

Listening and participation in ethnographic research with children in Early Childhood Education

Escuta e participação em uma pesquisa etnográfica com crianças na Educação Infantil

Escucha y participación en una investigación etnográfica con niños en la Educación Infantil

[Rodrigo Saballa de Carvalho](#) 

Highlights

Respect for children's temporalities is essential so that they can experience participatory processes.

The exercise of children's citizenship demands listening and participation in everyday life.

Participation and listening in research with children demand that they exercise choice and decision-making.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss how children were listened to and participated in an ethnographic study on the meanings of time in Early Childhood Education. The research was carried out with 23 pre-school children from a public institution. The methodological strategies were observation, field diary, photography, photo-elicitation and conversation circles. The course of the research is discussed through analytical units that focus on listening and children's participation. Based on the research, it can be inferred that children's listening and participation: promote the exercise of citizenship; demand participatory methodological strategies; enable them to have decision-making power during the investigation.

[Resumo](#) | [Resumen](#)

Keywords

Early Childhood Education. Research with children. Time. Listening. Participation.

Received: 09.11.2023

Accepted: 11.10.2023

Published: 11.29.2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26512/lc29202350765>

| Initial considerations

In recent decades, we have experienced an *acceleration in the pace of life* (Rosa, 2019), and its effects have reverberated in all areas of the social sphere. The effects of this acceleration can also be seen in the fragility and ephemerality of social relationships established by people in work, friendship relationships, intimate relationships, or even institutionalized educational processes — whose imperative has been to learn faster and in less time. According to Rosa (2019), this acceleration has also resulted in “[...] a reduction in the duration of meals, sleep, or the average time of communication within the family [...]” (p. 155), among other aspects related to life. The acceleration of the pace of life is seen as a hallmark of the present, and the reduction of time to carry out activities — be they daily activities, studies, domestic tasks, or professional life — is “[...] achieved, on the one hand, [by] increasing the speed of action [...], and, on the other, by reducing pauses and intervals between activities [...]” (Rosa, 2019, p. 156).

Concerning educational processes, it is possible to state that the acceleration of the pace of life has also reverberated in Early Childhood Education. The obligation of Early Childhood Education at four years of age, the Brazilian National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age, as well as the dissemination of textbooks and teaching systems in municipal education networks in the Brazilian territory — after the approval of the Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) for Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 2017) — have contributed to a process of accelerating the school life of children, especially those who attend preschool. From an educational propaedeutic approach, time in Early Childhood Education has been seen as a consumer good that cannot be wasted.

In the name of accelerating the pace of life, the *temporalities* (Oliveira, 2014) of children, which many people believe are safeguarded in institutions for Early Childhood Education, have generally been disregarded. In this sense, “the experience [that children have] in and over time,” (Oliveira, 2014, p. 215) notably through interactions and play, has been occupied by an intense and accelerated agenda of activities that often do not dialogue with the *ethical, political, and aesthetic principles* (Brazil, 2010) that guide pedagogical work in Early Childhood Education. Corroborating the argument, Clark (2023, p. 14) states that “[...] discussing the conception of time in Early Childhood Education impacts how we see children, childhood and the teaching role”. And it is always good to remember that “[...] thinking about time is reflecting on the purpose of education” (Clark, 2023, p. 14).

Mobilized by concerns about the effects of the *acceleration of the pace of life* (Rosa, 2019) in Early Childhood Education, this article is the result of ethnographic research with children that sought to understand the meanings that children attribute to institutional time based on their everyday experiences in preschool.

Considering the above, the article is organized into six sections. From this introductory section, the second section presents the research methodology. The third section discusses the concepts of listening and participation. In the fourth and fifth sections, respectively, the analyses are presented. Finally, the last section presents the article's final considerations.

| Research methodology

Methodologically, the ethnographic research was developed during one school year with a group of 23 5-year-old children – 14 girls and nine boys – who attended preschool in a municipal public institution located on the urban outskirts of a city in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. From reading the children's registration forms, it was possible to identify that five were declared black, two brown, and ten white by their families. The strategies for generating research data were observation, recording in a field diary, photographic records, photo-elicitation (as a trigger for discussions with children), and conversation circles. Fieldwork was conducted daily, in alternating shifts, totaling 20 hours per week, over 11 months.

Regarding the ethical aspects of the research, it followed all the guidelines contained in Resolution No. 510 of April 7, 2016 (Ministry of Health, 2016), which guides investigations with human beings. After the presentation of the project and acceptance by the teachers and managers of the Early Childhood Education institution to conduct the research, upon signing the Institutional Consent Form, the project was submitted via Plataforma Brasil to the Research Ethics Committee (REC). After approval by the REC¹, the research project was presented to the teachers and children's families, and their authorization was obtained by signing the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF). Next, the research was presented to the children using comics visually narrating the data generation strategies to be developed with them. The children signed the comic — by drawing and writing their names — as a Free and Informed Assent Term (FIAT).

