. 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2176-457332164>.

¹⁹ In Portuguese: “os enunciados narrativos são propícios à produção singular de um conteúdo não esperado ou planejado (...) [já que excedentes de visão são construídos pela narradora, surgindo a] possibilidade de produzir conhecimento novo no próprio acontecimento da escrita.”

utterances by the authors and authoresses with whom we interacted in this text besides our own concrete utterances.

2 Pedagogical Narratives Expanded by Baby Boys and Baby Girls

This teacher, who comes from a municipal public school, organized and reorganized her work attentive to the responses of her others. Among those others are: the relationships she established in the school routine with babies, children, professionals; and the written narrative about her own educational practice. It is important to point out that we understand the response as an active response.

Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.68).²⁰

It is also important to highlight that when we bring this quote to this text, we are not only thinking about the live speech and utterance, we are expanding this understanding to the various forms of languages expressed with the whole body. Babies, when expressing themselves with the whole body, respond to what was proposed to them and to the people with whom they relate.

Based on those many responses, the teacher could reflect upon her pedagogical practice with her others, with the ‘thou. This exercise of listening and looking carefully at what she was told got facilitated by the practice of narrating her experience with the others. When narrating what happened in her relationship with the childhoods, the teacher became the other to herself resulting from her excess of seeing. That enabled her not only to look again at her own actions, but also to revisit the actions of the subjects with whom she became involved. The teacher’s interpretation of the narratives, expressed with the whole body of the baby boys and girls themselves, expanded her narrative. Here follows an example of it:

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

The musical wood chunk

Pedro is intense. When he doesn't want something he throws himself on the floor. Sits down. Lies down. Throws himself. His tiny little body turns into a big one. And when he wants something, he gets involved with it. Body and soul. He stays there. Plays and invents, invents and plays again ... for hours. Pedro is intense. The other day Ruy went to school, for child musicalization ... and he put the music into action ...

Pedro, with all his intensity, seemed to have forgotten that in the class there were other babies. He received every sound, every movement, every word as if they were just for him. He looked at Ruy in the eye, always very attentively, always wanting to blow the instruments Ruy had blown, wanting to strum the strings that Ruy had strummed, wanting to make sounds. Pedro's sounds.

Ruy played a little bit of each instrument he took to our class. Ruy played the ukulele, played the guitar. Soon after that Pedro went there and explored each instrument Ruy had played ... when Ruy played the flute it was no different: Pedro went there to look at him. But when Ruy kept it away, Pedro disappeared ... he disappeared for a short time, and that was the space he gave Ruy. In those little moments, the other babies could see Ruy without Pedro at his side, without Pedro in his front, without Pedro behind him ... But soon after that space-time and that time and space changed again. Pedro ran back, all happy, bringing a wooden chunk with him. When he arrived in front of Ruy, he brought the chunk to his mouth, blew and shook the body ... he then swayed to the rhythm of the musical wood chunk (Teacher's narrative).

The teacher's narrative not only brings herself in it, but it also brings Pedro, brings Ruy and brings the other babies. The teacher has her narrative expanded by the narratives of these others, because she opts for this position of narrating not only what she lived herself, but she also tried to respond to what she had lived including her comprehension of what the others responded to the live event. This exercise fosters the construction of shared understandings and knowledge about the work itself and about the relationships it constitutes, since the expressions of others, brought into her narratives, allow the teacher to perceive aspects of herself and of the relationships, since the acts of her others also respond to her and to her pedagogical practice.

Pedro responds to the proposal of the musical experience by expressing himself with his whole body. He reveals to the teacher that a piece of wood can be much more than it simply appears to be. The baby boy shows that for him, and possibly also for other baby boys and girls, the understanding of things is not given in *a priori*; they are being constructed. We were born in a space and a time circumscribed by other spaces and times, that of our society. For adult men and women, much of the world is already given (even though it may always be changing), after all, when we share the time and space of the

society in which we live, we become all part of the same ideological chain (and we concomitantly build it) which

stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness, connecting them together. Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. And the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction (Vološinov, 1973, p.11).²¹

For babies, everything is being built in the encounter that they have with other consciences, so everything is creative power. A wooden chunk is not a cut piece out of a broom handle. This piece of wood for Pedro was a flute, yet for another baby it was a drumstick and for another one it was a spoon to mix something, among many other possibilities that they create with something which, for us, adults, is usually just simply a cut piece of broom handle. When baby boys and girls express themselves, they reveal the creative power of their childhoods, they also reveal how much of this world is already given for us adults.

