

# Oral narratives in research with children: inspirations from González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology

Narrativas orais na pesquisa com crianças: inspirações na Epistemologia Qualitativa de González Rey

Narrativas orales en la investigación con niños: inspiraciones en la epistemología cualitativa de González Rey

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## Highlights

Este artículo presenta propuestas que pueden orientar la investigación con niños pequeños.

Destaca la dialogicidad, la participación observadora y el papel activo del investigador en la producción de información con los niños.

Señala la construcción de escenarios sociales basados en la espontaneidad y la ludicidad como estrategia de investigación con niños.

## Abstract

Research methodology with children is a type of research that is constantly under discussion, given the specific characteristics of children, especially young children. This article aims to propose and analyze a research procedure with young children in a school environment called *Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives*. The methodology involves field research in a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center in the municipality of Natal-RN, in a Pre-School class. The procedure was proposed based on the interlocution between the perspectives of research *with* children and González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology. Its emphasis in research methodology *with* children is on active dialogue beyond listening, observant participation, and the construction of social research scenarios mediated by spontaneity and playfulness. It is clear that this procedure is useful for producing information, as it enhances the development of children's oral narratives.

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## Keywords

Young children. Research Methodology. Epistemology.

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## Introduction

Until the 1980s, the field of research focusing on children tended to view them as objects of investigation. In this context, the perspective adopted was that of research *on* children, as is/was the case with many studies in the field of Psychology, as Evangelista and Marchi (2022) show, and Medicine, as Abramowicz and Oliveira (2010) show.

According to Marchi (2018), the shift in research methods *involving* children is related to changes in the paradigms of classical ethnography, regarding issues surrounding the voice of research subjects and the relationship between researchers and research subjects. These changes have directly affected ethnographic research carried out with children since the 1990s (Marchi, 2018), especially in the field of the Sociology of Childhood, which emerged during this period.

In this context, the understanding that children are active social subjects with rights, autonomy, and agency (Sarmiento, 2007) reinforces the notion that their voices are powerful and legitimate when it comes to speaking about their worlds (Corsaro, 2009; Friedmann, 2020; Sarmiento, 2007). As a result, children are no longer seen as objects to be investigated, but as participants in the research (Marchi, 2018; Mitjás Martínez, 2014), which means assuming that they are active in the research process, especially in terms of producing information (González Rey, 2012).

In this sense, attentive and sensitive listening to children becomes central to the development of research with them, intending to get closer to children's points of view and shift away from adult-centered theoretical lenses (Friedmann, 2020). In this direction, the Sociology of Childhood points to the need to build methodological strategies and instruments that adapt to and respect the specificities of children (Abramowicz & Oliveira, 2010).

Corroborating this concept, Larrosa (2017) points out the need to understand that childhoods are not limited to the knowledge we have about them. Therefore, if we want to understand them, we need to make ourselves available to listen to them (Larrosa, 2017). In this context, it is necessary to be willing to meet and listen, because knowledge about childhood does not necessarily lie in what we say about it, but in the very event of childhood and in what children tell us (Larrosa, 2017).

Thus, we understand that the specificities of having young people as research participants necessarily imply developing particular ways of listening and understanding (Abramowicz & Oliveira, 2010), as well as ways of building relationships, affections, languages, meanings, and senses that make dialogue with them possible.

We should therefore ask ourselves: How can we listen to, highlight, and value the power of children's voices without running over children with adult-centric views?

How can we question children and get them to develop their languages? How can you understand their interests and needs in the research process?

These questions make up a framework of issues that still surround research *with* children. With this in mind, this article aims to propose and analyze a research procedure *with* young children (three to six years old) in a school environment called *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas* (*Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives*).

The article is organized into five sections. In the Introduction, we present the theme, problem, and objective of the research. In the section entitled Methodological Aspects, we describe the research's methodological procedures. The topic Inspirations from González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology for Thinking about Research with Young Children in a School Environment is divided into the following subtopics: (1) The social scenario of research and playfulness; (2) Dialogicity; (3) The active participation of the researcher; (4) Singularity; (5) Spontaneity. In the section of the text entitled Children's Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives: Some Scenarios, we set out the social scenarios of research with young children. Finally, the conclusions and references.

## **| Methodological aspects**

This procedure was produced based on research carried out by the authors of this article. However, the empirical data presented come from the doctoral field research<sup>1</sup> of one of the authors. The methodology used was based on the qualitative research approach *with* children (Corsaro, 2009; Marchi, 2018; Muller & Carvalho, 2009), inspired by Qualitative Epistemology and the Constructive-Interpretive Method (González Rey, 2011; 2012; 2017; 2019).

