

TEACHER, qual a educação ambiental que se faz na educação infantil?

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Resumo

O presente artigo situa-se nas relações entre a educação da pequena infância, educação ambiental e práxis pedagógica. Sob a ótica de duas TEACHERs e tendo como lócus duas turmas pré-escolares da educação infantil, objetivou-se investigar como a educação ambiental tem sido realizada na educação infantil. O estudo configura-se como pesquisa qualitativa do tipo exploratória, de modo que os dados foram construídos a partir de entrevistas e análise documental. Os dados foram analisados e categorizados em quadros de representações temáticas, seguindo a metodologia da análise de conteúdo. O estudo revelou uma educação ambiental concentrada nas concepções ecológicas do meio ambiente, ligada ao contexto de datas comemorativas ambientais e ênfase nas aprendizagens dos infantes por meio de atividades impressas, com poucas situações de experiências em ambientes naturais ou seus elementos.

Palavras-chave: Ação docente. Educação da infância. Meio ambiente. Professores.

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Teacher, what environmental education is practiced in early childhood education?

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Abstract

This article focuses on the relationships between early childhood education, environmental education, and pedagogical praxis. From the perspective of two teachers and having two preschool classes in early childhood education as their locus, the objective was to investigate how environmental education has been carried out in early childhood education. The study is configured as qualitative exploratory research so that the data was constructed from interviews and documentary analysis. The data was analyzed and categorized into tables of thematic representations, following the content analysis methodology. The study revealed environmental education focused on ecological conceptions of the environment, linked to the context of environmental commemorative dates and an emphasis on children's learning through printed activities, with few situations of experiences in natural environments or their elements.

Keywords: Teaching action. Early childhood education. Environment. Teachers.

Maestra, ¿qué educación ambiental se realiza en la educación infantil?

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Resumen

El presente artículo se sitúa en las relaciones entre la educación de la primera infancia, la educación ambiental y la práctica pedagógica. Desde la perspectiva de dos profesoras y con dos aulas preescolares de educación infantil como locus, se investigó cómo se lleva a cabo la educación ambiental en la educación infantil. El estudio se configura como una investigación cualitativa de tipo exploratorio, de modo que los datos se construyeron a partir de entrevistas y análisis documental. Los datos se analizaron y categorizaron en cuadros de representaciones temáticas, siguiendo la metodología del análisis de contenido. El estudio reveló una educación ambiental concentrada en las concepciones ecológicas del medio ambiente, ligada al contexto de las fechas conmemorativas ambientales y con énfasis en los aprendizajes de los niños a través de actividades impresas, con pocas situaciones de experiencias en entornos naturales o sus elementos.

Palabras clave: Acción docente. Educación infantil. Medio ambiente. Profesores.

Introduction

In this article, we address the relationship between environmental education (EE) and early childhood education through the voices, documents, narratives, and observations of the pedagogical practice of two teachers working with two preschool classes, educating and caring for children aged four and five years.

Environmental education (EE) has been a widely disseminated topic in recent years and has gained prominence in the school setting. It is mandatory at all levels and modalities of Brazilian education. However, its widespread implementation is more noticeable in the educational stages of elementary and high school, with little emphasis on early childhood education, even though it is part of basic education as its first stage.

The curricular documents for early childhood education highlight educational actions based on the concepts, guidelines, and principles of EE. In the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) (BRASIL, 2010), terms such as sustainability, biodiversity knowledge, interaction with nature, and the preservation and conservation of planet Earth can be found.

On the other hand, in the National Common Curricular Base for Early Childhood Education (BNCCEI) (BRASIL, 2017), terms such as preservation, exploration and understanding of relationships with nature, care for plants and animals are found. Teacher education programs that qualify professionals to work in early childhood education, such as Teaching and Pedagogy, include subjects in their curricula that discuss environment, education, nature, and society.

Thus, there is a framework that enables the dissemination of the environmental dimension in early childhood education. But how is this work being carried out? In seeking answers to this question, this study aims to present the results of research conducted to understand how environmental education (EE) is being developed in the teaching practice of two early childhood education teachers. Therefore, some key questions guided the study: What are the EE practices in the early childhood education context being researched? How have the teachers been incorporating EE with the children's knowledge? Have they been incorporating it? Regarding EE actions, which aspects of this education have been supporting these actions?