Pedro, with his comings and goings, with his dance, with his babbling, shows us that babies have not yet hierarchized their languages, unlike adults who make the verbal language the most important form of communication. When expressing himself with his whole body, the baby boy reveals how much he was enjoying exploring the instruments, showing the teacher that the whole body is expressive, that all forms of languages can express meanings, not just the verbal one. Pedro's responses to the proposal, materialized in the text, expand the pedagogical narrative written by the teacher.

When addressing the classic Greek novel, Bakhtin mentions that the character does not undergo changes during the work. A lot happens, time passes and the character remains the same. The classic Greek novel thus creates an extratemporal hiatus (Bakhtin, 1981),²² an empty present. Conversely, the responses of baby boys and girls, interpreted by the teacher and materialized in her narratives, reveal that those babies live present moment, giving meaning to it with their bodies, producers of languages.

²¹ For reference, see footnote 15.

²² For reference, see footnote 10.

In the school routine, we often find ourselves living in the future or in the past, not realizing everything that is happening in the present time. Babies, with their childhoods, reveal to us that they expand the present moment and invite us to live this present with them, instead of creating an extratemporal hiatus. The interpretation of this expanded present perceived in the responses of baby boys and girls, expands the teacher's narrative. When we live in the present in itself, we realize that Pedro used a wood chunk to musicalize the day, or that Kika had an immense courage, cuddling herself and the teacher, as narrated below:

About sizes and courages

It was the time when babies should sleep. They were accommodating themselves; others were being accommodated by the educators. It was also an atypical day, as one of the early childhood education agents had missed the work and another one was replacing her.

There was only thirty minutes left for my shift to end and until that moment everything had gone very well, I was happy and calm. I was thinking of everything that had gone well, while singing for a baby to sleep. Kika, who almost always used to sleeping next to me, this time was beside this other colleague who was not part of our team. She was lying down, but with her eyes wide open. Sometimes she looked at me, and I also looked at her. The moments when I had sung for her to sleep were moments that I liked a lot, but today I was singing for another baby.

In one of those moments of looking from one side to the other, Kika moved as if she was going to get up, but she must have heard the warning "Lie down and sleep fast! It's not time to get up!", coming from this new educator who was sitting next to her side. She immediately lay down again. As soon as I heard what had been said, I understood the reason, the cause and who the recipient of that imposition was. I looked at the baby who was already looking at me and I fell silent. I did nothing, I felt cowardly, very cowardly... and sad. I kept looking at the baby, as if trying to comfort her (without knowing for sure if I was trying to comfort her or myself), I stared at her, I gazed at her ...

Kika, who had kept her eyes wide open after being told off, at times looked at me, at times she looked at the educator who was beside her. As soon as she could (once the educator turned back to talk to another person), she started to crawl super-fast and with her small body of great courage she came to me. She stood up, then she sat on my lap, and there, I sang for both of us (Teacher's narrative).

In this second situation, if the baby girl had laid down and slept instead of resisting; or, yet, if the teacher had been so very focused on what she and her team had to do as soon as all babies fell asleep in order to meet their needs; or even if committed to

making them sleep at all costs (since that was the routine at that moment) to the detriment of each baby's individual needs; maybe she might not have noticed Kika's responsive act. Perhaps the teacher could have not noticed the living the value of that present moment, if she had focused on the value of the near future viewing what might have happened after all babies had slept. The act of the baby made it possible for the teacher to think about her practice in the face of the event, to cuddle herself and also Kika, to attribute value to what was happening in the present moment, instead of letting the event go unnoticed, remaining committed to making babies sleep. Kika's act and the teacher's response expanded that present moment in such a way that it could be narrated later.