The *locus* was a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (CMEI) in the city of Natal, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. The participants were 17 children aged between five and six from a pre-school class, as well as one of the authors of this article. The information was produced with the participation of the researcher twice a week, during the afternoon class's full-time activities, between August 2023 and January 2024. The audios were transcribed verbatim, respecting the specificities of the children's languages.

Regarding ethical issues, it is essential to note that, after the consent of those responsible, we also obtained the assent of the children. However, according to Ferreira (2010), the children's consent is not definitive, and following this premise, we paid attention to a daily consultation process. We chose not to reveal the name of the early childhood education institution and to use the codenames freely selected by the children themselves.

The analysis was carried out based on the construction of coding categories, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1994):

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<sup>1</sup> The doctoral research was authorized by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte under opinion number 6.211.050.

The development of a coding system involves several steps. It scans your data in search of regularities and patterns, as well as topics present in the data, and then writes words and phrases that represent these same topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994, p. 221).

Following the analytical moves proposed by Bogdan and Biklen (1994), we read the empirical data looking for regularities that would highlight the strategies used to produce information with the children. We identified four strategies: (1) Social scenario based on spontaneous conversation; (2) Social scenario of research based on storytelling; (3) Social scenario of research based on make-believe games; and (4) Social scenario of research based on drawing and modeling. These strategies, along with the aspects of Qualitative Epistemology that underpin them, gave rise to the research procedure that we named *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas* (Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives), which is the subject of analysis in this article.

## **Inspirations from González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology for Thinking about Research with Young Children in the School Environment**

Within the epistemological framework of the human sciences, González Rey proposed an epistemology called Qualitative Epistemology and its Development in Constructive-Interpretive Methodology for the Development of Studies on Subjectivity (González Rey, 2011; 2012; 2017). From this epistemological and methodological perspective, the production of knowledge is considered to be a constructive and interpretative process, subjectively configured. Assuming this "[...] implies understanding knowledge as production and not as the linear appropriation of a reality that presents itself to us" (González Rey, 2012, p. 5).

Qualitative Epistemology has three principles: dialogicity, singularity, and the constructive-interpretive nature of knowledge. Within the set of aspects that characterize the Constructive-Interpretive Methodology, we highlight: the creation of social scenarios of research, playfulness, the active stance of the researcher, and spontaneity (González Rey, 2019). We believe, in agreement with Mitjans Martínez (2019, 2022), that the foundations of this epistemological and methodological framework are useful for guiding the development of research, not only in the field of subjectivity studies, but also for qualitative research in various fields, especially with young children.

In this sense, the reflection we developed based on the dialogue between the field of research *with* children and aspects taken from Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretive Methodology led us to propose a methodological procedure for research *with* young children that we call *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas* Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives.

The term narrative is used because we understand that the information the children produce in their interactions with the researcher and other children is configured as

stories. Stories based on their experiences and/or imagination, stories that go through make-believe and other games, the symbolic meanings of drawings and other languages.

Oral narrative is a linguistic interaction activity central to everyday conversations, consisting of a type of text that reports on past events and, therefore, has the function of reconstructing real or imagined experiences (Bruner, 1997). Children use this type of text for numerous purposes in their social relationships, such as relating situations they have experienced, convincing someone, fabricating, creating, or retelling stories (Bruner, 1997; Perroni, 1983). In this sense, storytelling is the first way children relate experiences, think, and produce knowledge about themselves and the world. Therefore, narrative from a dialogical perspective can converge into a privileged form of information production among children.

The term “dialogic” comes from the notion that narratives are developed through interaction between research participants (children-children, researcher-children). Therefore, it is not a monologue, but necessarily requires dialogicity, that is, a form of communication in which people are emotionally involved (González Rey, 2012).

The term spontaneous in the Constructive-Interpretive Methodology refers to the subjects' space for free expression (González Rey, 2012), an aspect that we consider basic when it comes to research *with* young children.

The procedure—*Narrativas Dialógicas Espontânea* (Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives)—is characterized by the construction and maintenance of the social scenario of research, the active participation of the researcher, dialogicity, singularity, spontaneity, and playfulness (González Rey, 2011; 2012).

## **| The social scenario of research and playfulness**

The social scenario of the research is not to be confused with the research field. While the research field refers to the location where the research is carried out, the social scenario of the research is understood as the space created by the researcher, referring to the way he or she involves the participants and gets involved. According to González Rey (2012, p. 85), "In the case of children, the scenario is created from the type of initial activity used to develop the research. It's the attractiveness of the activity that defines the children's interest in taking part in the research." Therefore, with children as participants, it is necessary to build a social scenario of research mediated by playfulness.

