Planning and organization of learning environments in Early Childhood Education: reflections on spaces, time, and materials

ARTICLE

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Abstract
This article discusses the results of a study focused on the organization of learning environments in early childhood education, as well as reflections on spaces, furniture, and time. The objective was to analyze the implications of organizing experiential classrooms for children's learning and development and for the pedagogical practice of early childhood educators. To this end, we drew on the theoretical studies of Vigotski (2007), Saviani (2013), Gandini (2016), Barbosa (2008), Ostetto (2000), and Forneiro (1998). The corpus of analysis for this qualitative research consisted of the discourse of fifteen teachers from a public early childhood education school located in an inland municipality of Ceará. The study revealed that the configuration of learning environments reflects underlying conceptions and directly influences the quality of the experiences that children have in the school's internal and external spaces.
Keywords: Planning and organization. Spaces and time. Early childhood education. Children.

Planejamento e organização dos ambientes de aprendizagem na Educação Infantil: reflexões sobre espaços, tempos e materiais

Resumo
O presente artigo discute os resultados de uma pesquisa cujo objeto de investigação está centrado na organização dos ambientes de aprendizagem na Educação Infantil, bem como em reflexões sobre os espaços, o mobiliário e o tempo. O objetivo foi analisar as implicações da organização dos ambientes das salas de experiências na aprendizagem e no desenvolvimento infantil e na práxis pedagógica da professora ou do professor de Educação Infantil. Para isso, ancoramo-nos teoricamente nos estudos de Vigotski (2007), Saviani (2013), Gandini (2016), Barbosa (2008), Ostetto (2000) e Forneiro (1998). O corpus de análise da pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, foi constituído pelo discurso de quinze professoras de uma escola pública de Educação Infantil localizada em um município do interior cearense. A pesquisa revelou que a configuração dos ambientes de aprendizagem reflete concepções e influencia diretamente a qualidade das experiências que as crianças vivenciam nos espaços internos e externos da escola.

Palavras-chave: Planejamento e organização. Ambientes e tempos. Educação Infantil. Criança.

1 Introduction

> I learned the secret of life by watching stones that cry alone in the same place.
> Raul Seixas

What is the secret behind planning and organizing the environments of experience rooms in Early Childhood Education? Are there any secrets? The excerpt from the song in the epigraph prompts us to reflect: the lyric speaker sees stones crying alone in the same place and considers that they, as inanimate beings, cannot move or express any reaction, for they do not change. The environments of Early Childhood Education are not stones that cry alone in the same place, meaning they are time spatial dimensions in constant transformation at the service of the learning and development of babies and children in collective schooling contexts.

Among the contributions of historical cultural Psychology, one finds the understanding that learning and development are interrelated from the child's first day of life (Vigotski, 2007, p. 95) and, in historical critical Pedagogy, according to Saviani (2013), whose conception of childhood points to the roots of historical and dialectical materialism. Man is not born knowing how to produce himself as a man. He needs to learn to become a man. Therefore, the production of man is, at the same time, the formation of man, that is, an educational process (Saviani, 2013, p. 250). To this one adds the conception of childhood, which emphasizes that, besides being a living body endowed with its own interiority, the child is situated in a spatial and temporal context that determines him or her (Saviani, 2013, p. 256).

This space time context highlights cultural conditions and, therefore, this being in a process of development and learning learns within this set of conditions, which influence him or her in a dialectical and historical process. To learn about themselves and about the world, the child, in the line of action proposed by historical critical Pedagogy, needs

pedagogical mediation whose method takes social practice as its reference. At this point, it is observed that teaching work can contribute by:

> developing from the earliest age, always oriented toward each child's appropriation of human objectifications in their most developed forms, represented by scientific concepts grounded in the elaborations of philosophical thought and in the aesthetic expression of great works of art (Saviani, 2013, p. 274).

Among other pedagogical functions, Early Childhood Education is responsible for intentional mediation so that the child may move from the level of unreflective consciousness to reflective consciousness, as Saviani (2013) asserts, based on the objective situations of existence, considering the child's knowledge and articulating it with the knowledge constructed and accumulated by humanity, given that the child's interest is not limited to what is closest, immediate, familiar, or part of their everyday life (Saviani, 2013, p. 274).