Pedro's and Kika's responses, as well as that of all other childhoods, responded to the teacher in a relation that helped her to reorganize her work with the baby boys and girls in favor of them. The interpretations of these same responses by the teacher, when they were materialized in her pedagogical narratives, in addition to broadening them, raised consciousness, making the teacher understand things that, at the very moment of that lived experience, she had not been able to achieve (Simas, 2018; Simas; Prado; Domingo, 2018).²³

The narratives of the school daily life deal with the unrepeatable singularity of the lived life and with an objective unity of the culture domain (Bakhtin, 1993).²⁴ In their responses and expressions, baby boys and girls reveal the singularities that happen in everyday life and point to the uniqueness that is present in the daily dialogue those children establish with the world. When narrating those unrepeatable and unique singularities bringing babies to her text, the teacher, based on what her class showed her, questions the objective units of the cultural domain that, at times, is also composed of adult-centered, hygienist and schooled proposals, in the case of early childhood education. The access she had to the excess of seeing of herself and of the relationships she built, allowed her to have a glimpse at what was unique, in addition to composing the already instituted. This was made possible because this uniqueness put everyone and everything in question, also questioning the official ideology. This only happened because of the teacher's interpretation of the baby boys' and girls' expressions and of herself as she was 'another of herself' (Vološinov, 1973).²⁵

²³ For reference, see footnote 19.

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 11.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 15.

3 Narratives of an Asynchronous and Non-Face-to-Face Work: Looking for Responses

How do these narratives amplified by many voices work in times of social isolation? How does the early years teacher, in a non-face-to-face and asynchronous work, build the excess of seeing by the interpretations of the babies' expressions about her own practice, so that she can reorganize her work in favor of them?

In view of the changes resulting from the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus, the person-to-person meetings with baby boys and girls ceased to exist and the teacher started to create asynchronous proposals aimed at families, suggesting the organization of spaces and times allotted for playing and for creating with different materials. The option for the elaboration of proposals that were not synchronous and that could serve as inspirations for families to play with their babies, also came from the understanding that the exposure of babies in front of screens is harmful and not recommended (WHO, 2019). The conception that the curriculum in early childhood education occurs in relationships, in meetings, in games, in the creations of babies and children, has contributed to the work in the sense of proposing the organization of spaces and times set aside for the children to play and create freely, instead of proposing something closed and already defined *a priori*, indicating how they should play.

Looking at possibilities in non-classroom work in early childhood education, we see that the contact of the teacher became much more with the babies' families than with the baby boys and girls themselves. The teacher sent PDF files containing books of infant literature so that family members could read for their babies. She also produced videos in which she proposed ways to organize spaces in an attractive way, with fabrics and strings, with ice and kitchen utensils, with materials from nature, among other proposals, so that babies and young children could play and create freely. The conversations, which started to mediate the asynchronous contact between teacher and babies, took place with adult family members via WhatsApp. Furthermore, on the school's website, the teacher made proposals for organizing spaces, times and materials to play with and create and talked about the objectives of such work in times of social isolation.

By defending the conception that babies are producers of cultures, knowledge and authors of their creations, and in view of the impossibility of that happening in front of screens, the teacher built this non-face-to-face work, proposing that babies and adult

family members can play together, without pre-determined proposals. However, unlike the work she did in the school space, the responses to the teacher's proposals did not reach her in a synchronous way, in the live event of the lived experience of playing and creating.