From this perspective, it is important to plan the entry into the field and the approach to the group, in other words, to create a social scenario that captivates the children and establishes bonds of trust and affection between the researcher and the children. At this point, the use of playful strategies, such as "the use of puppets, children's films and games represent convenient ways to form a group of children with whom you want to work steadily for some time" (González Rey, 2012, p. 85). This is because elements related to childhood establish a playful bond and can facilitate rapprochement, opening up a dialogical space.

In addition, the social scenario of the research must be maintained throughout the research process, reconstructing it whenever necessary. According to Rossato, Martins, and Mitjás Martínez (2014, p. 41), "[...] in the interaction with the research subjects, the researcher gets closer to each research subject, in order to develop the reliability and interest necessary for the development of the research". In this way, the use of toys makes it possible to enter the children's universe and establish a connection with them, facilitating interaction and increasing the dialogic power of this encounter.

In addition, the use of toys involves playfulness, understood as an important characteristic of childhood (Muller & Carvalho, 2009), and is also pointed out by González Rey (2012) as an aspect to be considered in research methodology involving children as participants. In this way, we can deduce that the use of toys and other playful resources can favor the creation of a social scenario of research, instigating engagement and emotional bonding, which are necessary elements in the process of producing information with children.

## | Dialogicity

Dialogicity is one of the three principles of Qualitative Epistemology, which is expressed in Constructive-Interpretive Methodology. Based on this principle, we understand research as a dialogical process, that is, one of communication (González Rey, 2012), with dialogue being a space for relationships between subjects and for the expression of subjectivity that breaks with the logic of questions and answers (Mitjás Martínez, 2014).

In this way, dialogicity serves as a crucial foundation for thinking about research with children through the lens of interaction. This is because the younger the child, the greater their dependence on interaction with others in order to develop their narratives (Perroni, 1983). It is worth noting that listening is seen as a privileged technique in research *with* children (Corsaro, 2009; Friedmann, 2020; Marchi, 2018). However, when we think of *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas* (*Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives*), we focus beyond sensitive listening on an active and sensitive dialogue that enhances children's voices.

In this sense, the meaning of dialogue is that it "[...] implies the emotions of those involved, as well as possible moments of contradiction and tension that have great value for the development of the dialogue itself and the subjects involved in it" (González Rey, 2019, p. 30). In narrative dialogic encounters, there is mutual affectation, so that sometimes children can identify with what they hear, remembering and recounting similar experiences; other times, they may find the content narrated by others strange and doubtful, and engage in dialogue by questioning and problematizing.

## **| The active participation of the researcher**

We can see that, with dialogicity as a principle, the researcher takes an active stance in the dialog; in other words, it's not just about listening, but also about interacting. In this sense, González Rey (2012, p. 45-46) states: "Conversations generate co-responsibility because each of the participants feels subject to the process, facilitating the expression of their needs and interests". The interaction between the researcher and other partners in the dialogue drives the expansion of narratives through subjective productions generated in the dialogical process, such as memories, emotions, knowledge, and imagination.

The active participation of the researcher differs from *Participant Observation*, an ethnographic procedure widely used in research *with* children (Abramowich & Oliveira, 2010; Muller & Carvalho, 2009), in that it is not a matter of observing peripherally and acting sporadically, but of entering the territory inhabited by children, that is, being part of the group. Ferreira (2010) described a similar process, calling it *Observant Participation*, alluding to the way of constructing information with children from within children's cultures and approaching their perspectives.

Furthermore, according to González Rey (2012; 2014), the researcher's close relationship with the participants is fundamental to the process of interpretation and the construction of information. This is because the meanings are not in the isolated word, but in the broader context of enunciation in which the word becomes alive (González Rey, 2012, 2014, 2019), which can favor a rapprochement with children's own modes of rationality, thought, and knowledge.

## **| Singularity**

Another principle of Qualitative Epistemology is singularity. This aspect concerns the fact that the study of the singular is a legitimate space for the production of scientific knowledge. Singular situations and cases make it possible to advance in understanding the object of study and build theoretical models, which is how generalization is expressed in this epistemological conception (González Rey, 2012, 2014, 2019). However, by digressing somewhat from the meaning of this principle of Qualitative Epistemology, we can say that singularity underpins the understanding of children as a generational group that has its own singular forms of language, expression, thoughts, and worldviews (Sarmiento, 2007), permeated by imagination. These forms are not inferior to those of adults, but distinct and full of intelligence.

In Scenario 1, we observed the researcher entering the children's imaginary symbolic universe by including her in the make-believe play that took place in the park.