Without intending to exhaust the study of the theme, this research aimed to investigate the implications of environment organization in the pedagogical practice of teachers, as well as to understand the relationships between organization, learning, and child development. We started from the premise that the intentionally planned organization of indoor environments experience rooms in Early Childhood Education is directly related to children's learning and development, requiring the planning and evaluation of pedagogical praxis.

It is necessary to consider the characteristics of groups of children in order to provide spaces rich in exploration possibilities that contribute to children's learning and development. Given this, the present study seeks to answer the following questions: what are the guiding criteria for planning and organizing the environments of experience rooms in Early Childhood Education? Does environment organization have implications for children's learning and development?

2 Our compass for the investigative path: the methodological course

Our study, qualitative in nature, is situated within the scope of (auto)biographical Research, here employed as a branch of qualitative research whose hermeneutic philosophy enables the researcher to grasp the socio historical dimensions found in the narratives of intersubjective experiences of the participating teachers, constructed within the spatial temporal relationship in which language emerges as an element intertwined with thought and as a mechanism for expressing the self. From this standpoint, the focus of (auto)biographical Research lies in how a representation of existence is constructed. Thus, (auto)biographical Research is concerned with the ways individuals ascribe meaning to their experiences. The writing of autobiographical accounts gives individuals the possibility of articulating, through the narratives they produce about themselves, the experiential references through which they have passed, thereby granting meaning to their own professional trajectory (Passeggi *et al.*, 2011, p. 378). It is therefore relevant for us to move toward an understanding of how the teachers collaborating in this investigation interpret and experience the organization of Early Childhood Education classroom environments.

The research corpus consisted of written narratives produced by Early Childhood Education teachers. The locus of the study is an Early Childhood Education institution located in a municipality in the interior of Ceará. The criterion for choosing the research field stemmed from one of the researchers' connection with the municipality and from the school's singularity within that territory, given that, up to the publication of this work, it is the only Early Childhood Education unit serving the children of the town's seat.

As a data collection technique, in the second half of 2023 a virtual questionnaire[1], was administered via Google Forms, sent through the WhatsApp instant messaging application, and we obtained a sample of fifteen respondent teachers (from a population of 30 teachers). The purpose of this instrument was to gather written narratives in a digital environment. This choice met the criterion of optimizing and organizing the teachers' time,

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[1] We present a synthesis of the questions and contents/topics included in the questionnaire: 1. The guiding criteria for planning and organizing the spaces in your activity room with the children. 2. The organization of the environments and the implications for children's learning and development and for pedagogical practice.

given the numerous demands of teaching. In addition to this justification, we stress that digital platforms broaden the possibilities for recording written narratives. In keeping with the ethical principles of research, the participating teachers signed a Free and Informed Consent Form, which is one of the prerequisites for research involving human beings, and their identities were preserved.

For the analysis of the narratives, we drew on Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2014), carrying out a gradual reduction of the text and working with meaning condensation. Thus, we organized the content of the teachers' narratives into three columns: in the first, we presented the transcription; in the second, we carried out the first reduction; and in the third, only the key words. The data analysis led us to organize the discussions into two themes, as previously established in the questionnaire, in keeping with the objectives of the investigation and the issues most evident in the teachers' narratives: i) criteria for the organization of environments; ii) relationship between environment, children's learning, and development. Thus, we first reflected on the relationship between planning and organizing spaces, materials, and time in Early Childhood Education; then, we engaged in dialogue based on the narratives of Early Childhood Education teachers from a public school located in the interior of Ceará.

3 Conceptual reflections: planning and organization of learning environments

The dialogue on spaces, times, and materials and their implications for teachers' pedagogical praxis, as well as for children's learning and development, presupposes a multifaceted perspective that involves other categories of analysis, such as pedagogical approach, curriculum, planning, and assessment in Early Childhood Education. This is because we understand that the spatiotemporal dimension and the use of materials in Early Childhood Education are also encompassed within the dimensions of planning and assessment.

Obviously, we do not intend to exhaust the reflections on all these categories, given the complexity of each of these themes. Furthermore, discussing the organization of

environments presupposes thinking about the organization of time, space, and materials in pedagogical work, in a way that respects the particularities of childhoods, considering children as subjects who (co)construct curriculum and learning.