One-sided agreements

It was agreed. No, it wasn't. I think it was something one-sided, unilateral, since I made this list of broadcasts on whatsapp: when I wrote it, everyone would receive my message from a single click of mine, but when they responded, the message would only reach myself. So, it wasn't an agreement. I only agreed with myself. It was like this: I decided that I would send two PDF books a week to the babies' adult family members, in case they wanted to read for them. I chose each book very carefully, I remembered those already known by the class, those who seemed to me that the class liked to hear the story the most. I looked for other books on the internet, each choice was very carefully done. Three weeks had passed, six books had been sent, and no reply had been received. So, just as I individually made the decision to share the books, I individually made the decision to stop sharing them. After all, probably no one was reading them. Perhaps more than thirty days after this second arbitrary decision of mine, I saw a short video of a baby boy reading a physical book at his house, via his mother's instagram. I immediately sent her a message saying that the baby was cute reading it, to which she answered me
- We've read all the books you sent in the group, he loves the "Witch Witch" (Teacher's narrative).

The baby boys' and girls' responses, at the moment of the interaction, reached the adults with whom they played. The teacher only had access to those responses when and if family members decided to disclose them. Thus, to the teacher, the responses were from the family members and no longer from the babies themselves. Probably due to the characteristic of the asynchronous work, the responses the teachers was eager to get in order to let her organize and reorganize her work with babies and families did not reach her.

The other's response wedges its way, as it were, into his speech, and although this response is in fact absent, its influence brings about a radical accentual and syntactic restructuring of that speech. The response is not actually present, but its shadow, its trace, falls on his speech, and that shadow, that trace is real (Bakhtin, 1984b, p.208).²⁶

²⁶ BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in Dostoevsky. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. University of Minnesota Press. 1984b, pp.181-269.

The ideas that Bakhtin (1984)²⁷ elaborates regarding the discourse in Dostoevsky's work help us to understand the situation in which the teacher was living. In the absence of any responses, in addition to the silence in relation to the book files she had sent to her list of broadcasts, directed to the families of her class, she projected a shadow of possible responses, which created traces on her discourse, in this case, that no one would be reading the books she had sent, or not even being interested in them.

The shadows and the traces became so real to her that she ended up stop sending the books files to the group. However, when she finally had access to a mother's response, which showed her the baby boy's response, the shadow ceased to exist, since she now had access to the response of another kind of reality that helped her reorganize her practice. Acting in response to the adult who responded to her on Instagram, the teacher decided to transform the list of broadcasts she had created into a group in which all participants could have access to everything sent there, ceasing to be the only one authorized to speak to them and the only recipient of each message, thus making the responses circulate among all families.

As the teacher's access to the baby boys' and girls' responses to her proposals was scarce her actions was responsive to subjects of past experiences, instead of being responsive to the baby boys and girls belonging to her class. That was because she needed the mediation of the family members to have those responses. When remembering the face-to-face interactions she had had with her babies in previous years' classes, or even the relationships she established with this current class during the months in which they still could meet person-to-person, the teacher started gradually building proposals based on her inner dialogues (Bakhtin, 1984b).²⁸ To do this, she based herself on past memories, on the materialities she had experienced in the past, on the actual family members' responses – but not on events really witnessed by her at the very moment they occurred, since it was not possible – in dialog with the recollected events. Therefore, the words of others at the moment of non-face-to-face work were much more present in her inner discourse than in the real events of lived life with her others.

The teacher's pedagogical narratives, referring to that time, reveal this inner dialogue and a relentless pursuit for responses, so that she could, through the

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 27.

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 27.

asynchronous proposals and conversations, also respond to them. Few clues were revealed by the families, in the materialities that they sometimes sent to the teacher through WhatsApp.

The year passed

I think the backyard where we used to play is bigger than the city. We only discover this after we have grown up (...) I was thinking about childhoods' shelters. If we dig a hole at the foot of a guava tree in the backyard, there will be a kid rehearsing to climb the guava tree
Manoel de Barros (free translation)

It was early February. Tidy school. Team together. First days planned. The day has come. There they were: with their mothers, some of them with their fathers. There was a day when there was even a grandmother. We spent three days together, educators and families. Fourth day, babies arrived and stayed with us without their families. Laura was fine, we thought she would cry, and so was Carol. She stood up holding herself, look! Bruno seems to be suffering. I had to have a conversation with him, after the third day of a lot of crying. He looked at me, nodded and, since then, he hasn't cried. Park day. Wall tile day with ink and water. Day in the backyard, this group really seems to like the roosters at the nursery. Courtyard. Flour, ink, clay, materials, history, dance. Gael slept in the hammock. Pietra would not stop crying in the afternoon.... The adaptation of babies in daycare is not being as smooth as it was last year, but we are getting to know each other, more and more each day, tears seem to be giving way to smiles.

