

Uma análise sobre como docentes e familiares percebem uns aos outros em um centro de Educação Infantil de Lages, SC¹

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RESUMO

Este artigo é resultado de uma dissertação de mestrado que trata das percepções recíprocas entre docentes e famílias de um centro de Educação Infantil de Lages, SC. Objetivou conhecer as percepções das famílias sobre a atuação das professoras na Educação Infantil e das professoras sobre a atuação das famílias das crianças com quem trabalham. Trata-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, exploratória, caracterizada como estudo de caso. A coleta de dados foi realizada pelo uso da técnica do grupo focal, a partir de Gondim (2002, 2023). Foi possível concluir que as professoras percebem maior preocupação das famílias apenas com atividades relacionadas ao cuidado, discurso bem presente entre as professoras das turmas de berçário e maternal. Quanto às famílias, elas até percebem o desenvolvimento das crianças, porém, desconhecem a rotina na Educação Infantil, bem como, a formação das professoras e a maneira com que planejam e desenvolvem suas práticas pedagógicas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Infantil. Professoras. Famílias. Percepção.

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An analysis of how teachers and family members perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education center in Lages, SC

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ABSTRACT

This article is the result of a master's thesis that deals with reciprocal perceptions between teachers and families at an early childhood education center in Lages, SC. The objective was to understand the families' perceptions of the performance of teachers in Early Childhood Education and of the teachers' perceptions of the actions of the families of the children with whom they work. This research was conducted with a qualitative, exploratory approach, characterized as a case study. Data collection was carried out using the focus group technique, from Gondim (2002; 2023). It was possible to conclude that teachers perceive greater concern from families only with activities related to care, a discourse that is very present among teachers in nursery and nursery classes. As for families, they notice the development of children, but are unaware of the routine in Early Childhood Education and the training of teachers.

KEYWORDS: Early Childhood Education. Teachers. Families. Perception.

Un análisis sobre cómo los profesores y familiares se perciben unos a otros en un centro de Educación Infantil de Lages, SC

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RESUMEN

Este artículo es el resultado de una tesis de maestría que aborda las percepciones recíprocas entre docentes y familias en un centro de Educación Infantil en Lages, SC. El objetivo fue comprender las percepciones de las familias sobre el desempeño de los docentes en Educación Infantil y de las percepciones de los docentes sobre las acciones de las familias de los niños con quienes trabajan. Se trata de una investigación con un enfoque cualitativo, exploratorio, caracterizada como un estudio de caso. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante la técnica de grupos focales, a partir de Gondim (2002; 2023). Se pudo concluir que los docentes perciben mayor preocupación de las familias únicamente con las actividades relacionadas al cuidado. En cuanto a las familias, incluso notan el desarrollo de los niños, pero desconocen la rutina en la Educación Infantil y la formación del profesorado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Infantil. Maestros. Familias. Percepción.

Introduction

For less than two decades, the understanding that links educating and caring as an inseparable part of the educational process has been consolidating in Early Childhood Education. This binomial brings teachers and families face to face, in a relationship of participation and complementarity in Early Childhood Education institutions.

According to the LDBEN (Brazil, 1996), Early Childhood Education is established as the first stage of Basic Education, while the DCNEI (Brazil, 2009) define that the guiding axes of this stage are interactions and play.

Quality teaching in this phase is undoubtedly essential for integral human development, considering the physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects, as stipulated in Art. 29 of Law No. 9394/96 (National Education Guidelines and Framework Law – LDBEN) (Brazil, 1996). Therefore, one of the main agents responsible for the teaching and learning processes is the teacher. Whereas this professional was once seen as a caregiver or, even, as the ultimate authority in the learning process, today their role is linked to mediating learning and the development of the child.

It is within this context of recognizing the importance of Early Childhood Education that we chose the theme "Teachers and Families: Reciprocal Perceptions in an Early Childhood Education Center in Lages, SC." It arises from questions and concerns stemming from the researcher's experiences as a teacher in Early Childhood Education.

In this perspective, the social and academic relevance of the theme lies in the fact that the Brazilian public policy for Early Childhood Education – after a “brief” history of five hundred years of the state's absence or its active presence in promoting welfare and exclusionary actions, with the participation and complicity of the property-owning classes in maintaining the social order – has made significant progress in the last thirty years. Now, it is about giving concreteness to childhood policies that enable the rights already guaranteed by law, since the Federal Constitution of 1988, through the Child and Adolescent Statute of 1990, and the LDBEN of 1996.

However, many challenges still persist, such as the fragility of teachers' continuous professional development, material, food, and didactic conditions in underfunded schools, limited resources due to public budget caps, the understanding of the legal framework itself, particularly the latest National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) (Brazil, 2009), linked to the LDBEN, and, of course, the perceptions of families and their participation in the institution, as well as the teachers' perceptions of this family involvement. In short, reciprocal perceptions are embedded in the democratic management of Early Childhood Education.