Scenario 1: **Dad Power Rangers**

Barbie<sup>2</sup>/mother — Daughter, your sister Sunflower is cooking, and Mom is going to the market, okay? Keep an eye on the gate so no thieves get in!  
 Res/daughter — Thief?  
 Barbie/mother — Yes! There are thieves out here!  
 Res/daughter — (Batman approaches) Look at the thief, Mom, close the door!  
 Barbie/mother — it's your dad, girl!  
 Res/daughter — Is it Dad?  
 Barbie/mother — Yes! He's a policeman!  
 Res/daughter — Daddy, you scared me!  
 Batman/Father — (laughs) I'm the father! I'm the Dad Power Rangers of fire [...] of fire!  
 Wonder Woman/Sister — I have the power of ice, look! (gestures with her hands) [...]  
 Barbie/mother — Daughter, you have to go to school. (Leads the researcher by the hand) This is the school, come in! Mom will come pick you up later, daughter [...]. (Returns and speaks to the researcher/daughter through the window of the playhouse) Hi, daughter, Mom brought the video game you wanted to bring to school so badly. (Hands over a piece of broken tile) [...]  
 (Children, ages five and six, research participants).

The researcher dialogues with the children based on their experience of make-believe, which gives her a privileged vantage point from which to look inside peer cultures (Corsaro, 2009; Ferreira, 2010) and get closer to the children's vision, to the detriment of the adult-centric view of those looking in from the outside. Consequently, by participating in the observation, the researcher had the opportunity to learn about and contribute to the storyline that was developing there, which referenced the children's experiences: "There's a thief here"; their knowledge: "Daughter, you have to go to school"; their imagination: "I have the power of ice"; and their subjectivities: "I'm the dad Power Rangers of Fire".

By assuming active participation and dialogicity (González Rey, 2011), she moves actively in the plot of the game — "Look at the thief, Mommy, close the door!"- acting according to the role she has been given, taking care not to alter the plot created by the children significantly, but also without being a passive listener. This type of interaction strengthens bonds of trust in relationships, which are important for ensuring spontaneity in research and the production of information from a privileged angle.

## **| Spontaneity**

Spontaneity is not a principle of Qualitative Epistemology, but an important aspect of Constructive-Interpretive Methodology. This component requires promoting a social scenario of research in which participants feel safe and free to express themselves (González Rey, 2012; 2019). In this sense, guaranteeing a research scenario free from situations of imposition and pressure, which can block children's expressions, is essential if they are to be able to express themselves spontaneously.

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<sup>2</sup> Barbie/mother. The first word of this expression (Barbie) is the child's codename, and the second word (mother) represents the role that the game plays.

In our view, spontaneity is related to: (1) the context of the research, which, as in ethnographic methodologies (Muller & Carvalho, 2009), refers to the child's living space, such as home and school, moving away from planned spaces such as laboratories; (2) the maintenance of routines with subtle changes for the research. Accompanying the children in their activities, trying to insert yourself as an atypical adult (Corsaro, 2009), is a way of guaranteeing a certain spontaneity in relationships; (3) the scenarios and resources planned should pay attention to and avoid artificialities that do not involve the children effectively and emotionally.

In this context, we believe that the very routine of young children in a school environment is a fruitful space for research, to the detriment of planned spaces, which will hinder the child's spontaneous expression by including them in contexts that are not natural to them and/or because they feel intimidated. Thus, participating in mealtimes, graphic activities, games, playtime, and conversation circles can make these dialogical spaces very productive for building information. However, it is essential to be careful not to alter the flow of the children's activities (Corsaro, 2009), which implies a certain sensitivity on the part of the researcher in this participation.

## **Children's Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives: some scenarios**

To begin this section of the text, it is important to clarify that “[...] the methodological operations of a research study are not something formulated *a priori*, but rather something constructed in the living process of the research itself” (Gonzalez Rey, 2012, p. 87). In fact, it is the day-to-day work in the field, as well as the unforeseen events, that will forge the resources needed to carry out the research. At this point, the researcher's creativity becomes an essential aspect (Mitjás Martínez, 2014).

In scenario 2, we observed an interaction between the researcher and a group of young children, based on her participation in a conversation that took place in the playground.

### **Scenario 2: Tom's game**

I watch the children in the park; they are sitting, playing with sand, and talking.  
[...]  
Superman — I play Tom's game!  
Sunflower — I've got it too!  
Superman — My Tommmm, ok, mine is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15!  
Res. — Is that so?  
The Flash — My Tom's birthday is on the 30th!  
[...]  
Sunflower — I'm looking after mine.  
Superman — I'm playing Tommm's game!  
Res. — How do you look after your Tom, Sunflower?  
Sunflower — With my Tom, I feed him, he drinks water, I bathe him, and he goes for a walk.  
Superman — I buy food! If I have to, as I think he does, he always puts on a little sign to say that he's hungry.