News from covid-19 around the world. It has arrived in Brazil. First case in Campinas. A week with reduced support. Next week, no one comes...

Days, weeks, months go by...

I was sick, weakness, dizziness, diarrhea, difficult breathing ... I talked to my brother and cried, cried, cried, then everything passed. They said it could have been a crisis, I don't know, I had never gone through this before... there was a lot going on inside of me for me to name it with just one word. I wake up at 6 am, but as usual, it is not to go to daycare. I don't leave home anymore, everything arrives here. If I am here at home, it is because there are people working so that I can stay here. What an unfair world... only a few can protect themselves...

And then a day, a week, a month goes by... Will we stay two months at home?

I organize the month's calendar, then I detail the weekly activities.

Work, project, literature, research, cuisine, yoga, news. No, no news, no more. I realize that when I read them, I feel as sick as before.

And then you spend a day, a week, a month, two months at home. Will you spend a semester?

I have the impression that we are working harder than when we went to school, as there are now so many meetings, trainings. It seems that we are managing to be more like a group! This is so good! But it is so bad not to see babies and children anymore. Where are the childhoods in

my life? Those who pull me in the now, who pull me out of bed every morning ... They are no longer here!

And then you spend days, weeks, months, bimesters, semesters... Will it become a year?

I look into the minutiae of life for enchantments that may allow me to linger in the now. The nest that the birds made here on the balcony of the 11th floor, the flower that appeared in the tomato, Carol's laugh that arrives via WhatsApp, the video of Gael talking about the gift he got, the video of Bruno jumping on top of the bubble wrap, the video of Sophia playing with the clay with her whole body, the photo of Vitor playing in the basin with water, the dance in the middle of the room, the crying that relieves the pain, the pain of being here, isolated from the world, from loved ones, from childhoods, from meetings ... Then, I remember Manoel de Barros, the childhoods' shelters... I perceive myself far from the childhoods, but looking for them, I find myself a hunter of childhoods' shelters! Now, I look for them, with an attentive eye and ear. In the school, they were sprouting... my school was bigger than the city.

Days, weeks, months, bimesters, semesters passed. Year passed... (Teacher's narrative).

In this exercise of listening and looking closely into her relationship with the families, the teacher begins to reconnect with the childhoods and babies, not from what she lives with them, but through the temporary aesthetic finish of what is experienced by babies and families and sent to the teacher afterwards. The audio of Carol's laughter, the video of Gael talking while babbling and gesticulating, the video of Bruno playing with the material she sent him, the video of Sophia creating with clay, Vitor's photo in the basin with water, all of them bring the teacher closer to these childhoods, but now from another place. From this place, the teacher no longer lives the event of lived life with the many childhoods and the baby boys and girls. From the aesthetic finishes that she receives via WhatsApp from parents, the teacher observes parts of what they have lived, observing their expressions with their whole body, without knowing the exact context, only observing fragments: fragments of childhoods.

4 Some Responses to Childhoods' Fragments

The social isolation adopted as a means of fighting the pandemic seems to favor the creation of an extratemporal hiatus (Bakhtin, 1981).²⁹ We often find ourselves

²⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

thinking about what we could have accomplished throughout the year if this virus had not exist. Other times, we find ourselves thinking about the solution to all of this, hoping for the arrival of the vaccine; speculating all the uncertainties, in case the vaccine takes time to become available. In the same way, by choosing the books she would send to the class, the teacher thought about the past, about the readings that together they had done and, after sending the books, she thought that no one would be reading them, so she envisioned a future without further books being sent to the parents, and so she did.