According to the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (Brazil, 2017), until the 1980s, the term “pre-school education” expressed the understanding that Early Childhood Education was a previous, independent, and preparatory stage for schooling, which would only begin in Elementary Education, placing it outside formal education. From the 1988 Federal Constitution onwards, the care of children aged zero to six in daycare centers and pre-schools became a duty of the state and a right of the child and family. Subsequently, with the consolidation of the LDBEN, Early Childhood Education became an integral part of Basic Education.

Similarly, the old Kindergarten, as it was referred to in the history of Brazilian Early Childhood Education, was strongly associated with the concept of “care,” labeling those responsible for the children with the term “aunt,” and even with the emergence of a new concept of childhood with the implementation of the LDBEN, this term has still been associated with affectivity. This reinforces the need to propagate the true meaning of Early Childhood Education. After all, the real role of the teacher and the importance of this educational stage are still underappreciated by many, especially when compared to other stages of schooling.

Regarding this, initially, we know that the challenges are significant in the daily relationship between families and teachers, such as the availability of time and the daily struggles of families for survival, the limited flexibility in the institution's schedules to promote meetings between teachers and families, among many other difficulties.

Thus, in an effort to understand how teachers and families perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education Center in the municipal education network of Lages, SC, we adopted a qualitative approach to conduct this case study. According to Yin (2001, p. 32), research considered as a case study empirically investigates “[...] a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined.” Case studies are commonly used in the field of human sciences, health, and particularly in education. Therefore, the case study aims to intensify and systematize research focused on a phenomenon, but with characteristics common to the context of a broader social universe. Thus, the case study should not be taken as a simple investigation, as it requires many skills from the researcher (Yin, 2001).

The goal of this type of study is to produce in-depth knowledge about a specific case, taking into account its particularities, complexities, multiple determinations, and specificities. However, this knowledge can and should gain a generalizing dimension, serving as a theoretical and practical reference for understanding similar situations. Another important dimension linked to the case study when considering the object of study is, therefore, the concern to advance the investigation beyond

An analysis of how teachers and family members perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education center in Lages, SC, merely describing the appearance of the phenomenon. The aim is to uncover its origin, constitution, and the dynamics of its essence. The entry point is the appearance, but it does not coincide with the phenomenological essence. It hides and reveals the essence, as Kosik (1989) says, which is why investigation is necessary.

This investigation focused on an Early Childhood Education Center, within a universe of seventy-nine such institutions managed by the municipal government of Lages, serving children from zero to five years old⁴. During the research, a theoretical survey and an exploratory study of bibliographical references were conducted, followed by data collection in the field. For this, authorization was requested from the Municipal Department of Education of Lages, SC (SMEL), respecting the ethical aspects of the research, in accordance with Resolution CNS/CP No. 510/2016. After approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), data were collected in the field through a focus group. The broader field research universe consisted of five guardians of children enrolled and attending regularly at a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (Ceim) in Lages, SC, and five teachers from the same institution.

Regarding the criteria for selecting the participants in the research, the following was stipulated: select the guardians of children with higher attendance, those who usually took the children to school, and who lived in the same household as the children. Therefore, guardians of children with lower attendance, who had no direct contact with the school, and who did not reside with the children, were excluded from the focus group. Based on these criteria, the sample consisted of five participants, guardians of children, including one from the mixed nursery, one from Maternal I, one from Maternal II, one from Pre I, and one from Pre II.

Regarding the selection criterion for the teachers, one teacher from each class was included in the research, with those having the most experience in Early Childhood Education in the municipal education network of Lages being selected. Thus, this sample comprised five participants among the teachers.

To collect data from the participants, the focus group technique was used, based on Gatti (2005) and Gondim (2002, 2023). The focus group was the technique used for data collection because it is believed that this technique, through group interactions, “[...] in addition to helping obtain different perspectives on the same issue, also allows the understanding of ideas shared by people in their everyday lives and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others” (Gatti, 2005, p. 11).

⁴ Disponível em: <https://www.educacaolages.sc.gov.br/ceims-e-emebs>. Acesso em: 9 jun., 2022.

Gondim (2002, p. 160) considers focus groups as “[...] a useful tool for working with groups of parents, teachers, and students,” which helps “[...] in introducing programs, making decisions, organizational learning, diagnosing and evaluating service quality, as well as generating new ideas.” As there are different types of focus groups, as pointed out by Morgan (1997), cited by Gondim (2002), the two focus groups conducted in this research, one with families and another with teachers, are characterized as self-referential groups, as they are the primary source of data and serve to deepen issues and/or define other questions based on already known themes. In a more recent text, Gondim (2023) considers that focus groups are relevant tools for evaluation and planning practical actions, which requires a careful alignment between the research aspects and data collection. Based on this, it can be considered that well-executed focus groups are important instruments for evaluating and planning educational policies and school management, two dimensions that are very close to the issue discussed here, the relationship between families and school.