In addition to complying with legal standards for conducting the research, ethical discussion was present throughout the investigation, considering that *listening* (Santos, 2022) and *participation* (Bordenave, 1983; James & James, 2012) of the children constituted mobilizers of data generation strategies. In this direction, the concepts of listening and participation in the research context were seen in an interdependent and relational way. Listening was conceptually seen as a *political and pedagogical act* (Santos, 2022) that has implications for the researcher's decision-making based on the information shared by children. Participation was conceived as the possibility for children to *be part, take part, and have a part* (Bordenave, 1983) in the investigative process. In this sense, participation involved the opportunity for children to contribute “[...] actively to a situation, an event, a process or a result [...]” (James & James, 2012, p. 86) during the research.

The following actions were conducted, considering listening and participation of the children as principles for the investigative work: 1) the researcher made a reactive

1 CAAE: 09262212.1.0000.5564.

entry into the field, 2) children participated in the research in groups of six, 3) the children were consulted throughout the research about whether or not they wanted to adhere to the proposals, 4) their suggestions regarding the research's methodological strategies were incorporated into the investigation, 5) data generation proposals involved the production of drawings and photographic images, 6) after listening to their demands about the preschool routine, the researcher mediated between the children and the teacher to guarantee more extended daily time for playing, 7) the research was returned to the children, the teacher, their families, and the management team.

The data generated in the research were discussed based on two analytical units: 1) being with children in the field and listening as a research process, and 2) between being part and taking part: children and participation in research. The research results showed that children are concerned about the lack of time to play, resulting from the acceleration of institutional daily life and the intense demand for preparatory activities for literacy. When listening to the children, it was also possible to discover that time management is carried out by them *reiteratively* (Sanchez, 2019) since the research participants, when listened to, pointed out in numerous situations the need for more time to play and also to choose and propose games in external spaces of the school. Because “to play and play well, adequate spaces and times are necessary [...]” (Giovannini, 2022, p. 168).

| Listening and participation: the slowing down of time in research with children

Episode 1: End of the day at the bakery

Children are playing in the sandbox in the playground, making cakes, pizzas, and bread. The teacher announces:

Teacher: — Playground time is over.

At the end of the announcement, Bella questioned the teacher.

Bella²: — Teacher, we are playing bakery. Today, we have a lot of cake orders.

Ana: — It's true!!!

Caio: — But we're still playing.

Teacher: — Time to close the bakery, as we are wrapping up playtime on the playground.

Sara: — There won't be time to finish the cake.

Bella: — Why can't we play bakery longer?

Teacher: — Because it's time to enter the room. You haven't finished doing all the activities in the block yet.

Bella listens attentively to the teacher.

Teacher: — Next year, in the first year, there won't be a playground all the time.

Bella: — And in the first year, we won't be able to play in the playground?

Teacher: — You can play, but there will be no time to go to the playground every day. It's a shorter time. Next year you will understand.

Caio: — Without playing in the playground, it's no fun.

Bella: — Teacher, can we play just a little longer?

Teacher: — Playground time is over, Bella.

2 The names used in the transcriptions are fictitious.

Bella looks at the teacher, puts her hands on her hips and asks:
 Bella: — Why is time already up?
 Teacher: — I already explained. We are wasting time here on the street. We have really cool activities to do in the room.
 Théo: — Activity sheets are not cool.
 Ana: — It is not.
 Teacher: — Time is over. Time to close the bakery.
 Bella: — What a bummer! Activity, activity, and activity.
 Teacher: — Everyone to the room. Topic closed. (Researcher's Field Diary — observation)

In the episode, the asymmetric power relationship established between adults and children in the daily life of Early Childhood Education stands out, as well as the need for institutional time – which guides the organization of daily life – to be rethought based on demands from the children and respect for their temporalities. In this direction, the transcribed episode also elucidates that, although children legally have their rights to be listened to and participate recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations [UN], 1989), there is still a long way to go so that the intentions foreseen in the legal plan become effective within the scope of institutional practices. Corroborating the argument, Morales and Magistris (2020, p. 46) state that “[...] we adults must reflect on our practices and maintain constant vigilance over our power, in relation to our privileges, in order to know to accompany, collaborate, and assist children in their struggles [...]”. To this end, institutionally, adults need to promote spaces for children to be listened to and participate based on democratic social relations, in which adult centrism is tensioned based on power sharing.

It is worth highlighting that, regarding the recognition of children as full-fledged social actors, the CRC (UN, 1989), despite criticism of its colonialist and protectionist character (Aitken, 2019, p. 95), is undoubtedly considered a historic landmark which “[...] provides a platform where policymakers and activists can debate to improve the worlds for the children.” The CRC (UN, 1989) legitimized the right of children to be heard, to express their points of view, claim their demands, and participate in the discussion of issues that concern them, having as an effect a paradigmatic change in the ways of the conception of childhood and children citizenship.

Morales and Magistris (2020) point out that, throughout the course of the 20th century, childhood was understood from the *paradigm of irregular situations*, according to which children, seen as “[...] risk, material, or moral danger, should be saved by the State” (p. 33). However, with the approval of the CRC, for these authors, there was a change of paradigm, that is, “[...] the transition from the paradigm of irregular situation to that of full protection,” (Morales & Magistris, 2020, p. 34) which, in a way, it has made unfeasible the political participation of the children. According to the authors, this change of paradigm is based “[...] around the three large groups of rights: protection, provision, and participation,” (Morales & Magistris, 2020, p. 34) which constitute the text of the CRC (UN, 1989). Within the scope of the set of rights, those of provision and participation, although they are “[...] quantitatively scarcer [in terms of the number of articles allocated to them in

the CDC], are qualitatively more significant” (Morales & Magistris, 2020, p. 34) as they elucidate the importance of children being seen as social actors. On the other hand, Alderson (2008) criticizes the instrumental character given to children’s participation rights, as they are reduced to “two main areas: being consulted and making decisions.”