In summary, this study aims to present the findings and engage in dialogue with references on environmental education (EE) for early childhood, with the goal of reflecting on it and its practical and theoretical manifestations.

Methodological Procedures

This study is defined as qualitative research, as this type of research is concerned with explaining how the investigated subjects, in specific situations, understand the phenomenon in focus and how it presents itself in the environment and situation being studied (BOGDAN; BIKLEIN, 1994). This study also has an exploratory nature, as its aim is to approach the problem with a certain level of familiarity in order to make it more explicit and to present its findings. (GIL, 2012).

The research was conducted at an early childhood education center in the municipality of Arapiraca, a city in the interior of Alagoas. The choice of this institution was based on its structure, which facilitates the smooth implementation of environmental activities: the building is spacious and equipped with green areas, a sand field, an ecological park, and a solarium. For the study, the selected age group was four and five years old, corresponding to the two preschool classes at the institution, where the two teachers work in the afternoon shift.

The choice was made based on the assumption that these children, in the final classes of early childhood education, have a regular command of verbal language and good coordination³, which expands the possibilities for educational action in environmental education (EE). The teachers hold degrees in Pedagogy and are permanent staff members of the municipal education system.

The data collection instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guided by pre-prepared questions, which focused on inquiries about how environmental education is carried out, in what situations this topic is addressed, whether the institution's spaces are utilized in this process and how, as well as the participation of the children in these learning experiences.

The semi-structured interview has the peculiarity of not being closed in itself. According to Triviños (1987, p.147): “during the interviewee's discourse, new questions and hypotheses may arise from the interviewee's own responses, expanding the scope of information apprehension about the object.” The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the interviewee's consent through the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

In addition, another methodological resource used was document analysis which, according to Gil (2012, p.14), “consists of a procedure that seeks to obtain the most significant information, according to the established research problem.” The documents analyzed were the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP). The criteria for selecting this document were based on the conception

³ We reiterate that being in this age group does not guarantee full mastery of these skills, as there is a multiplicity of children and levels of childhood development.

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advocated by Veiga (2002), as it reflects the educational intentions, actions, and principles that the school and teachers prioritize in their pedagogical, political, and social domains. Thus, the analyses focused on the environmental aspects and nuances present or absent in the documents, with the aim of broadening the understanding of what was discussed in the interviews.

The data analyzed and interpreted in this study aimed to construct results that demonstrate how environmental education actions are being developed in the early childhood education of the researched preschool. In this context, inspired by Bardin's (2004) content analysis methodology, which involves the analysis of linguistic data, where the fundamental elements of communication are identified, numbered, and categorized in order to measure the relative value assigned to a particular topic.

Thus, we conducted an exhaustive reading of the documents and interviews, marked and identified thematic units according to the object of study, and analyzed them. In this way, what we call thematic representation charts were constructed, which are groupings of recurring themes in the teachers' discourses, ultimately providing a kind of overview of EE teaching practices, revealing the representations, meanings, and concepts expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the teachers' actions.

Environmental Education and Its Approaches to Early Childhood Education

As a concept, environmental education emerged in the 1960s with the interest of discussing the preservation and conservation of the environment, the finiteness, and the unequal distribution of natural resources (GUIMARÃES, 2011; CARVALHO, 2012). In the educational field, starting in the 1970s, it was recommended in education policies, beginning with early childhood (BRASIL, 1997). However, legislation ensuring its inclusion in schools only came in 1981 with the National Environmental Policy.

However, this legislation had no effect on the education of young children, as there was no institutionalized early childhood education in Brazil until 1988. Prior to that, there were only spaces concerned with the hygienic and nutritional aspects of children, linked to social assistance services (KUHLMANN, 2000). The Federal Constitution of Brazil is what grants early childhood education an educational character and integrates it into the country's educational system. This status made it possible for the requirement of environmental education actions to be introduced into early childhood education policies.

In this sense, the first guiding document for the early childhood education curriculum, dated 1994, addresses the topic of the environment instead of environmental education. Here we notice an inconsistency, as there is no justification for the absence of the term, considering that early childhood education was already part of the national education system, which required the inclusion of environmental education. However, the first approaches reveal the environmental dimension advocated by the document, which are processes related to nature, its transformations, the environment, and society (BRASIL, 1994). In this way, the construction of the relationship between environmental education and early childhood education began.