Sunflower — Mine too!  
 Superman — So I think he's my brother because I eat...I think...every day. [...]  
 Res. — What else do you do with Tom, guys?  
 Sunflower — In fact, he's already big!  
 Superman — He poops and even pees [...] (Children, five and six years old, participants in the research).

The researcher was following the children's conversation when the subject of the game, Tom, came up spontaneously. As digital entertainment games were the subject of the researcher's interest, she subtly joins the conversation: "Really? How do you look after your Tom, Sunflower?" – in order to encourage the children to expand on what they said. It is important to point out that the conversation is a space for exchange and a narrative encounter, so it is interesting that the researcher, in the interlocution, also discusses her experiences. The idea is to generate points of intersection between the children's experiences and those of the researcher, something that will instigate a certain identification and horizontality in the relationship.

Furthermore, when discussing their experiences, the researcher acts as an example of a narrator and can intentionally generate learning processes around the production of this type of oral text, because we understand that the research space is also a space for mutual learning.

Another scenario that can help children develop narratives is the use of children's literature. Reading moments, storytelling, and conversations around literary texts are typically part of the children's routine in the school environment. They are, therefore, a resource that can be utilized without altering their daily lives. In scenario 3, we observe the discussion generated around the telling of a story.

### Scenario 3: **As long as I want!**

The researcher talks to the children about the story "A novíssima história dos três porquinhos (The brand new story of the three little pigs)", by the writer Maria das Graças Brandão Soares. It's a retelling of the traditional tale of the three little pigs, in which two of the pigs spend the day on their cell phones.

[...]

Res. — Is anyone here like those little pigs who like to spend all their time on their cell phones?

Heart – Not meeeeeee!

Cowgirl — (Raises her hand and shakes her head yes and laughs)

Cupcake — (Shakes the head and laughs, claiming to be like the little pigs)

Heart — Me too, just a little!

Little Mermaid — Me too, (laughs)

Heart — Me too, kind of (laughs).

Cowgirl — I don't even play, I don't even play!

Cupcake — I play, I play!

Res. — What do you play?

Cupcake — I play with dolls.

Heart — I play Parkour!

[...]

Res. — Is Parkour on a cell phone?

Bowser — Parkour is jumping from one building to another, but there are videos where they can't do it!

Cowgirl — Like in Roblox!

Spider-Man — I like it!  
(unintelligible simultaneous speech)  
Cowgirl — Even my mother plays Roblox! Even my mother plays!  
Little Mermaid — Even my dad plays!  
Bowser — Some...My father once took my cell phone and just watched what I was playing, to play too!  
Little Mermaid — (laughs)  
Res. — Did you see that the little pigs didn't even want to go to school because they just wanted to stay home on their cell phones?  
Cowgirl — I like school! [...] When there are no classes, I almost cry.  
Heart — Me too, I throw myself on the floor and start kicking (laughs)!  
[...]  
Spider-Man — I keep pestering to go to school.  
(unintelligible simultaneous speech)  
Bowser — Not me, I stay normal!  
Res. — So everyone likes to come to school; no one just wants to stay at home with their cell phone. Now the little pigs didn't want to play with the toys their mother bought them; they just wanted the cell phone!  
Bowser — I play with my toys!  
Cowgirl — Sometimes I play with my friend! So, from time to time, but I prefer my cell phone.  
Res. — But what do you do so much on your cell phone, Cowgirl?  
Cowgirl — Ah, I play, I watch (simultaneous speeches with Heart)  
Heart — You'll play along with me, right?  
Res. — Do you play together? How does that work?  
Heart — She was at my house, then she takes my dad's cell phone, and I take my mom's cell phone [...] then we play Roblox, Roblox, Roblox.  
Cowgirl — There are maps, maps [...]  
Heart — We play too! We play too! We're not fans of just staring at our phones and televisions either. I even watched a movie with my mother, father, and aunt [...]  
Res. — Do your parents let you spend a lot of time on your cell phone?  
Cowgirl — My mother allows all the time!  
Heart — Mine also allows! (laughs)  
Cowgirl — As long as I want!  
Bowser — Mine won't let me! [...] (Children, aged five and six, participating in the study).

The researcher proposed a conversation around the story, getting the children to compare their behavior in relation to cell phone use with that of the characters in the story. This dialogic movement instigated the children's engagement, as some identified with the characters, while others did not. This interaction, despite being planned and directed by the researcher, in a way ensures the children's free expression, while also being permeated by the playful aspects that children's literature encompasses.

Proposing an outcome to a story or solving a problem in a fictional story can also be a good trigger for talking about a particular topic, as it generates a certain creative involvement in problem-solving.