Although I recognize that the participation of children is also effective through consultation and decision-making, I agree with Alderson (2008, p. 79) when she argues that we should not forget that “[...] children participate in countless activities and relationships, in pairs or groups, playing, acting, learning, cooking, taking care of other people or animals,” among other actions. For this reason, as Morales and Magistris (2020) remind us, it is necessary to ask: how can their participation not be additional but an integral part of the relationships between adults and children? Going beyond the instrumental character of the participation of children demands discussing the notion of citizenship in childhood, which has generally been understood from a perspective of preparation for its exercise in adulthood. Contrary to this perspective, it is crucial to highlight that “seeing children as holders of rights is related to seeing them as active citizens” (Clark, 2015, p. 22).

Liebel and Gaitán (2011) propose that citizenship in childhood should not be thought of based on normative regulations but through the practice of everyday life. The authors argue that citizenship should not be “[...] seen as a status granted to children, but as a fact that arises from life practices of the children and that puts the power advantage of adults into assessment” (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011, position 2301). Their proposal is that citizenship be thought of from below, “which is based on the practice and experiences of children, and which takes into special consideration social disadvantages and vulnerabilities in rights” (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011, position 2321). In this way, the argument is ratified that “[...] children are, yes, political agents in the spaces in which they participate, but [that] their battles are distinct from those of adults, [since] they occur within their political geographies” (Silva & Gomes, 2023, p. 5).

Therefore, it can be inferred that the exercise of citizenship of children demands listening to them and their participation in everyday life. Listening to the children can be understood as a) “[...] an active process of communication that involves listening, interpreting, and constructing meaning [...]” (Clark, 2015, p. 23); b) “a right of the child, guaranteed by national and international documents that place the child as a subject of rights (and not an object of rights) [...]” (Ribeiro, 2022, p. 69); c) “a political act because it involves [...] decisions from the listener as they make choices regarding who, when, and where they will listen [...]” (Santos, 2022, p. 75); d) a “pedagogical act [that] is founded when the experience of speaking and being listened to represents a gesture of welcoming the human being that the listeners have in front of them [...]” (Santos, 2022, p. 75). Based on these assumptions, listening can operate as a trigger for the children’s participation.

It is therefore inferred that listening to children contributes to their identification and belonging to the group, in addition to mobilizing initiatives in which they feel *compelled to take part in the decisions* (Bordenave, 1983) that concern them. I

emphasize that participation, in addition to being defined as “[...] ‘being part of’, receiving status as a member of a community, can also be understood as a feeling of being together, of connectivity, of sharing common interests, rights, and responsibilities” (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011, position 2047).

From this perspective, listening to the children and their participation in the research, which is the focus of discussion in this article, requires that they have time to live their childhood. In this regard, Clark (2023) argues that children need *extended*, rather than fragmented, *time* in their lives to have the opportunity to listen, express their demands, make choices, live together, establish relationships with their peers, choose to be part of a group, claim, among other actions that could be listed.

In other words, children's temporalities must be respected so they can experience participatory processes through the exercise of active citizenship in the institutions and communities of which they are part. Clark (2023) highlights that promoting *extended time* for children requires *being with* the children, which is based on the establishment of dense relationships in which they feel welcomed and have their rhythms respected. The author also points out that it is necessary for adults involved with children, through sensitive and active listening to the demands of their group, to promote opportunities for them to *go off track*. Finally, Clark (2023) highlights the need for play to be revived so children can explore time in depth. The author metaphorically uses the expression *diving deep* when referring to the need for children to have more time to establish deeper social relationships through play.

In research with children, the considerations addressed by Clark (2023) are extremely important, as they allow us to reflect on the often accelerated way in which methodologies (labeled as participatory) and data generation strategies are put into operation in investigations in Early Childhood Education, disregarding respect for the temporalities of the children. Thus, I agree with Clark (2015) when she points out that participatory research methodologies with children are not inherently ethical, as they depend on questioning the adult-centrism of the researcher, the horizontality of the relationships established with the participants, and above all on listening and the participation of children involved in the process of slowing down the time. To this end, like Clark (2015, p. 20), I understand that young children, in investigations, must be conceived “1) as experts of their own lives; 2) as skilled communicators; 3) as rights holders; 4) as creators of meanings.” In this sense, in the next two analytical sections, episodes relating to the data generation in the research conducted with children will be shared and discussed to highlight listening and participation as mobilizing principles of investigative practice.

| Being with children in the field and listening as a research process

Listening during ethnographic investigation demands that the researcher be with the children by slowing down institutional time and promoting meeting spaces that allow their points of view to be shared, supported, and respected. Corroborating the

argument, Ribeiro (2022, p. 76) states that “listening is connection par excellence.” The author advocates that “to listen to [children], we need to develop a state of presence” (Ribeiro, 2022, p. 76). The keywords connection and state of presence, enunciated by the author when discussing listening to the children, are close to the concept of *being with*, defended by Clark (2023). According to Clark (2023, p. 39), being with children “is conceptually related to the search for the child’s rhythm, but also with paying attention to the rhythm of the group, materials, and ideas” that are shared. Thus, listening as a *political and pedagogical act* (Santos, 2022) in research with children is seen as “[...] an active process, which involves not only listening but also interpreting, constructing meanings, and responding” (Clark, 2015, p. 26) based on the tension in the adult-centric position that we generally occupy as adults.