The uniqueness that the many childhoods helped her build meaning and consequently filled her present time with value, become more difficult to be noticed due to the physical distancing between the bodies of babies and educators. However, this impossibility of physical encounter does not hamper the subjects' responses to the teacher, although those responses reach her in a different way and frequency. Whether we are in the context of face-to-face meetings or in the context of asynchronous meetings, "there is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past the boundless future)" (Bakhtin, 1986b, p.170).³⁰

When the meetings were in person, the babies' responses, interpreted by the teacher, expanded her pedagogical narratives. These responses were experienced by the teacher as they were directed at her. The temporary aesthetic finish produced was about something she had experienced in her relationship with babies herself. Now, from the moment when face-to-face interaction is no longer possible, as it has become asynchronous, the responses start to have other characteristics. As the contact is made with the adults family members, the babies' responses turned into a parent response. The babies appear in those responses sent by the families, who aesthetically finish what they had lived with their baby boys and girls in a provisory way, and from this provisional finish that they have produced and made available to the teacher, she is able to reorganized her work.

The many childhoods stop responding directly to the teacher. When she proposes that families and babies should play with something and receives a photo of the game, or a footage, the response she is receiving does not come directly from the babies, but from

³⁰ BAKHTIN, M. Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, First Edition. 1986b. pp.159-172.

the adults who were present when the baby played with what was suggested. Thus, while in the first situation the teacher lives the moment of the reply in real time and contact with the childhoods, in the second one she does not.

In the first two narratives, each character that the teacher-researcher-narrator created from the experience between herself and the baby boys and girls, she brought with her an axiological position (Bakhtin, 1993),³¹ she was creating uniqueness, responding to the others of the event. In the third and fourth narratives, the teacher reveals that she does not reach the uniqueness created by babies, as the answers they give about the lived experience are directed to others; what she achieves are the provisional finishes of what was lived by them with their families, as well as the responses of the families.

The act of narrating what happened in relation to others and responding to them, fosters the construction of shared understandings and knowledge about one's own work and relationships – since a narrative full of voices of many others, still contains several excesses of vision (Bakhtin, 1990)³² provided by the interpretations of these other voices. This may come to guide the future actions of the narrator teacher in relation to her daily life with babies, as well as the construction of a curriculum based on the encounters (Richter; Barbosa, 2010) with the 'thou. However, in a situation in which the encounter of physical bodies does not happen or happens without the teacher being able to experience it in real-time, the organization of the teacher's pedagogical practice takes place in another way. It is being built based on what the teacher is able to achieve through what the families reveal to her from what babies experienced at home. We can say that, in this case, there may not be a curriculum, since there is no meeting in the space and time of the early childhood school, but there is a reorganization of the teacher's work based on the finishes she receives of the activities she proposed, but which she was not able to witness in real time.

In both situations, for the times and spaces to be powerful assets for babies to experience moments of discovery, creation and playfulness, the listening of the early years teacher needs to be a responsively active (Ponzio, 2010; Simas; Serodio; Fujisawa, 2020) to what those baby boys and girls communicate through their whole bodies. Even though there is no possibility of achieving what they say in real time, from what was

³¹ For reference, see footnote 11.

³² For reference, see footnote 14

proposed by her, there are indications of these responses through conversations with families. There are also the responses of the adults of each family, who in a moment of social isolation are the ones who mediate the contact between teacher and babies. In an asynchronous and non-face-to-face contact, like the one we brought to the fore in this study, the responses may not be as vivid as they used to be before the pandemic (Bakhtin, 1984b),³³ but, despite all that, they do not cease to exist. Only through the practice of a listening that actively responds with the full body to babies and families, will it be possible for teachers to build a pedagogical practice and a curriculum that takes place from relationships (Richter, Barbosa, 2010), from games, from creations and encounters among babies, children and adults, whether they happen in pandemic or non-pandemic times.

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³³ For reference, see footnote 27.

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We, Vanessa França Simas e Guilherme do Val Toledo Prado, as coauthors of this paper, declare that we both had access to the research corpus, participated actively in the discussion of the results, reviewed the paper, and approve of the final version.

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