According to González Rey (2012, p. 69), "The use of puppets is a privileged avenue in research with children, as it creates a playful atmosphere in which children express themselves with total spontaneity". In this context, proposing play-stories using a set of puppets, images, logical sequences, and various elements can be an interesting resource. In this case, it's essential to create scenarios and let the children explore freely.

Let's look at another proposal organized by the researcher within the children's institutional routine. Beforehand, she set up a themed make-believe environment with a few corners. As the researcher was interested in children's relationships with screens, she provided notebooks, cell phones, headphones, digital readers, keyboards, and *mouses*. The children freely explored the spaces, creating games individually and in groups.

Scenario 4 shows one of the interactions in which the children involved the researcher in the game.

**Scenario 4: Make a Pix!**

I'm sitting on a chair next to a group of children playing. Little Mermaid approaches me and hands me a plate, then says:

Little Mermaid — A special soup recipe!

Res. — Hmm, and where did you see this special recipe?

Little Mermaid — On *YouTube*!

Res. — Did you see the recipe on *YouTube*? (Barbie, who is playing nearby, puts a cell phone to her ear and says)

Barbie — Hello, researcher!

Res. — (I say to the Little Mermaid) Wait a moment, I'll answer my phone. Hello, who's speaking?

Barbie — It's me, the hairdresser,

Res. — Oh, the hairdresser, can you help me, friend?

Barbie — I can!

Res. — I'm eating, I'll be there in a minute, okay?

Barbie — Yeah! I'll be waiting for you!

Res. — Ah, thank you! What's that special soup you saw on *YouTube*?

Little Mermaid — Shrimp soup!

Res. — What else is in that shrimp soup?

Little Mermaid — Fish!

Res. — What else?

Little Mermaid — Potato

Res. — Hmm, what else?

Little Mermaid — Only that.

[...]

Barbie — You're going to come now, I've been waiting a long time, a client has already come to ask if you're going to come now.

Res. — I'm arriving right now! [...] I'm here!

Heart — I'm going to wash her hair!

Res. — (Barbie puts on her glasses and takes my hand, and makes movements as if she were painting while Heart combs my hair).

[...]

Barbie — Ready! It's over!

Res. — Ah! How beautiful it turned out! [...] So, how can I pay you? I have no money.

Barbie — Well, on the cell phone, credit.

Res. — On credit? On the card?

Barbie — Yes!

Res. — But I didn't bring a card, just my cell phone.

Barbie — Aah! Go get it, I'll wait for you here [...]

Hulk — (Not participating in the game, but standing nearby and saying) Make a pix!

Res. — And how do you make a pix?

Barbie — I know! Here (laughs, points to the cell phone I'm using to record)

Res. — Ah, it's on the cell phone! Oh, let's go then! [...] (Children, aged five and six, participating in the study).

This interaction took place in a social scenario of research planned and structured by the researcher, intending to observe the children's relationships with the screens. She based the social scene on playfulness, the permanence of the children's routine, and their freedom of action and expression.

As we can see, play appears to be a rich space for dialogue and self-expression for children. In this interaction, the storylines created by them and their peers, in which the researcher is actively involved (after being inserted into the game by the children), emerge as potent for evoking the children's experiences, knowledge, thoughts, and imagination.

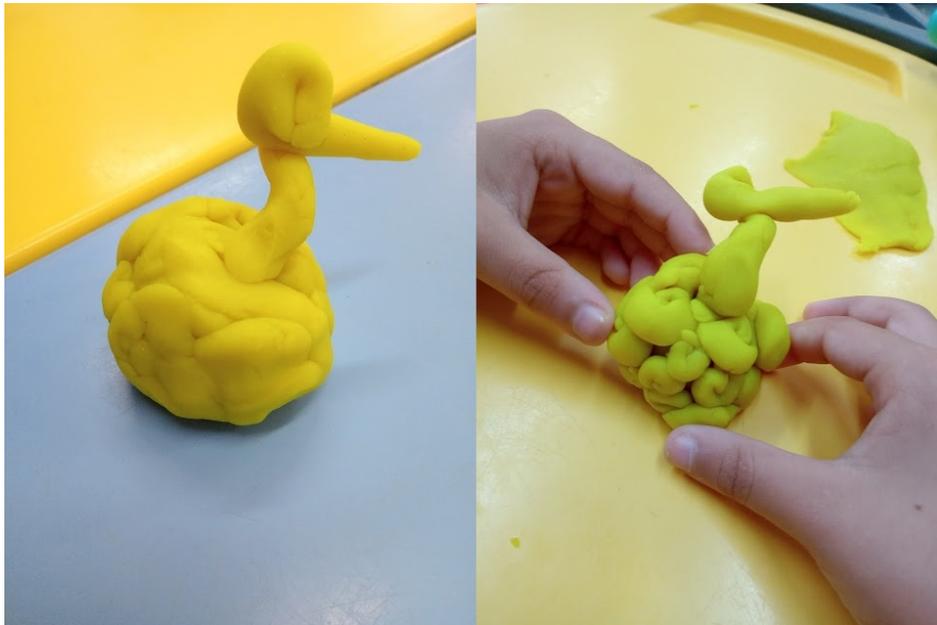
Once again, we saw the active participation of the researcher in the dialog, instigating the children to appear in this space of free expression, which is emerging as a make-believe storyline. Something interesting to note is that Barbie takes on the role of a hairdresser, demonstrating knowledge related to the daily routine of this profession, which can be seen in her lines: "Are you coming now? I've been waiting a long time, and a customer has already arrived." And related to payments: "on mobile, credit". She also uses a certain language, trying to get closer to the reference of what she is playing.