To reflect on this theme, we draw on the studies of Gandini (2016), Barbosa and Horn (2008), Ostetto (2000), and Forneiro (1998). The epistemological interest in the theme of environment organization in Early Childhood Education is not new in this work. Since the 1990s, with the enactment of Law 9.394/96, Early Childhood Education has gradually gained visibility in the arena of pedagogical debates on education for and of childhoods. Marked by a paradigm of welfare assistance, as Kuhlmann Jr. (1998) points out, Early Childhood Education has, over the last two decades, followed a path of struggle for the guarantee of families' and children's rights to equitable and quality early childhood education.

According to Ostetto (2000), at the core of the concern with planning is the search for answers to questions such as: what should be proposed? Why propose a given activity? How should it be proposed? Which activities are possible for babies and for very young children? What marks the difference between proposals for babies, for very young children, and for young children? Aware of the inseparability of care and education, as Ostetto (2000) argues, thinking about planning goes beyond the how to do and moves into why we do it, for whom we do it, and why we do it in a particular way.

Planning enables the teacher[2] to rethink her practice in the pursuit of quality and equity in pedagogical work. In this sense, it is necessary to question why certain environments are proposed, what the underlying intent is, which materials constitute them, and at what time the children will experience particular proposals in different spaces.

In an effort to move beyond an adult-imposed perspective and to ensure the rights to learning and development (living together, participating, playing, expressing, exploring,

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[2] Understood as a historical, critical, and reflective professional, a mediator of learning in the objective relationships established with children, providing them with access to the knowledge socially constructed by humanity. We opted for the use of the feminine gender due to the predominance of women working professionally at this stage of education.

knowing oneself) set out in the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (*Brasil*, 2018), we find proposals for organizing pedagogical work such as project pedagogy (Barbosa and Horn, 2008) and didactic sequences (Zabala, 1998). These approaches take into account children's knowledge, needs, and interests and connect them to the knowledge constructed by humanity, as indicated in the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil – DCNEI* (*Brasil*, 2010), in the definition of curriculum as a

> set of practices that seek to connect children's experiences and knowledge with the knowledge that is part of the cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific, and technological heritage, in order to promote the holistic development of children from 0 to 5 years of age (DCNEI, 2010, p. 12).

Drawing on *Resolução* no. 05/2009, the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (2010), and the *Documento Curricular Referencial do Ceará* (2019), all of which are important regulatory documents for Early Childhood Education, we observe, among other aspects, the clarification of the nature of Early Childhood Education and its ethical, political, and aesthetic principles, as well as the conception of the child as an active, socio-historical subject and producer of culture and curriculum. These conceptions are fundamental for organizing pedagogical time, routines, and the teacher's organizational mode of pedagogical work.

From a legal standpoint, it is also important to highlight *Resolução CNE/CEB* no. 1 of October 17, 2024, which establishes the National Operational Guidelines for Quality and Equity in Early Childhood Education. In this document, Sections III and V, which address Pedagogical Proposal and Infrastructure, buildings, and materials, respectively, refer to the dimension of temporal-spatial organization, outlining curricular organization and matters related to buildings, internal and external environment facilities (furniture, flooring, climate control, safety, cleanliness, among others) and the adequacy of spaces and materials to childhood.

We understand that the starting point for planning is a critical-reflective attitude that involves observation and attentive listening, as highlighted, among others, by the Italian pedagogical movement grounded in the work of educator Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia,

a city that revolutionized early childhood education after World War II and gained prominence in Brazil in the early 2000s.

Thus, we recognize that the planning and organization of time, space, and materials are intrinsically connected to our conception of the child and of childhood. Therefore, we align ourselves with the understanding of the child as a socio-historical subject of rights who produces culture, is transformed by society, and transforms it through the relationships established within the material conditions of existence. Consequently, this conception of the child calls for theoretically grounded activity proposals that require a critical-reflective and investigative stance on the part of the teacher. Hence, observation and listening are foundational elements for the construction of investigative projects, as argued by Barbosa and Horn (2008), didactic sequences, as stated by Zabala (1998), and work/teaching workshops. These organizational modes unfold within spatial dimensions and involve the use of materials (instruments), and thus must be intentionally organized.