Two focus groups were then conducted, one composed of five guardians of children from an Early Childhood Education center and another composed of five teachers from the same institution. The data collected were analyzed based on historical-critical pedagogical theory. Regarding the theoretical approach, the historical-critical pedagogy of Saviani (2011) was chosen, in which the social phenomena studied are found in reality, being, therefore, historical constructions. Thus, the goal is not to describe the appearances of the object being investigated but to make an effort in the research, that is, to go beyond appearances and reach the essence to be unveiled.

Child and Childhood

The ways in which childhood and children are understood by society are directly related to historical context. These concepts are the result of a social construction, in which behaviors are produced, reproduced, and transformed, so that we reach the present day, recognizing the child as a historical being and holder of rights.

Until the 18th century, “[...] the passage of the child through the family and society was very brief and insignificant for there to be time or reason to force memory or touch sensitivity” (Ariès, 2019, p. X). Paraphrasing the author, the child went through a short period called “pampering,” a phase in which emotions were superficial, because after these early years of life, if the child died, few would be inconsolable, as the order was not to make much of it, since the child would soon be replaced by another. In this context, older children, who no longer depended entirely on the care of their

An analysis of how teachers and family members perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education center in Lages, SC mothers or wet nurses, began to participate in the social relations of adults, being seen as miniatures of adults.

Based on this information, it can be observed that affectivity, which is now widely discussed and seen as an important part of child development, was almost imperceptible at that time. Even the term “child” did not have the same definition we know today, as it was not used solely to refer to human beings, but also to animals and plants.

According to Priore (2020), the 19th century ratifies the humanistic discovery of the specificity of childhood and adolescence as stages of life. Thus, the terms “child,” “adolescent,” and “boy” appeared in dictionaries in 1830, designating the child as the offspring of a woman, in the same way that plants and animals also have their offspring. This meaning comes from the association of the child with the act of creation, where to create means to breastfeed or, as plants do not breastfeed, to nourish with their own sap. Only with the popular use of the term in the early decades of the 19th century did dictionaries recognize the exclusive use of the word child for the human species.

But, after all, what distinguishes childhood from a child? Sociologists Manuel Jacinto Sarmento and Manuel Pinto explain this distinction in detail:

[...] Children have always existed, since the first human being, and childhood as a social construct – around which a set of social representations and beliefs has been built, and for which mechanisms of socialization and control were structured, establishing it as a distinct social category – has existed since the centuries XVII e XVIII (Sarmento; Pinto, 1997, p. 11).

As can be inferred from the exposition of the aforementioned authors, every child is just that, regardless of the cultural and historical context in which they live. Therefore, in this sense, what changes are the actions of adults in relation to the child. According to the Aurélio dictionary, a child is a human being living through the childhood period, and childhood is the period of life from birth to puberty, around 12 years of age.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 marked the beginning of a new political, educational, and social perspective regarding children. From this Magna Carta, every child is considered a citizen, thus a subject of rights, and the family, society, and the state are declared responsible for ensuring, as a priority, these rights. It is also important to note that the term “minor” was replaced by “child and adolescent,” regardless of economic, social, legal, family, or other distinctions.

It is important to reflect that the concepts of "child" and "childhood" are variable, meaning that to understand them, it is necessary to consider the structural contexts, the conditions, and the time in which one is inserted. However, being a child in contemporary times means having access to basic rights such as education, health, nutrition, and life. It is important to emphasize that a child is not synonymous with childhood, and even with the recognition and enrichment of laws and studies about this period of life, not all children experience childhood. After all, many are immersed in environments that prevent the full realization of their rights in practice, even though they are guaranteed by law.

Role of Families and Teachers in Early Childhood Education

Children are full of energy, driven by the desire to play and do something. It is in this way that they gradually rediscover the world, and therefore, they need to be guided toward experiences that ensure development in the physical, psychological, intellectual, and social dimensions. At this point, it becomes evident that family participation and constant dialogue with teachers are of utmost importance for child development. However, what do official documents say about the role of families and teachers in Early Childhood Education?

Considering that this stage was included in Basic Education just over two decades ago, which can be considered recent, we can observe that many people still view Early Childhood Education as an opportunity for welfare. However, with regard to public policies, since the 1988 Federal Constitution established the requirement for daycare and pre-school attendance for children from zero to six years old, there have been significant advances in Early Childhood Education, including the creation of documents that recognize, guide, and set intentions for this stage of schooling.

In this regard, as stated in Art. 29 of the LDBEN, "Early childhood education, the first stage of basic education, aims for the integral development of the child up to 5 (five) years old, in its physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects, complementing the actions of the family and the community" (Brazil, 1996). In line with the law in question, it is the Union's responsibility to provide free vacancies in Basic Education and to actively seek children, while the family is responsible for enrolling the child and ensuring their attendance from the age of four in educational institutions. Otherwise, the family may be held accountable for not complying with what is prescribed by law.