Another scenario that can be useful in generating information with children is the use of plastic languages, which are very present in the daily life of Early Childhood Education Institutions. The activities in scenarios 5 and 6 were proposed by the class teacher. The children modeled and drew freely, without being guided by themes.

In scenario 5, we see the use of sculpture with modeling clay. The researcher followed the production of one group and was also involved in the activity.

Scenario 5: **One Piece fruit!**

**Figure 1**  
*One Piece* fruit



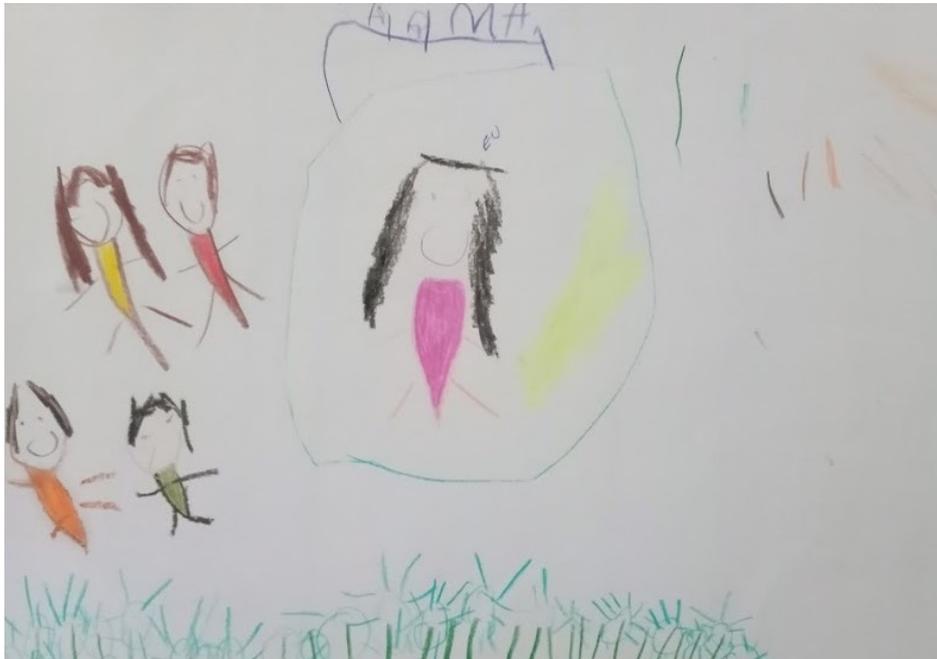
Source: the authors.

Hulk — I'm making a *One Piece* fruit!  
 Res. — What kind of fruit are you making?  
 Hulk — From *One Piece*!  
 Res. — What is that?  
 Superman — An anime series!  
 Hulk — Yeah, an anime. This anime airs on Netflix.  
 Res. — And there are fruits, what are these fruits called?  
 Hulk — Gomu gomu no Mi, Mochi mochi no mi, Pika pika no mi, it's...  
 Res. — What happens in this anime?  
 Superman — Even I have its album and stickers, lots and lots of duplicate stickers, even a shirt.  
 [...]  
 Hulk — It's the pirates, they want to defeat the other pirates to be the kings of pirates [...] (Child, six years old, research participant).

We observed that the modeling activity has a playful link, and the non-directed theme allows children to spontaneously express their experience with the anime series by modeling the fruit. The researcher's interlocution, which arises around the sculpture, prompts the elaboration of a narrative, as the child is challenged to talk about his work and the relationship with anime. In this sense, children's artistic expression through sculpture, drawings, paintings, and collages can be used either as empirical material, without necessarily involving an oral interlocution, or as a propellant for conversation. In the case of this article, it was used to promote oral storytelling.