Being with the children to listen to how they attribute meaning to school time based on the institutional routine required the promotion of an *extended time* (Clark, 2023) for meeting and dialogue so that it would be possible to “[...] cultivate the culture of thinking and working together” (Clark, 2015, p. 40). At each meeting with the group of children, in conversation circles to propose drawings, photographic records, or even to debate the visual material produced, I realized that the children were experiencing the interaction with their colleagues and the researcher with increasing intensity. For illustration, below, I present an episode referring to the moment I shared with the children the proposal to photograph images with digital cameras of the daily activities in which they most liked to participate. The tone of the dialogue transcribed enables us to understand how listening operates so that “[...] each child feels that their experience [...] [has] value” (Agostinho, 2010, p. 109). Furthermore, as can be seen from the reading, the recognition of children as social actors participating in the investigation is present in the dialogue.

Episode 2: So now we are researchers!

Researcher: — Do you remember that we used cameras?

Bento: — I remember. We played with taking pictures of our antics.

Mel: — And posing for photos.

Ana: — Model pose.

Researcher: — Do you already know how to use cameras?

Bia: — Of course. It’s pretty easy. Just press the button.

Bento: — Don’t forget to turn on the camera.

Ana: — You also can’t put your finger in front of the camera.

Mel: — And you have to aim for the target.

Researcher: — So, the news today is that each of you will receive a camera.

Pedro: — Like your camera, professor?

João: — Of course. The teacher’s camera is big. You forgot, Pedro, that it’s a small camera. We’ve already played with them.

Mel: — So, is it a camera for everyone? That’s it?

Researcher: — That’s right, everyone will have their own camera. The first time we used the cameras, I only brought two. Do you remember?

Luca: — I do remember.

Bento: — And can we take it home?

Researcher: — Initially, you will only use the cameras at school.

I show the children a wooden trunk containing the cameras and continue with the explanation.

Researcher: — At the end of the day, or whenever you feel necessary, you can store the machine in this trunk.
 Mel opens the trunk and looks at the cameras.
 Mel: — I see, the cameras have strings to hang around the neck and even names.
 Researcher: — That's right.
 Bia: — And what are we going to do with the cameras?
 Researcher: — The camera is for you to photograph the activities you like to do most at school.
 Ana: — And will you print our photos?
 Researcher: — Yes.
 Mel: — And are you going to put it on the wall?
 Researcher: — Yes.
 Bia: — And just one more question. Will we be able to talk about the photos?
 Researcher: — Yes. I'm going to print your photos, really big, and we'll talk about them in the circle.
 João: — Cool!
 Pedro: — So now we are researchers!
 Bia: — Researchers indeed! (Researcher's Field Diary — conversation circle)

The dialogue developed between the researcher and the children and the active listening in the interactive plot enable the highlighting of three relational aspects. The first refers to the fact that “[...] when we listen to a child, we are not making a concession but rather asserting their rights” (Ribeiro, 2022, p. 69). This implies that the attentive listening of the researcher mobilizes the participation of the group involved in the dialogue and denotes the recognition that “the opportunity to participate in what the adult does transmits to the child a message of esteem for their capabilities” (Giovannini, 2022, p. 152). In this sense, digital cameras also stand out as a materiality that triggers their engagement in sharing their points of view. The camera, in a way, connects the children to the investigative work of the adult since, during the process of entering the field – approximately two months – I was equipped with a professional camera recording the institutional daily life and sharing the photos on the wall of the reference room of the class participating in the research. Finally, the third aspect highlighted is the recognition that children express that they are also researchers, that is, that they are part of a participatory investigative process, in which listening and being listened to is a constituent of the relationship of trust and reciprocity established in the group.

As Clark (2023, p. 42) argues, *being with* children allows for promoting “time to listen to the unexpected,” as can be seen in the next episode to be shared. However, it is necessary for the researcher, based on the *slowdown in institutional time* (Clark, 2023), to mobilize “[...] attitudes such as sensitivity, astuteness, and insight to capture the different ways in which children express their thoughts and feelings” (Agostinho, 2010, p. 110) through the discussion that is on the agenda in the group. Therefore, the analytical focus of the next episode is on how children autonomously are willing to guide their colleagues about the proposal they will develop.

Episode 3: Teacher, can we stay a little longer?

It is the end of the meeting with the group formed by Bento, Mel, Ana, Bia, João, and Pedro. The proposal was to draw activities they would like to be included in the daily school day. The group was unanimous in presenting proposals involving dancing, painting, singing, and games. At the end of the meeting, I was surprised by a question made by Bento:

Bento: — Teacher, can we stay a little longer?

Immediately, Mel responds.

Mel: — Of course not, now it's the other group, Bento.