When analyzing the Federal Constitution (1988), we find, in Article 227, some duties assigned to families, as well as to society and the state. Among these duties is the responsibility to guarantee the rights of children, adolescents, and young people to life, health, food, education, leisure,

An analysis of how teachers and family members perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education center in Lages,^{SC} professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and coexistence with the family and the community, as well as to protect them from all forms of abandonment, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression.

In light of this, the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) (Brazil, 1998) describes the professional profile of those working in this stage of education: the teacher must work in an interdisciplinary manner, meaning that they should cover everything from basic care to specific knowledge, encompassing all areas of learning. In addition, the teacher must have broad training, reflect on their practices, engage in discussions with other education professionals, and dialogue with families and the local community to understand the social background from which the children come.

Regarding the relationship between the family and Early Childhood Education institutions, the document presents specific topics addressing: partnerships with families, respect for various types of family structures, acceptance of different cultures, values, and beliefs about child education, the establishment of communication channels, the inclusion of family knowledge in educational work, the welcoming of families and children in the institution, and the reception of families with special needs.

When revisiting the DCNEI (Brazil, 2009), we can observe that the pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education institutions should complement the education and care of children with families, as well as provide conditions, spaces, and times that ensure listening and dialogue with families, respecting their different organizational types. The document also highlights that institutions should monitor the pedagogical work and create opportunities for assessing children's development, without the aim of promotion, ensuring specific documentation that allows families to be informed about the work carried out with the children and their development and learning processes in Early Childhood Education.

In the same perspective, the Base Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education in the Catarinense Territory (Santa Catarina, 2019) highlights that Early Childhood Education institutions must ensure that ethical, political, and aesthetic principles are articulated with the axes of interactions and play. The document also acknowledges that the family motivates and mediates education, contributing to child development, and that, together with educational institutions, it is responsible for ensuring the child's upbringing. In this process, it is essential that teachers working in Early Childhood Education integrate learning rights with individual and collective identity, considering cultural diversity and family experiences. Thus, it is up to these

education professionals to observe and diagnose the group of children they work with, so that, through planned actions, they can provide the children with meaningful learning opportunities.

Still under the same approach, in Article 205, the Federal Constitution (1988) describes that education is the duty of the state, the family, and society. Regarding the teaching profession, the LDBEN outlines the following duties:

Art. 13. Teachers shall be responsible for: I – participating in the development of the pedagogical proposal of the educational institution; II – preparing and following the work plan according to the pedagogical proposal of the educational institution; III – ensuring students' learning;; IV – establishing recovery strategies for students with lower performance; V – conducting the established school days and class hours, in addition to fully participating in the periods dedicated to planning, evaluation, and professional development; VI – collaborating with activities that connect the school with families and the community (Brasil, 1996).

It is important to highlight item VI of Art. 13 cited above, as much has been said about the relationship between family and school, but little has been done. In this regard, it is essential to emphasize that the school should be responsible for facilitating this interaction, and it is the duty of teachers to participate in these actions. However, academic and continuous training does not provide support for this. On one hand, the authorities responsible for education do nothing about it, and on the other hand, teachers use this state neglect as an excuse and do not seek strategies to get closer to the families. Thus, as time passes, the family and school continue to drift apart.

Families Through the Teachers' Eyes

The groups were gathered at the Early Childhood Education Center, on different days and times for each category. In this sense, the room made available for the meetings was prepared in advance to ensure that everyone felt welcomed. After the presentation of the research, the discussion of each focus group session was initiated, coordinated by the researcher, who also signs this article, using a guiding script for the dialogue. In each meeting, participants were seated in chairs with individual tables arranged in a semicircle, as “[...] this arrangement provides greater comfort for the participants and can facilitate different forms of record-keeping [...]” (Gatti, 2005, p. 24). The meeting was mediated by the researcher and recorded with a video camera. From this, the statements were transcribed with the help of a transcription program.

In the discussion with the teachers about the interaction with families during the arrival and departure of the Ceim, we noticed that some of them, specifically those who work with babies and

An analysis of how teachers and family members perceive each other in an Early Childhood Education center in Lages, SC very young children, highlighted the families' omission regarding the child's health status, as exemplified below:

Azaleia⁵: There is the welcoming, right? Since I work in the morning, there is a welcoming of the children with their parents, but my focus is on the children. However, I ask if everything is okay, how they passed the night, because many parents don't mention if the child had a fever, if the child didn't feel well, right? If they vomited, if they were unwell, they don't comment on it, right? So, sometimes I ask, sometimes I don't, but most of the time I ask, and they don't always say anything, right? [...] I think it still continues to be a place to drop off children, ahm, it's been like that for a long time and nothing has changed. For them, it's a place where they leave the child there all day so they can work, so they can sleep late, gossip with the neighbor, get some sun, drink some chimarrão, because most of them don't work. So, I see it as that, a children's deposit.

According to Vitória (2017), if teachers believe that daycare is a right for children, they should not oppose the fact that mothers take their children to daycare, even if they could stay with them at home, whether during vacations or on a day off.