The publication of the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) in 1998 is another document that strengthens environmental relations in the early childhood curriculum, as it dedicates an entire volume under the title Knowledge of the World to address environmental issues. However, it does not explicitly use the term environmental education, although principles and guidelines of environmental education are implicitly present. In the following curricular documents, this discrepancy remains. In the 2009 National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, the pedagogical proposals introduce new environmental terms such as sustainability, ethics, solidarity towards the common good, and respect for pluralities (BRASIL, 2009).

A socio-environmental approach to environmental education is noticeable, as it relates aspects that connect society and its implications with nature (LAYRARGUES; LIMA, 2014). However, this is another document that does not mention environmental education, despite its undeniable presence in these proposals. There is no clear explanation for the absence of the term, given that the existing legislation encompassed early childhood education. However, in a study, Silva (2020) suggests that this could be due to the unique identity of early childhood education, as it involves educating young children with specific age-related needs that differentiate them from other educational levels and modalities. Thus, the use of the term could equate this stage to elementary or secondary education.

The last two stages of Basic Education, mentioned above, rely on a discipline-based learning approach, which contrasts with early childhood education, which is divided into fields of experience. This requires a specific type of environmental education, which is still an emerging field of study (CAPANO; PEDROSO, 2023; TIRIBA, 2018; PROFICCE, 2016). With the publication of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), the term Environmental Education emerges, though it is not directly stated in the curriculum. It is presented as a contemporary topic that should be part of the pedagogical proposals of educational institutions, including those for early childhood education

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(BRASIL, 2017). In this sense, it is clear that there are references to environmental education in the guiding documents.

Environmental Education in Early Childhood: A Synonym for Care and Preservation

The concept of environmental education being necessarily linked to the expression of care, conservation, and preservation of the environment is a result of the historical construction of the concept of environmental education (EE). It emerged in the 1960s under the banner of discussing the care and ethical treatment of the environment, the finiteness, and the unequal distribution of natural resources, with a strong appeal to nature from a biologizing perspective (GUIMARÃES, 2011).

Currently, environmental education (EE) is viewed from a socio-environmental perspective, in which humans must see themselves as part of the environment, becoming aware of their collective and individual responsibility for the well-being of the planet. This enables individuals to recognize their interdependence and the understanding that environmental problems are interconnected and can only be comprehended and addressed if considered from all aspects of the world of life: social, economic, political, scientific, and historical (LAYRARGUES; LIMA, 2014; ZANON, 2019; GUIMARÃES, 2011).

In this sense, the teachers' discourses, when asked about how they carry out the work with the children, still adhered to this singular and naturalistic perspective of environmental education (EE), as can be seen in the statement of teacher 1⁴

We are always working on this issue of environmental awareness, right? Taking care of the environment, not littering, we are always observing because it's complicated—they have their snack and already throw things away. It's a serious matter, but we are always there talking to them, so that these attitudes gradually change. (TEACHER 1)⁵

The practice of developing in children an ethical sense and care for the environment is supported by national childhood documents, which encourage actions that promote values of responsibility, respect, care, and environmental preservation in pedagogical experiences (BRASIL, 2010). These documents also clarify that these educational intentions can be realized when children begin to "interact, observe, and share care situations with other children" (BRASIL, 2017, p. 41) and when the

⁴ We referred to the teachers with these terms because we wanted to highlight the discourses rather than the names. We believe this does not detract from or influence the research.

⁵ The discourses were transcribed in full, so there will be linguistic markers characteristic of colloquial verbal language.

teacher facilitates the ability to "establish some connections between the environment and forms of life [...]" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 175).

The National Curriculum Guidelines for Environmental Education (DCNEA, 2012) is a document that guides the principles and values that should govern the curricula of Basic Education and teacher education at the higher education level. In addition to expressing actions in this perspective of environmental care and preservation, the document highlights "experiences that promote recognition, respect, responsibility, and careful coexistence with living beings and their habitat" (BRASIL, 2012, p. 5). Furthermore, experiences of observing nature "perceiving the multiple relationships that are established [...]" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 172) are also advocated and considered relevant.