João intervenes.

João: — Mel, Bento asked the teacher. He didn't ask you.

Researcher: — Bento, why would you want to stay a little longer?

Bento: — Because today we can explain to them how the meeting will work.

Researcher: — I understood. You want to explain the proposal we made today.

Bento: — That's right.

Researcher: — Mel, Ana, Bia, João, and Pedro, would you also like to stay and help Bento explain the proposal?

The children respond affirmatively in unison: Yesssss!

Bia: — We can start by telling them that today is the day to draw the things we like.

Ana: — Things that we like but don't have or have very little of at school.

Mel: — Playing has very little [time].

Bento: — Painting also has almost nothing.

Bia: — We can never sing and dance either.

João: — But these are the things we want. We have to ask what they want from the activity.

Researcher: — So how can you ask the question without announcing what you indicated in the drawings about what you would like to have in the school?

Mel: — Just sit in a circle and ask.

João: — Ask and tell them they have to draw.

Bento: — And hand over the sheets and pens.

Ana: — And the crayons too.

Pedro: — Oh, but there's one more thing.

Researcher: — What is it, Pedro?

Pedro: — After they draw, they have to tell what they did.

Mel: — Like we did.

Bia: — At the end, we can tell them what we drew.

Researcher: — Great proposal.

Bento: — Teacher, write down what we talked about in your notebook.

Researcher: — Okay.

Mel: — I'm going to go and call Théo, Cris, Sofia, Cauê, Caetano and Sara.

Ana: — Meanwhile, we organize the material.

Researcher: — Perfect. Thanks for the help, guys. (Researcher's Field Diary – conversation circle)

The episode under analysis confirms the argument made by Santos (2022, p. 78) that “listening to the child is an intentional and interested decision of the adult subject.” The researcher's listening to the demand made by Bento – on behalf of his group – to explain to his colleagues how the proposal would be conducted highlights listening as a catalyst for the participation of the children. In this sense, it is also possible to perceive in the episode the horizontal relationship established between the researcher and the group, as well as the recognition of the fact that “the active participation of children is socially influential if children are empowered

to make their autonomous contributions in the decision process [...]” (Agostinho, 2010, p. 302) that constitutes everyday life in Early Childhood Education.

In the dialogue developed between the children and the researcher, the *temporalities* (Oliveira, 2014) of the children also stand out, and the fact that “listening does not lead to the exclusion of the role of the adult but provokes [them] to rethink and review this role” (Ribeiro, 2022, p. 75). The request made by Bento demonstrates that children need more time, as they are intensely involved with the drawing proposal. In this sense, it is also worth highlighting the mediation of the researcher and the fruitful discussion between the children about the best way to present the proposal to their colleagues. João realizes that it is necessary to ask his colleagues to draw the activities they most like to do at school instead of narrating the demands his group expressed graphically. It is interesting how children realize that it is necessary to provide space so that their colleagues in the next group can also participate in the discussions on the agenda in the investigation.

Finally, another aspect that requires analytical attention is the demands made by the children for the right to have more time to play, paint, sing, and dance during their daily journey. In fact, from listening to children, it is possible to infer the need for “[...] stable and predictable contexts [of play at school], with broad and unhurried temporal units, coherent with each other, to give life to a fluid and non-mechanical daily journey” (Giovannini, 2022, p. 152). During the entire investigative process, it was possible to perceive an *acceleration in the rhythm* (Rosa, 2019) of the lives of the children and the propaedeutic perspective of a pedagogical project focused on preparing them for the first year of Elementary School, a fact that contradicts the guidelines in the curricular documents for Brazilian National Early Childhood Education. In this sense, it is essential to remember that playing is a right of the child and a guiding principle for the Early Childhood Education curriculum in Brazil. Continuing the analyses, in the next section, the focus of the discussion will be on their participation processes related to sharing demands for more time to play and proposals for changes in the institutional preschool routine.

| Between being part of and taking part: children and participation in research

Children’s participation in research is directly related to the promotion of democratic listening spaces since, *to take part* in the decisions required in discussions mobilized by the researcher and peers, children need *to be part* of the group. Participating is related to creating a *feeling of being together and sharing common interests* (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011). To this end, children demand that their temporalities be respected in the investigative process – so that they can listen, speak, accept, and be affected by the ongoing discussions within the group. For children to have the possibility of *going off track* (Clark, 2023) whenever necessary in the investigative process, the researcher’s respect for how they experience the *relationship in and with time* (Oliveira, 2014) is fundamental. After all, *children are political agents* (Silva & Gomes, 2023) as long as they are recognized as citizens and not as a project for future adults.

During the research, the children had the opportunity to *go off* (Clark, 2023) the proposed investigative track, share ideas and alternatives to what the researcher proposed, and establish dense social relationships with their peers. It was possible to observe that research participants repeatedly shared points of view that allowed the researcher to implement actions not foreseen in the initial project. In this sense, in the following episode, it is possible to notice how the children present an alternative – which had not been foreseen by the researcher – so that their demands for more time to play could be shared with the reference teacher of their class.

Episode 4: Complaints by the children about the lack of time to play

The children and the researcher are in a circle. I shared with the children participating in the meeting – Théo, Cris, Sofia, Cauê, Caetano, and Sara – the photos they took about the proposals they most like to do at school. I distribute the A3 size photographs in the center of the circle. All the images, without exception, are of games in the school playground.