Regarding family participation, the testimonies show that families demonstrate greater involvement in the children's school routine starting from pre-school age. According to the reports of teachers who work with children aged zero to three, it is noticeable that families are mainly concerned with care-related activities, disconnecting from what official documents advocate for Early Childhood Education, that is, the inseparability between caring and educating:

Begônia: Well, we observe that it seems that the younger the children are, the less interest parents have in the school, the less they value the school, the teacher, and what they come here for, right? It seems that when they are babies, they only come so that the mother can work, so the mother can, you know? And then, as they grow, it seems like there starts to be an interest, I don't know, an understanding of school, of learning, but while they are small, it's really complicated for us. And, like, if we ask for a little money to buy, I don't know, a treat for Children's Day, they give it. But if we ask for a picture for a project, a pedagogical task, there's no interest, you know? If it's for a party, if it's for something like that, there's interest. But if it's for the pedagogical part, it's more difficult.

Considering the compulsory education for children from the age of four, it is possible that families understand that it is during this period that children go to school to, indeed, learn. This aspect is highlighted in the following testimonies.:

Gardênia: And so, at the beginning of the year, this really happens a lot. It happens a lot from the smaller ones to the older ones, because the first thing at the first meeting at the beginning of the year is: "Is the child going to leave reading from pre-school?" (laughs) Their concern is that the child is ready for first grade. Some parents have this concern. Hmm. And maybe that's the difference; it's that with the little ones, right? "I need to work, bye, left them there, it's fine, they're looking good."

⁵ To maintain the anonymity of the research participants, the names used are fictitious, and flower names were chosen.

Begônia: Hmm, if they come home clean and without any bruises, that's great! It doesn't matter if they learned a new word, it doesn't matter if they're developing skills, it doesn't matter. What matters is that they're clean and have eaten...

Regarding the family situation of the children, it was possible to identify that most of the families belong to the community where the school is located, with prior information provided by other teachers from the institution, as shown in the following excerpts:

Gardênia: In my case, when they arrive, most of them have been with us since the nursery, right? So, we end up knowing their history even before they join the class, right? And it's normal, sometimes, we talk with a colleague, right? "Did you know it was like this?" Sharing ideas with a colleague who has already worked with the child, you know? We get to know most of them this way. When they arrive, who are from the school, we already have a brief understanding of the child, but this really happens though not 100% over the course of the year. Throughout the year, if there are any issues, we find out, but it's rare for us to hear it from the parents. Very rare. They don't open up like that with us; in the case of my students, right? Ahm, so, it really happens over the course of the year.

Although these statements are important, it is worth noting that teachers cannot rely solely on prior knowledge obtained from colleagues. After all, it is throughout the year that they get to know the children and their family situations better, and often, specific conditions are perceived through the children's own reports. However, the teachers do not plan strategies to learn more about the realities of the families of the children they work with daily.

When prompted to talk about their professional preparation, the expressions were of surprise and doubt, with comments such as: "[...] wow, how have I never thought about this before?" The reports indicate that there is no guidance on how to interact with families, and if they need any advice, they seek it on their own, adapting in the way they consider best, letting things happen naturally. If a problem arises, they will think about how to solve it.

Gardênia: And things happen so naturally that you end up interacting with them daily, including with the families [...] and now with WhatsApp there [...]. So, but this is something that happens naturally, in my view, and it's in the day-to-day. And in the best way possible, right? Ah, if we see things are getting complicated, we try to ease them, right? Sometimes we even pretend we don't see or hear, to avoid bigger problems, right?

Regarding working conditions in Early Childhood Education, there is no perception of the existence of public policies addressing the working conditions of professionals in this field. Only two of the participants verbally expressed their views on the matter, while the others shook their heads in denial and showed bewilderment in their facial expressions.

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From Saviani's (2011) perspective, the scarcity situation that schools and teachers face, such as outdated working conditions and salaries, reflects on teacher training, which is also deficient, compounded by the fact that they have an overload of classes. This makes it difficult for these teachers to assimilate theoretical proposals and try to implement them in their practice.

Given the exposed reality, when searching for the existence of any municipal public policy related to working conditions for Early Childhood Education professionals in Lages, SC, no documents were found that address this issue.

When prompted to discuss how families perceive the pedagogical work developed in Early Childhood Education, we obtained extensive participation from all the teachers:

Begônia: As I had mentioned, they don't care, they don't charge, they don't observe, there's no interest. There's more interest in whether the child has a home and is clean than in the pedagogical part, right?

Gardênia: Yeah, I think that's the teacher's job. Parents talk about it, but they don't talk to us, they don't discuss it with us. They talk to the directors. I've noticed this, I've realized that they don't come to us to comment on anything or criticize, you know? No, they talk directly to the director, there's one or another who always comments with the boss, always with the director.

Azaleia: I wonder why, right?

Gardênia: They don't come to us, you know? They don't say, "Hey, is it good here, teacher? Is it okay or not?" No, I'm not talking about complaints, like complaining, no, I'm talking about the pedagogical issue, that's the question, right? So, I don't know why this is. I notice that they don't comment with us, they comment with the director.