However, these principles and values are knowledge that can only be properly internalized when there is a clear understanding that humans are also integral members of the environment (TIRIBA, 2010). In the discourse of teacher 1, a broadly discursive approach to working with environmental education is noticeable. Statements like "we are always there talking to them" or "not littering" highlight a practice that prioritizes the value of narratives, which is certainly a relevant resource, but when combined with experiences and lived moments, children begin to understand the reasons behind the importance of these actions. Therefore, this is what gives them meaning.

Hohmann and Weikart (2007, p. 35) describe that children "only learn when they make their own observations and discoveries." The literature on child development has noted that young children have a strong interest in touching, feeling, and the tangible. This understanding is confirmed in the national curricular documents for early childhood education, which state that "From a very young age, through interaction with the natural and social environment in which they live, children learn about the world [...]" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 163, emphasis added), and that "representations and notions about the world are directly associated with the concrete objects of the known, observed, felt, and lived reality" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 169, emphasis added).

It is necessary to understand that the primary objective of the school, regarding environmental issues, is not just to instill in children a critical awareness of environmental reality, as if the matter were only theoretical and reflective. Instead, there are other pathways, though often undervalued, that also facilitate learning: experiences and lived interactions, building a new relationship with the environment, breaking away exclusively from the domain of discursive rationality (TIRIBA, 2018).

This same understanding is evident in the conduct and perspective of Teacher 2:

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We always focus on the issue of taking care of the environment, the hygiene of the space, and respect for the environment, for the plants, and the outdoors. It's this kind of contact. We talk to them about not pulling up the little plant because otherwise, it will cry and lose its flower. About turning off the shower and faucet to avoid wasting water. These are the things we work on every day. Recently, one of the children even corrected Aunt Andreia (the cleaning assistant) for leaving the shower running while cleaning the bathroom, saying she shouldn't do that because it would waste water and that she was ruining it (TEACHER 2)

The concept that values are solely disseminated through discourses and narratives results, in the educational field, specifically in a weakening of pedagogical practices, especially with young children. Although children may express understanding of these discourses, such practices lead to a behaviorist approach to EE, which contributes little to developing a sense of criticality and belonging in children. Thus, it is possible to contribute to the development of individuals who perform small actions for environmental respect, but with little or almost no environmental education.

Such practices may be supported by beliefs in the limited intellectual capacity of children to grasp more complex subjects. It is common to understand that children learn gradually, starting from simpler to more complex topics. However, this understanding overlooks the fact that when children experience developmental leaps, fundamental changes occur in their ways of seeing and understanding things (BRASIL, 1998).

The institution's document, the Political-Pedagogical Project, advocates that it is the responsibility of the teacher and the pedagogical team to create challenging learning situations that respect the developmental stages of children and their prior knowledge. Thus, there is a clear possibility for developing environmental actions that build in-depth knowledge about EE, even with young children.

Despite the weakened environmental educational actions, a certain inclination from the teachers towards working on these issues is perceptible. There are multiple problems contributing to these weaknesses, and it is a multidimensional factor. During the interviews, the teachers reported a lack of adequate environmental training, with only brief and sporadic mentions of the topic in ongoing professional development.

It's clear that the effectiveness of environmental education (EA) in early childhood settings is deeply intertwined with the preparation and ongoing support for teachers, as well as the explicitness of EA in curricular documents. Teachers who lack formal training in EA may rely on their personal beliefs and limited experiences, which can lead to superficial or fragmented approaches. This underscores the need for comprehensive professional development and well-defined curricular

guidelines to ensure that EA is integrated meaningfully and effectively into early childhood education.

Paulo Freire's critique of traditional education emphasizes the importance of recognizing children as active participants in their learning process, rather than passive recipients. This perspective is crucial for developing a more engaged and profound approach to teaching EA, where children not only receive information but also actively interact with and understand their environment (FREIRE, 1987).

These are conflicting and paradigm-driven aspects that need to be considered, questioned, and overcome so that environmental education for children, which is a fundamental right, enables them to interpret, act, and engage responsibly and with commitment to the environment of which they are both a part and a constituent (ARAÚJO, 2012).