Researcher: — Today, I brought printed the photos you produced.

Théo: — There's my photo.

Cauê: — There's everyone.

Caetano: — And they are really big.

Théo: — The teacher had already said that they would be big photos.

Researcher: — Do you remember that I asked you to photograph the activities you like to do most at school?

Cris: — Yes!

Researcher: — What are you observing in the images?

Sofia: — Everyone playing in the playground.

Caetano: — Playing bakery.

Théo: — There are also people playing cops and robbers.

Cris: — Oh, but Bella and Luca are riding the swings too.

Sofia: — In my photo, Caetano and Sofia are playing hide and seek.

Théo: — There are also circle games with the teacher in the playground.

Cauê: — In this photo, there is almost everyone.

The children start to laugh.

Researcher: — And why did you choose to take these photos?

Cauê: — Because it's what we like to do most at school, right?

Sofia: — We like to play in the playground.

Caetano: — Too bad it's a short time.

Sofia: — Just a little.

Théo: — A little in the morning and a little in the afternoon.

Researcher: — When going to the square, can you always play in the playground?

Sofia: — Not always.

Cris: — Sometimes it's time to play here in the covered area.

Caetano: — But I really like the playground.

Cauê: — The bakery is in the playground.

Théo: — That's where we make bread.

Sofia: — And plays cops and robbers.

Cauê: — The teacher doesn't like this game.

Researcher: — Would you like to have more play time on the playground?

Cris: — Yes!

Caetano: — But [we] can't.

Théo: — The teacher has already explained that there are activities.
 Sofia: — Next year is the first year.
 Cauê: — What I really wanted was to stay small so I could play.
 Researcher: — But aren't you small?
 Cauê: — I'm not very small, right?
 Théo: — He's not small like babies, teacher.
 Sofia: — My brother is 3 years old, and he can play a lot.
 Cris: — We can not.
 Théo: — Next year we're going to the older children's school.
 Sofia: — I have an idea.
 Researcher: — Say it, Sofia.
 Sofia: — What if we made a book with photos of the things we like?
 Cauê: — And can we include the drawings of the games too?
 Sofia: — Yes.
 Researcher: — Are you proposing that we make a book of the research?
 Sofia: — More or less that. The book is for us to show the teacher.
 Cauê: — To ask to play more in the playground.
 Théo: — But we can invite all groups.
 Sofia: — That's it. Let's call everyone.
 Cauê: — Can we do that, teacher?
 Researcher: — Yes, it's a great proposal.
 The children are excited about my acceptance. (Researcher's Field Diary – photo-elicitation)

Reading the episode under analysis highlights the following aspects: 1) the demand made by the children for more time to play in the playground of the Early Childhood Education school; 2) the way children attribute meaning to playing time – as an activity that allows them to have greater decision-making power; 3) their perception of the age differentiation between daycare and preschool based on the observation of the reduction in playing time for 5-year-olds compared to 3-year-olds; 4) the children indication to prepare a book with photos and drawings of their favorite activities, given their request to the reference teacher for more time to play in the playground. The centrality of play is evident in sharing their views on their favorite activities at school. This is because play allows children to exercise autonomy, produce narratives, create symbolic plots, have decision-making power, live in groups, and effectively participate in matters that concern them without adult supervision. Bae (2015, p. 22) argues that “play is central to childhood education [as] it allows space for children's freedom of expression and for them to participate as active agents.”

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the claim for bakery and cops and robbers games was recurrent in all groups that participated in the investigation. The systematic observation of children in the playground during the fieldwork enabled me to understand the commitment of the class to defining roles, creating plots, and establishing routines for games. Although often banned by adults – teachers, monitors, cleaning staff – children always reinvented the game of cops and robbers. According to the statement of the class's reference teacher, the prohibition of such games was motivated by the adults' perception that the children were reproducing the behavior of the residents where the school was located, giving second place to the symbolic narrative present in the actions of everyone involved.

Parallel to the demand for more time to play in the playground, it is important to highlight the suggestion made by the children regarding the creation of a playbook as an instrument to mediate the conversation with the reference teacher. The alternative presented by the group allows us to remember that “it is not enough for children to have a voice; to have a presence, they also need to be heard” (Aitken, 2019, p. 116). By feeling heard and contemplated in their demands as part of the group, the children participating in the research begin to take part in the decisions and understand that “[...] participation has to do, first and foremost, with everyday life [...]” (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011, position 2389). However, the *slowdown in institutional time* (Clark, 2023) in research presents itself as a condition for children to exercise their right to participate.

Regarding the meanings children attribute to time, it is worth elucidating, from the episode read, that they perceive time both regarding the duration of games in the playground and the differentiation between the daycare and preschool routine, which takes ages as a parameter. Regarding ages, children also realize there is a difference between being in daycare or preschool. However, there is an impasse for them: Why do only children aged 0 to 3 have the opportunity to play freely without regulating activity times? After all, are writing activities more important than playing? Under the mediation of the researcher, such issues became present in the meeting of the children in the class with the reference teacher to share the book and demand more time to play, as can be seen in the final considerations.

| Final considerations

Episode 5: What if the school was a place just for playing?