Dália: Yeah, in my case, some of them do talk to me, right? About the children's development, and some of them talk, a few, but they do ask, right? – What can I do at home to improve, to develop motor coordination? – [...] So, there are mothers who care a lot about their child's development in my class. And there are also mothers who don't, right?

Gardênia: Sometimes they make a comparison between one teacher and another: – Oh, there's the morning teacher and the afternoon teacher –. Yeah. And sometimes they make a comparison between one teacher and another. I don't know if [pause]. In my view, this is not an exchange.

Dália: And they talk to the family, to the relatives. They usually comment on the child's development because, oh, I went to make a video with my student (child's name) there in education and fiscal, talking about rights and duties. And he spoke, right? Showed the pictures and spoke, and she said: – Wow, teacher, I showed your work to all my family, it was very good, he said so many things, it was really cool, we didn't even know about children's rights –. And he knew everything, right? The right to play, the right to love. So, yeah, they generally comment with their families.

In this last statement, we can see that the family's understanding came from the child's report at home, because it was a pre-school class. But what about those who work in daycare? Let's see what the teachers who work with babies and very young children say about how families perceive the pedagogical work they develop:

Azaleia: Luxury babysitter.

Begônia: And there's no interest in asking, right? Because until today, at least in my class, no parent has ever come and said: – Oh, teacher, I saw the material you sent home [pause] – or – Oh, that story you told was so cool, and the children shared it at home –.

Azaleia: Yeah, it's rare, right? Who's going to praise something? Sometimes we even try, right? The children tell, like the bulletin board that was made there. The children had to pull their parents to get them interested in looking.

Begônia: To look!

Azaleia: Frustrating, right? It demotivates us, you notice? Right? No, they don't praise, no [pause]. They mostly criticize.

Early Childhood Education institutions should focus on teachers and families characterized by cooperation, frequent communication, openness, and readiness to resolve conflicts, as well as mutual respect. Thus, the partnership between the family and the school can only happen through interactions, and where they exist, there is also dissent. The fact is that some institutions end up restricting these moments to parent meetings only.

Teachers Through the Families' Eyes

Initially, regarding the families' perception of the teachers' work and the role that Early Childhood Education plays in children's lives, the participants of the focus group, as mentioned above, highlighted the importance of an education focused on equality and respect, emphasizing the lack of dialogue with the families and children at this stage of education:

Margarida: I think that, as I'm studying pedagogy, I see that there are many concerns, and there isn't much dialogue with the parents and the little ones, right? [...] The activities, the storytelling, things like racism; wow, and with autistic children, I think there's also a lot missing from the teachers in this part, to have more [pause], of course, not all teachers, right? Some teachers understand, comprehend, right? But I see that there's a lack of dialogue with the little ones.

Amid the dialogues, the participants mentioned a certain preference from the teachers for specific children, emphasizing that all children should be treated equally. It is important to highlight that these reports are based on the interaction that families have with the teachers during arrival and departure times, which leads us to think that there are families who engage more with the teachers. However, if families do not engage, it is the teachers' responsibility to initiate dialogue with the families. In a way, we cannot evaluate only the moments of arrival and departure; it is necessary to view the teaching work as a whole, considering that the relationship between the children and the teachers is built through interactions throughout the entire time they stay at school.

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Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the lack of dialogue between families and teachers directly influences their perceptions. In this regard, perhaps the teachers do not realize that certain behaviors and attitudes harm their professional image, leading some families to have a distorted view of the work done with the children. Moreover, it becomes evident that:

Magnólia: I'll speak for myself, once, (I hope it stays here), the principal called me and said: – Hey Magnólia, is it possible for you to keep your son at home because his second teacher won't be at school and the teacher won't be able to handle him with the other students? –. I felt offended by the fact that my son wasn't being included, you know? Like, it wouldn't cost anything for me to bring him, and he could stay there with the teacher, you know? I felt that in this part [pause].

In addition to the lack of dialogue, it is possible to identify that the teachers are not prepared to deal with people with disabilities, which leads us to question whether, in fact, the responsible authorities are strictly following the provisions in the documents that regulate Early Childhood Education, as it is the responsibility of the municipal education departments to promote:

[...] appropriate training on how to interact with, handle, and ensure the rights, learning objectives, and development of all children, as well as the continuous professional development of Early Childhood Education professionals focused on serving children with disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and giftedness/talents, in partnership with the Education System Managers and Early Childhood Education Institutions (Brasil, 2018, p. 35).

Even with inadequate ongoing training, teachers must seek knowledge and improvement so that, in the exercise of their profession, theory and practice go hand in hand. Dermeval Saviani (2011) reiterates that it is very common in educational environments to separate theory and practice, with teachers insisting on understanding them as distinct poles that do not apply together.

For the most part, the lack of knowledge from families about the work developed in Early Childhood Education is evident in daycare centers, a phase where children's communication is limited. This is one of the causes of the low personal and professional value given to those working in this stage of education.