Environmental Education as a Synonym for Commemorative Dates

Working with commemorative dates is relevant for children's understanding of cultural, social, and environmental manifestations in the world. The National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education itself states that this methodology "provides the opening for creative work proposals" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 165). In this regard, the teachers highlight:

We know that the calendar in early childhood education institutions often focuses on commemorative dates, such as Earth Day, Arbor Day, and Water Day. On these days, we create posters with trees or plant some plants. On Water Day, we have a group discussion about not wasting water, and throughout the routine, we work on this, especially in daily activities, from brushing teeth to bathing with the assistant. (TEACHER 1)

We are always working on it. In October, for Animal Day, we talk about everything related to the environment. Generally, we focus on everyday things. Here, we get materials from the toy library, we have a bag of animals with some miniature animals, and we show them to the children, classifying them into terrestrial and aquatic animals, and so on. (TEACHER 2).

The teachers' responses reveal what Martins (2009) refers to as sporadic or informational activities. These actions are superficial and do not offer the opportunity for children to develop a deeper understanding. It is important for young children to understand that the environment also consists of plants, water, and animals. However, it is necessary that this understanding is not restricted to isolated aspects, such as commemorative dates, projects, and printed activities, which are of limited significance.

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The national curriculum documents note that “often themes do not gain depth or the necessary attention, resulting in the dissemination of cultural stereotypes and contributing little to the construction of knowledge” (BRASIL, 1998, p. 165). In this sense, these practices limit and perpetuate a cycle that begins with the selection of a specific day within the calendar, with actions that are implemented and concluded by the teacher. Thus, there is no room for the child, as the subject of this education, to engage with and internalize knowledge about these issues in a consistent and lasting manner.

In the same line of thought and practice, Teacher 2 addresses an interesting issue regarding the use of technical terminology with children in environmental education. When classifying animals as terrestrial and aquatic, it is necessary to consider what the children already know, their ways of naming things, and their ways of thinking. From this understanding, it is important to scale and translate this somewhat rudimentary knowledge into scientific knowledge, allowing them to develop, construct, and formulate hypotheses about the subject of knowledge (BRASIL, 1998).

On Environment Day, which is in June, we usually have a week dedicated to it. Generally, these projects are small, and we cover everything about the environment, disposable waste, types of waste, how to preserve the environment. It's usually everyday things that we show, printed activities to see if they remember something because they are small, four and five years old. They aren't curious enough to ask questions; their curiosity isn't that sharp, and they get a bit distracted if you delve too deeply. (TEACHER 2).

Most children in this age group possess language and cognitive abilities that enable argumentation, making this type of conception incongruent. Child development literature highlights the opposite view, that children are naturally curious and questioning, but these aptitudes can be either stifled or nurtured depending on the guidance and stimulation they receive from caregivers. In this context, the school plays a significant role in Rubem Alves' perspective: as either wings or a cage (TIRIBA, 2010).

These positions may also contribute to a retraction of more detailed activities on environmental education, driven by the belief that children lack the capacity to understand issues with a certain degree of complexity. Studies and research involving children (SILVA, 2020; CRUZ, 2008) have shown that young children possess extensive cognitive abilities for comprehension, questioning, hypothesis formation, and expressing opinions on various topics.

This scenario has validated a reorientation of the image of the child in culture, history, and the production of childhood development science. After all, “the child does not know less, but knows something different” (COHN, 2009, p.50). The perpetuation of a view of the child as lacking the

skills to communicate, to be understood, and merely absorbing knowledge expressed by adults does not align with this new perspective of the child, as presented in the documents governing the actions of teachers themselves. This perspective converges with the denial of access to various types of knowledge that are the rights of children, allowing them to connect their understanding of their own reality with the external reality (BRASIL, 1998).

We also work with this notion of environmental education during Arapiraca's anniversary, which is October 30. Last year, we planted an Arapiraca tree at the institution with the children. They saw the planting, the preparation of the soil, and every week they watered it for growth. We discussed the need for water for the plant to grow, the importance of caring for the environment, plants, and trees. We fenced it off, and surprisingly, with so many children, they never touched it (TEACHER 1).

Planting, observing, and caring for plants are recommended by national curriculum reference documents for early childhood education. These activities help children gradually understand relationships, attributes of beings, and their transformations by valuing communication, feelings, and desires about how they represent the world and their environment (BRASIL, 1998). The phrases “*they saw the planting*” and “*the preparation of the soil*” suggest a certain distance from the children’s active participation.