The class is gathered, and the children are in a circle. As I had agreed with the children, we got together for a special meeting to present the playbook to the teacher and ask for more time to play in the playground. Bella opens the book in the center of the circle and calls the teacher:

Bella: — Teacher, come and see our book.

The teacher approaches the center of the circle. The children get excited and soon begin to present photos and drawings of their favorite games.

Cauê: — I took this photo of the bakery game.

Ana: — There are also cops and robbers running here.

Luca: — Théo and Caetano are riding a swing.

Mel: — There's a photo of the square.

Ana: — Photo of us riding a swing.

João: — My drawing is of us in the little house.

Sara: — My photo is on the slide.

Théo: — But my drawing is here too, teacher.

Teacher: — And what did you draw?

Théo: — I drew us in the bakery.

Cauê: — Teacher, we wanted to ask you something.

Teacher: — What would you like?

Cauê: — We want to play a lot in the yard.

Bento: — There's a lot of activity on the block.

Théo: — Playground time is always very short.

Teacher: — I'm looking at your book, and I know you like to play in the playground, but you're in your last year at school, and you have activities to do

in the classroom. The activities are important since next year is the 1st year at the older children's school.

Bella: — What if the school was a place just for playing? (Researcher's Field Diary – conversation circle)

In the analyses shared in the article, listening and participation were presented as two relational concepts within the scope of the research. In this perspective, the participating children were recognized as full citizens. Thus, based on Liebel and Gaitán (2011), I highlight that the *exercise of citizenship of the children* in the research was promoted based on a relationship of listening and supporting their contributions and demands about how the time was being organized in the institution where the investigation occurred. Although the pedagogical practice of the preschool attended by the children was based on a preparatory perspective for Elementary School, the research had the effect of listening to their voices, reverberating in the increase in daily hours of playing in the playground and a more flexible routine of activities focused on writing.

The strategies for data generation mobilized during the research and the relationship established with the children enabled to demonstrate that “child participation involves a mutual relationship between children and adults in which all participants learn and benefit” (Soares & Oliveira, 2022, p. 1265). However, this was only possible by respecting the temporalities of the research participants and recognizing their demands as a social group that shares the collective life context of Early Childhood Education. The understanding of *listening as a political and pedagogical act* (Santos, 2022), as well as dialogue with children through a *slowdown in time* (Clark, 2023), allowed me to realize that “[...] [child] participation involves a process of social learning through which children accumulate shared knowledge and skills in their groups” (Soares & Oliveira, 2022, pp. 1273-1274).

From the meetings with groups of children during the research to discuss how they attributed meanings to institutional time, the sophistication of their modes of expression, sharing of ideas, and proposing actions to achieve more playing time in the playground was notable. In other words, contact with the boys and girls in the investigation made it possible to understand that “[...] it is not enough to 'grant' rights to children: they must understand these rights as theirs, to see the bond they have with their life” (Liebel & Gaitán, 2011, position 4147). However, it is worth highlighting that these results should not be seen in a generalized way, as they refer to the institutional context in which the children and adults involved participated. In this sense, I emphasize that participation of children in Early Childhood Education demands the mediation of adults so that they can have time and space to exercise choices, share positions, and establish dense social relationships. However, the listening and participation practices of children and the ethical and methodological discussions presented can inspire future investigations that aim to understand how children under five years of age signify institutional time.

Through the discussions developed in the article, the question made by Bella to the teacher, shared in the opening episode of this section, still resonates: “What if the [Early Childhood] school was a place just for playing?” It would certainly be possible

to respond to Bella that respect for children, the otherness of their childhoods, and the learning emerging from everyday life shared with peers and adults present in the institutional context would assume the foreground of pedagogical action, without ever giving way to a propaedeutics perspective of Early Childhood Education. However, playing involves time – to socialize, listen, participate, and interact with peers. After all, for children, playing is living, and the desire expressed by the boys and girls participating in the research is to live life in all its intensity.