Certainly, those who are unaware of the work of Early Childhood Education teachers understand that children go to daycare simply to be cared for, dissociating care and education. It is important, therefore, to remind ourselves, as Dermeval Saviani (2022) points out, that when educating a child, it is necessary to consider, beyond the physical reality, the biological reality. In this way, the first steps in educating children involve, in addition to protecting their physical integrity, providing nutrition and hygiene, taking into account studies of anatomy and physiology. This, in a way, justifies the families' perception of the role of teachers in Early Childhood Education.

Families do observe the children's development, but they are unaware of the daily routine in Early Childhood Education, as well as the teachers' training and the way they plan and develop their pedagogical practices, as can be observed below:

Violeta: Actually, I don't really have an idea. I know that I think at some point they sleep, right? And around four, four and a half hours, they have their meal there. That's about what I know, [...] in this case, I don't know her routine, I know what she more or less tells me when she gets home, right? About one, two, blue, green, that's about the idea I have... I've thought about asking, but I was kind of hesitant, like, if I asked the teacher, she might think I was invading her space or something... I'm afraid the teacher might think I'm trying to interfere, right? Or trying to cross a boundary, that's my point of view. Mine, my child has evolved a lot, [...] I think she started learning here because at home we don't have as much time to try to teach, right? Because of the rush of daily life, so I think she learned, I think not, I'm sure she learned a lot after she started attending school.

The lack of knowledge about the work of Early Childhood Education teachers ends up resulting in the romanticization of the teaching profession, as highlighted in the following comment.:

Margarida: [...] I see it this way, there are many schools where the teachers are relaxing, I don't know if they're not working with that love anymore [pause]. Ah, on the day of graduation, they say: – Oh, work for love – and so on, but I see many teachers who don't work for love, right? I think it's more about the job, I don't know, they earn little and I think it's for the money, because I don't see that it's for love, dedicating themselves, teaching the child, right?

Due to the age range of the children attending Early Childhood Education, which involves daily care situations, the school environment is often referred to as a place that replaces the family, which is certainly not the case. After all, teachers are not heroes, they are workers with specific professional training to carry out their roles. In this regard, there is a significant difference between working for love and working with love, and we cannot allow society to make Early Childhood Education teachers invisible.

However, when asked about how they refer to the professionals who work with their children, all the participants in the research responded that they use the term "prof." This proves that the terminology used to refer to teachers is not synonymous with knowledge about the professional role of the teachers.

On the other hand, the choice of institution by the families is based on the proximity to their homes and their prior knowledge of the school. For the most part, the main goal of enrolling children in daycare centers is the search for care, justified by the fact that some mothers are looking for employment:

Violeta: I chose this school because it is the closest to home, right? And I needed to work. So I had to choose to put her here so she could start developing, right? [...] Because it's a good school, right?

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Margarida: Yeah, we all studied here, the whole family. Because it's close to home, and because I can't put her in another school knowing that my other two kids study here. Like, if we go to pick her up somewhere, at the job interview, what do they ask? – Who will you leave the children with? – [...] So, you'll work to pay the babysitter, and there goes your salary. So, it's better to put them in school, where they will learn [...] This school is really good.

Hortência: I put my daughter here because I work all day. Otherwise, I wouldn't, because, of course, the child needs to go, right? But at this younger age, there's no need unless you work, right? Because with my oldest daughter, I tried to work at a sewing job and things like that; now, there's no other option.

On the other hand, there are families that enrolled their children with the aim of promoting their development, as highlighted in the following excerpts:

Rosa: I enrolled my son by choice, so he could learn and develop with his friends, to learn, like, development with other people too, not just at home, right? [...].

Magnólia: I enrolled my son for his development, right? After he started going to school there, he understood? [...], but that's it, I don't have much to say.

Considering that the institution does not promote sufficient actions to facilitate interactions, we understand that these exchanges occur during the arrival and departure times, which further hinders communication between families and teachers.

Based on the data collected, it is possible to perceive that families make comparisons between teachers from the morning shift and those from the afternoon shift, showing a preference for the afternoon teacher.

When asked if they ever needed to schedule a time to talk to their children's teachers, it was observed that families rarely request a specific time to speak with teachers. To illustrate this, one of the participants refers to her son, who attends elementary school, and mentions that the meeting time to talk happened at the teacher's initiative.

As evidenced, the family plays a primary role in shaping the character and personality of children because it is through these relationships that children have their first contact with others and develop notions of affection and security. Therefore, it is essential for the family to be present in the school routine, enabling the full development of children. Regarding this, the following reports are presented:

Hortência: Yeah, I participate, I check the agenda every day, because there are even parents who come to the school and don't know there's no class, and they go back home.

Violeta: I always try to stay informed, so I can help her as much as I can, I'm always attentive to what's going on, right? Because it's just me and her at home, my husband works outside, so I feel more responsible for always keeping an eye on the agenda, what needs to be done, what needs to be brought, what I need to do.