The sequence of expressions: “*So we fenced it, and surprisingly, despite working with so many children, they never touched it*” reflects a pedagogical action that is initiated and completed by the educator, without the children having regular, direct access to the experience, integration, and understanding of the processes of planting and growth. Araújo (2012) emphasizes that such activities reinforce a utilitarian and disconnected view of the environment, as they do not deepen the understanding of the integration between humans, nature, environment, and society. This lack of depth hinders the development of initial understandings of environmental issues relevant to life on Earth, which children will inherit and have the power to change.

Thus, it is vital and necessary to provide environmental education that allows for continuous experiences with natural elements. Sustainability, respect, and preservation are both learnable and teachable. Introducing these concepts in early childhood contributes to a balanced life cycle by reconnecting humans with the environment.

Environmental education synonymous with plants, water, and soil

The BNCCEI states that interaction and experiences with natural elements both inside and outside educational institutions constitute a right to learning and development. (BRASIL, 2017). The

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DCNEI, by guiding early childhood institutions to ensure that their pedagogical proposals include children's understanding of the physical and social environment, thus the environment, through experiences involving interaction, questioning, and curiosity, also guarantees this right. (BRASIL, 2010). The RCNEI, another document on early childhood, discusses the importance of children having contact and interaction with various elements and phenomena of the natural and cultural world. (BRASIL, 1998).

In this regard, the teachers' statements highlight actions that they consider to be experiences for children with the environment within the institution:

A little over a month ago, we planted beans in cotton, that classic experiment that everyone does, right? And they love it, right? So, that was a practical activity related to the environment. Another thing we planted was a Ypê tree near the kitchen, and everyone in my class participated. I even have photos at home; I took pictures of them planting the Ypê tree, their joy while planting it. Every day we're in the cafeteria, and Mrs. Francisca waters it. They say, 'Teacher, it's going to look really beautiful.' We talked about the Ypê tree, showed pictures (this is the white Ypê) of how it will look in the future. And they said, 'Teacher, but we won't be here at the daycare anymore.' So I said, 'But when it's beautiful, you can come back to visit the daycare and see the Ypê tree (TEACHER 1).

We show things here in the courtyard. We don't leave the institution, just show the sands and (laughs), no, just the weeds and things. The sands that the parents don't even like because the kids get all dirty, and in the winter it's complicated because it turns into mud. So, think about it. We show plants, water, we show everything, and show how to work with it, how to educate the child (TEACHER 2).

The early childhood frameworks demonstrate this connection between children and nature, with the natural environment as a place for interaction, experiences, and living. However, it is evident in teacher 1's discourse that, despite these experiences existing, they have limited aspects. The bean in cotton is a common practice in early childhood education schools, and teacher 1 reinforced this concept by stating that everyone does it. Tiriba (2010) warns that after the sprout appears, it is common for it to be discarded, and sometimes the children themselves do not plant the bean. These specific and isolated planting experiences seem to value the product over the investigative processes to which children could be exposed se as atividades focassem nos problemas investigativos e possíveis hipóteses, ou seja, na experiência em si.

Tiriba highlights that these activities open 'spaces for the exercise of an ethic of care regarding the body, the Earth, the surroundings, and the planet' (2010, p. 8). Thus, monitoring the sprouting of

a plant, its growth, and all stages of its transformation not only contributes to creating bonds and memories of respect for the environment but can also help in the development of self-confidence and regulation of frustration. If the plant does not sprout, the child may feel sad, frustrated, and insecure about their abilities. These issues are related to the child's holistic emotional development, which are fostered through their interaction with elements of nature.

The perception of nature as an instrument, which materializes in isolated situations and with limited purposes, expressed in the planting of beans and the ipe tree, reveals an EE that does not focus on developing bonds and a sense of world belonging in children. Thus, they fail to perceive themselves as integrated and part of nature, as they do not have a concrete relationship with themselves (LOUV, 2016).

Regarding natural elements such as water and sand emphasized in TEACHER 2's discourse, which are presented as sources of dirtiness in parents' narratives, these perceptions can influence educational intentions. They might reduce or eliminate access to these elements and unconsciously associate them with negative aspects such as messiness, leading to their avoidance. Natural elements should be viewed and utilized as places for learning and promoting child development. Education involves not only the mind but also the body, interaction, and engagement with the external environment (VYGOSTKY 2007; TIRIBA, 2018).