| References

- Agostinho, K. A. (2010). *As formas de participação das crianças na educação infantil*. [Tese de doutorado, Universidade do Minho]. Repositório da Universidade do Minho – RepositoriUM. <https://hdl.handle.net/1822/11195>
- Aitken, S. C. (2019). *Jovens, direitos e território: apagamento, política neoliberal e ética pós-infância*. Editora UNB.
- Alderson, P. (2008). *Young children's rights: exploring beliefs, principles and practice*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bae, B. (2015). O direito das crianças a participar – desafios nas interações do cotidiano. *Da Investigação às práticas*, 6(1), 7-30. <https://doi.org/10.25757/invep.v6i1.107>
- Bordenave, J. E. D. (1983). *O que é Participação*. Editora Brasiliense.
- Brasil. (2010). *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil*. Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de Educação Básica. http://portal.mec.gov.br/dmdocuments/diretrizescurriculares_2012.pdf
- Brasil. (2017). *Base Nacional Comum Curricular*. Ministério da Educação. http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/images/BNCC_EI_EF_110518_verseofinal_site.pdf
- Clark, A. (2015). *Listening to young children: a guide to understanding and using the mosaic approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Clark, A. (2023). *Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in Early Childhood Education*. Routledge.
- Giovannini, D. (2022). Pistoia, as crianças e as suas brincadeiras. Em D. Savio, & C. Moro (Orgs.). *Brincar para construir mundos: perspectivas experiências entre Itália e Brasil para a Educação Infantil* (pp. 149-170). Ed. UFPR.
- James, A., & James, A. (2012). Participation. Em A. James, & A. James. *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies* (pp. 86-88). SAGE.
- Liebel, M., & Gaitán, L. (2011). *Ciudadanía y derechos de participación de los niños*. Editorial Síntesis, S. A.
- Ministério da Saúde. (2016). *Resolução n.º 510, de 7 de abril de 2016*. Conselho Nacional de Saúde. <https://conselho.saude.gov.br/resolucoes/2016/Reso510.pdf>
- Morales, S., & Magistris, G. (2020). Hacia um paradigma outro: niñxs como sujetxs políticxs co-protagonistas de la transformación. Em S. Morales, & G. Magistris (Comp.). *Niñez em movimiento: del adultocentrismo a la emancipación* (pp. 23-47). Editorial Chirimbote.
- Oliveira, C. E. A. (2014). Fio de temporalidades na Educação Infantil. *Revista Travessias*, 8(1), 2013-228. <https://e-revista.unioeste.br/index.php/travessias/article/view/10274>
- Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU). (1989). *Convenção sobre os Direitos da Criança*. <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/convencao-sobre-os-direitos-da-crianca>
- Ribeiro, B. (2022). *Pedagogia das miudezas: saberes necessários a uma pedagogia que escuta*. Pedro & João Editores.
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Aceleração: a transformação das estruturas temporais na modernidade*. Editora Unesp.
- Sanches, E. O. (2019). A reiteração como mecanismo de gestão do tempo pela criança. *Educação e Sociedade*, 40, e0189816. <https://doi.org/10.1590/ES0101-73302019189816>
- Santos, M. O. (2022). Escutar a criança é um ato político-pedagógico. Em F. L. A. Leal, & K. P. B. Campos (Orgs.). *O que as pesquisas com e sobre crianças podem nos dizer em tempos de crise?* (pp. 73-94). EDUEPB.
- Silva, C. F. S., & Gomes, L. O. (2023). Participação política e infância: como as crianças brasileiras se posicionam e se fazem presentes em seus contextos

sociais. *Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 31(30), 1-22.

<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.7346>


Soares, L. M., & Oliveira, F. (2022). Um estudo sobre a participação infantil: o que dizem as pesquisas? *Zero-a-Seis*, 24(46), 1258-84.

<https://doi.org/10.5007/1980-4512.2022.e85948>

About the author

Rodrigo Saballa de Carvalho

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8899-0998>

Ph.D in Education from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (2011). Professor in the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Leader of the Curriculum, Languages, and Daily Life of Babies and Young Children Research Group. Email: rsaballa@terra.com.br

Resumo

O objetivo do artigo é discutir a escuta e a participação das crianças em uma pesquisa etnográfica sobre os sentidos do tempo na Educação Infantil. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida com 23 crianças da pré-escola de uma instituição pública. As estratégias metodológicas foram observação, diário de campo, fotografia, fotoelicitação e rodas de conversa. O percurso da pesquisa é discutido através de unidades analíticas que tematizam a escuta e a participação das crianças. A partir da pesquisa, infere-se que a escuta e participação das crianças: promovem o exercício da cidadania; demandam estratégias metodológicas participativas; possibilitam com que elas tenham poder de decisão durante a investigação.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Pesquisa com crianças. Tempo. Escuta. Participação.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo se escuchó y participó a los niños en un estudio etnográfico sobre los significados del tiempo en la Educación Infantil. La investigación se llevó a cabo con 23 niños de preescolar de una institución pública. Las estrategias metodológicas fueron la observación, el diario de campo, la fotografía, la foto-elicitación y los círculos de conversación. El curso de la investigación se discute a través de unidades analíticas que tematizan la escucha y la participación de los niños. A partir de la investigación, se puede inferir que la escucha y la participación de los niños: promueven el ejercicio de la ciudadanía; exigen estrategias metodológicas participativas; les permiten tener poder de decisión durante la investigación.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil. Investigación con niños. Tiempo. Escucha. Participación.

Linhas Críticas | Journal edited by the Faculty of Education at the University of Brasília, Brazil
e-ISSN: 1981-0431 | ISSN: 1516-4896
<http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/linhascriticas>

Full reference (APA): Carvalho, R. S. de. (2023). Listening and participation in ethnographic research with children in Early Childhood Education. *Linhas Críticas*, 29, e50765.
<https://doi.org/10.26512/lc29202350765>

Full reference (ABNT): CARVALHO, R. S. de. Listening and participation in ethnographic research with children in Early Childhood Education. *Linhas Críticas*, 29, e50765, 2023. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.26512/lc29202350765>

Alternative link: <https://www.periodicos.unb.br/index.php/linhascriticas/article/view/50765>

All information and opinions in this manuscript are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the journal *Linhas Críticas*, its editors, or the University of Brasília.

The authors hold the copyright of this manuscript, with the first publication rights reserved to the journal *Linhas Críticas*, which distributes it in open access under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY 4.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