It is noticeable that the fact that the child's father works outside exempts him from the responsibility of participating in his daughter's school routine. According to Rosenberg (2013), the responsibilities regarding education and care fall on women, not only mothers but also others who are close to the child, such as aunts, grandmothers, godmothers, among others. In this case, there is a narrowing of the possibilities for care.

In this perspective, according to Telma Vitória (2017), our society still strongly recognizes the existence of the traditional nuclear family, based on the division of roles between husband and wife, with the mother being the primary responsible for the care and education of the children. Daycare centers are, therefore, both a source of guilt and relief. The guilt is driven by people's tendency to believe that it is better for children to stay at home with their mothers, with the blame for not fulfilling their maternal duties. However, they are relieved to know that daycare is a great help for them to manage a double work shift.

Final considerations

It was possible to observe that the lack of recognition regarding the work developed in Early Childhood Education is greater with the teachers working in daycare centers. The teachers highlight the omission of families regarding the children's health status, emphasizing that even when asking at arrival if everything is fine, many families do not report that the child had been unwell the night before, for example. This is often only discovered later, during the day or at departure time, when families ask, with some concern, if the child showed any changes during the day, justifying the question with what happened at home.

It was possible to ascertain that the lack of recognition regarding the work developed in Early Childhood Education is greater with teachers working in daycare centers. The teachers highlight the omission of families regarding the children's health status, emphasizing that even when asking at arrival if everything is fine, many families do not report that the child had been unwell the night before, for example. This is often only discovered later, during the day or at departure time, when families ask, with some concern, if the child showed any changes during the day, justifying the question with what happened at home.

Moreover, it was observed that the Early Childhood Education center does not propose specific moments for interaction between teachers and families, which hinders this relationship, considering that dialogue mainly happens at the door of the classroom, that is, during arrival and departure times.

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Regarding family participation, the negative perception of daycare teachers is clear, with one of them even referring to the school as a "children's deposit," where parents leave their children so they can work or engage in other activities. The teachers emphasize that families are mainly concerned with care-related activities, dissociating from what official documents advocate in Early Childhood Education, i.e., the inseparability between care and education. The teachers who participated in the research also emphasize that when the school asks for contributions for festive events, most families send them, but when they ask for something related to the pedagogical aspect, even if it's a digital photo, many families do not pay attention and even ignore the agenda.

In this context, considering the compulsory education for children from the age of four and the increased paper-based activities (such as notebooks), it is possible that families understand that this is the period when formal education begins. This leads to greater interest in the children's development, especially since they tend to share their school experiences more at home during this period.

On the other hand, families highlight the importance of an education focused on equality and respect, emphasizing autism. They also state that there is a lack of dialogue with families and children at this stage of education. However, occurrences from other institutions with which they have had contact, or reports from relatives, were also mentioned.

Certainly, the lack of interaction explains the fact that families point out that there is a preference by the teachers for certain children, stressing that all should be treated equally. These reports are based on the perceptions of the interactions families have with teachers during arrival and departure times, which leads us to think that some families engage more with the teachers. However, it is reiterated that if families do not engage, it is the teachers' responsibility to initiate this dialogue.

Regarding the gaps, challenges, and progress based on the reciprocal perceptions of teachers and families, considering their roles in the day-to-day activities of Early Childhood Education, it was possible to confirm, on the one hand, the lack of family participation in Early Childhood Education, especially in the nursery and toddler groups. In this regard, there is insufficient communication between teachers and families. Additionally, the educational institution does not promote actions to improve this relationship, and teachers do not have ongoing training that addresses this issue. Similarly, it is evident that these professionals are not prepared to work with children with disabilities.

On the other hand, families are unaware of the routine in Early Childhood Education, the training, and the role of teachers, as well as the hiring process of staff and the existence of Public

Policies. Moreover, they are not invited to participate in the development of the institution's Pedagogical Political Project, and some had never even heard of this document.

In general, as indicated by the research data, even though most families refer to teachers using the term "teacher," it is evident that there is a lack of knowledge from families regarding the work done in Early Childhood Education, especially in daycare, where children's communication is limited and the activities developed during this period involve little paperwork, often referred to as "sheet activities." Families do observe the children's development and are aware that, in addition to being cared for, children also play, interact, learn colors, letters, and numbers. However, they are unaware of the routine in Early Childhood Education, as well as the teachers' training and how they plan and develop their pedagogical practices. Furthermore, they recognize the lack of actions from the school but do not question or suggest changes to the management.

Similarly, teachers are unaware of the families' reality and, as a result, make certain value judgments that do not align with the reality. Therefore, each teacher acts in their own way, some already accustomed to the absence of families, others bothered by the lack of communication and involvement, tired of demanding strategies and waiting for management, but complacent in the face of this situation.

It is understood that the issue addressed here is not relatively new; however, this research confirms that, even after decades, the school is unaware of the families, and the families are unaware of the school, meaning that two institutions that should work complementarily in educating and caring for children, as required by law, do not have a good relationship because each is unaware of the other.

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