But raising awareness about early childhood pedagogical practices in environmental education (EA) needs to shift towards a conception of the child as, though small, actively engaged with the environment. This requires a new model of teacher and, consequently, new teaching practices.

Environmental Education as a Synonym for Printed Activities

In discussions about how environmental education (EA) pedagogical practices were implemented in the children's routines, the teachers described the prevalence of paper-based activities in various formats, commonly carried out within the classroom setting.

We create posters with the children about the environment, show videos on nature preservation and care, and have "little tasks" throughout the week, focusing on the theme we're working on. When it's a project, it can last the entire month or a week, depending on the project's scope (TEACHER 1).

Despite the environmental activities still being minimally experienced, there is an effort to adhere to the RCNEI guidelines, which state: "The mediation of oral narratives, books, newspapers,

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magazines, television, radio, photographs, films, etc., are excellent opportunities for constructing this knowledge” (BRASIL, 1998, p. 172). In other words, the variety of resources to connect with the child's world, language, and understanding is crucial for guiding knowledge in environmental education. The institution's pedagogical project also notes that children use various forms of expression and exercise their capacity to generate original ideas and hypotheses about what they seek to explore.

We focus more on environmental education through daily activities and throughout the literacy process, showing them the changes that occur. We try to explain what can be done to reduce temperature, the importance of planting trees, and care. We show them the plant, its growth and development, what it needs, and also use printed activities (TEACHER 2).

The relationship between children and nature, and the work with environmental education, should not be limited to cognition, paper, and poster boards. Schools, as disseminators of culture, are embedded in a synthetic culture that emphasizes the production of things, having, and cognition at the expense of being and its subjectivities. Life is often taught through symbols rather than the life itself, which poses a challenge for teaching environmental education in early childhood. Children have a unique mode of learning that involves using their bodies to connect with things, engaging their emotions, senses, play, and imagination (TIRIBA, 2021; SANTOS, 2018).

It is essential that environmental practices for children provide an emotional and connected bond with the natural world, which is predicted in an interconnected relationship that can only be achieved through experimentation and direct experience with nature. This connection will encourage them “to discover existing problems related to nature, biodiversity, and their underlying reasons (HENN E BASTOS, 2014, p. 334).

This lack of educator attention to these spaces as environments for environmental learning and the development of children's potential, emotions, and bodies, stems from a teacher training grounded in traditional classroom settings (TIRIBA, 2010). The BNCC emphasizes the need for proposing experiences that allow children to understand and connect with nature, which can occur through play, observation, and experimentation (BRASIL, 2017).

These teaching and learning methodologies in environmental education transcend simplistic approaches by focusing on reconnecting the human component with the environment. However, such learning does not solidify at this educational level but is developed over time as the child comprehends and takes in notions of socio-environmental diversity (BRASIL, 1998). In this context, the stance of early childhood educators and institutions should be to fulfill their socio-environmental role, which

translates into an educational process that requires greater involvement, investment, and training, aiming to promote children's autonomy with and about the world in a sustainable manner.

Final considerations

The findings of this study highlight views of environmental education in early childhood that present issues needing reflection to facilitate reformulations in environmental education actions related to childhood. These perspectives should shift between the natural and social aspects of environmental education, fostering the perception of children as integral parts of the environment. They should allow continuous contact with nature and its elements, enabling learning and experiences shaped by direct interaction with life itself, so that children can truly understand and connect with the Earth.

In this context, it is essential for educators to recognize children as beings of both culture and nature, who develop through their interaction with the natural environment to which they belong, and their specific learning processes. This involves valuing their voices and perspectives on the environmental dimension, building on their existing knowledge about the environment to create situations and learning experiences that help them internalize their earthly identities, teaching them how to be in and with the world (VYGOSTKY, 2007; CORSARO, 2011; MORIN, 2000; FREIRE, 1983).

Therefore, it is expected that the results and reflections expressed in this study can contribute to the field of pedagogical praxis in environmental education (EA) for early childhood, aiming to enhance the understanding of this area and teacher training, as a way to improve pedagogical practice. Thus, it is intended that further investigations be conducted to advance educational developments concerning EA knowledge and early childhood education.

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