Scenario 6: **Watching a cartoon**

**Figure 2**  
 Watching a cartoon



Source: the authors.

- Res. — What a beautiful drawing! Tell me about it!  
 Cowgirl — I drew my family!  
 Res. — Who are they? (points to the four images outside the circle)  
 Cowgirl — My brother, my other brother, my mother, and my father, that's me.  
 Res. — And what is this? (points to a circle)  
 Cowgirl — My house, I was at home watching cartoons.  
 Res. — What drawing?  
 Cowgirl — Peppa Pig!  
 Res. — What about your family?  
 Cowgirl — I was walking down the street (Child, five years old, research participant).

Scenario 6 exemplifies the use of drawing as a resource for dialog and the production of narratives. It should be pointed out that the language of drawing is an important form of symbolic expression for children (González Rey, 2012) and is a significant tool in research with them. Free drawing encourages spontaneity (González Rey, 2019) and the representation of aspects related to their lives and their imagined worlds. They are certainly fruitful sources for producing information with the children and for developing narratives such as the ones we are following. Another way to encourage children to produce plastic languages is to organize corners with the materials needed for these productions and leave them available for the children to use whenever they wish.

In this way, it is by participating with the children, in order to "[...] become part of a dynamic conversation that takes different forms and is responsible for producing a fabric of information [...]" (González Rey, 2012, p. 45), the researcher can leverage the child's narrative production. In this active participation, a body of meaningful

information is produced from the mobilization of children's knowledge, memories, emotions, thoughts, and imagination.

## | Conclusions

The dialogue between research *with* children, Qualitative Epistemology, and Constructive-Interpretive Methodology helped us to consider important aspects related to the specificities of research *with* young children. These reflections do not answer all the questions raised in the introduction. However, they show us paths and possibilities for carrying out a type of research that values and enhances the languages and voices of young children, and that pays attention to their peculiarities and their own ways of understanding and acting in the world.

The procedure, *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas* (Spontaneous Dialogic Narratives), differs from what has been discussed in research methodology *with* children in that it involves active dialogue beyond listening, active participation by the researcher beyond participant observation, spontaneity, and research scenarios mediated by playfulness. In this sense, we infer that this procedure opens up spaces, through possible scenarios, which make it possible to highlight specific ways of producing authentic and meaningful information with children.

It is important to point out in these final lines that our intention is not to provide recipes. Not least because, as we have pointed out, there are no ready-made research procedures to put into practice with children, since these must be constructed during the research process itself, taking into account the context, the participants, and the study's objectives. Our intention is to present reflections, paths, and possibilities for thinking about research *with* young children.

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## **Resumo**

A metodologia de pesquisa com crianças é uma tipologia de investigação em constante discussão, dadas as especificidades das crianças, sobretudo as pequenas. Assim, neste artigo, tem-se como objetivo propor e analisar um

procedimento de pesquisa com crianças pequenas em ambiente escolar denominado *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas*. A metodologia envolve a pesquisa de campo em um Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil do município de Natal-RN, em uma turma da Pré-Escola. O procedimento foi proposto a partir da interlocução entre as perspectivas da pesquisa *com* crianças e a Epistemologia Qualitativa de González Rey. O seu destaque, na metodologia de pesquisa *com* crianças, está no diálogo ativo para além da escuta, na participação observante e na construção de cenários sociais de pesquisa mediados pela espontaneidade e ludicidade. Constata-se que esse procedimento é profícuo para a produção de informações, à medida que potencializa a elaboração das narrativas orais das crianças.

**Palavras-chave:** Crianças pequenas. Metodologia de Pesquisa. Epistemologia.

## Resumen

La metodología de investigación con niños es un tipo de investigación en constante debate, dadas las especificidades de los niños, especialmente los pequeños. Así, en este artículo, el objetivo es proponer y analizar un procedimiento de investigación con niños pequeños en el entorno escolar denominado *Narrativas Dialógicas Espontâneas*. La metodología implica la investigación de campo en un Centro Municipal de Educación Infantil del municipio de Natal-RN, en una clase de preescolar. El procedimiento se propuso a partir del diálogo entre las perspectivas de la investigación *con* niños y la Epistemología Cualitativa de González Rey. Su destaque, en la metodología de investigación *con* niños, está en el diálogo activo más allá de la escucha, en la participación observadora y en la construcción de escenarios sociales de investigación mediados por la espontaneidad y la ludicidad. Se constata que este procedimiento es fructífero para la producción de información, ya que potencia la elaboración de narrativas orales de los niños.

**Palabras clave:** Niños pequeños. Metodología de investigación. Epistemología.

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