Forneiro (1998) distinguishes the terms *space* and *environment*, affirming that *space* refers to the set of physical structures (furniture, materials), whereas *environment*, whose etymological root comes from Latin *ambiens*, *turns around*, from the verb *ambire*, *to go around*, from *AMBI- around, surrounding* plus *IRE*, *to go*, has the meaning of a scenario of circumstances (relationships, affections, scents, smells, people, and objects) that interchange in the daily life of Early Childhood Education institutions. Space, beyond its static dimension, is life; it is a constant movement of dialogues and learning.

Conceptually, we understand the learning environment in Early Childhood Education as a dimension of pedagogical praxis that invites adults and children into collective, welcoming, and purposeful construction; this conception therefore demands a paradigmatic shift away from outdated notions in which environment organization is centered on the adult, reinforcing stereotypes through decoration (posters and illustrations) and revealing little about the culture and potentialities of the children who inhabit the space and establish objective relations with the world around them.

Forneiro (1998) highlights four dimensions of the environment: the physical dimension, the relational dimension, the functional dimension, and the temporal dimension.

The physical dimension concerns the space of the Early Childhood Education institution. In this regard, it is worth noting that the space outside the children's activity room (playground, sports court, garden, park, etc.) and the surroundings of the institution (square, museums, parks, open areas, etc.) are learning environments that can strengthen the movement of opening children to the outdoors and foster contact with nature, which is essential for their well-being and physical and mental health. Here, we refer to the children's activity room as the internal space, which is the focus of this work, an area meant to ensure positive and purposeful learning and development experiences.

The functional dimension refers to the different functions that a single space may assume (Forneiro, 1998, p. 234). The relational dimension refers to the different relationships that are established within the room (Forneiro, 1998, p. 235); in other words, it is not predetermined but emerges from everyday experience.

When selecting materials, it is necessary to consider the dimension of safety in the environment; therefore, the type of material, its size, and its structure must be evaluated to ensure children's well-being and health. Regarding the repertoire of materials in the room, beyond safety criteria, it is essential to emphasize that if the teacher presents a limited collection of materials that does not support the development of multiple languages or the expansion of cultural, artistic, environmental, and scientific repertoires, or if, conversely, the teacher offers diverse resources such as natural materials, boxes of various sizes, kitchen utensils, fabrics, literature books, etc., such choices are connected to a particular theoretical conception, even if unconsciously. This, in turn, reflects the institution's culture, the *Projeto Político-Pedagógico*, and classroom dynamics.

The environment of the activity room, or the children's reference room, must be transformed into a welcoming setting whose configuration encourages positive interactions, the exploration of various types of materials, investigations, and, therefore, learning. There is an aesthetic dimension to the environment, and it must foster community coexistence, strengthening trust in the interactions established between adults and children and among children of different ages.

Gandini (2016) emphasizes that the environment is regarded as the third educator, alongside the pair of teachers. Thus, it must reflect the culture, daily life, and curriculum; it must communicate learning to the children themselves, to adults (teachers and families), and to the community. In this respect, Gandini (2016) and Forneiro (1998) reaffirm space as a dimension of the curriculum, constituted in itself by learning content.

According to the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (*Brasil*, 2010), regarding the organization of spaces, materials, and time, institutions must ensure: the inseparability of care and education; the holistic development of the child in their expressive-motor, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, ethical, aesthetic, and sociocultural dimensions; the participation, dialogue, and listening of families and the local community through democratic management; the recognition of age specificities and the individual and collective singularities of children, promoting interactions among children of the same age and of different ages; children's movement and displacement in internal and external spaces of the reference rooms and the institution; accessibility of spaces, materials, objects, toys, and instructions for children with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high abilities/giftedness; and children's appropriation of the historical-cultural contributions of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, Asian, European peoples and those from other American countries.

Thus, the organization of classroom spaces is not neutral: it reveals conceptions about the sociopolitical role of Early Childhood Education, as well as views on children, childhood, curriculum, interactions, and play. It is closely related to the organization of time and materials. From this perspective, reflecting on the organization and use of materials in Early Childhood Education is indispensable for advancing discussions on the quality of pedagogical practices and the objectives of Early Childhood Education. This is because conceptions of the child, childhood, and curriculum are directly linked to the choices of materials and materialities that make up the repertoire of activity rooms or reference rooms for babies and children, as well as the ways in which these resources are organized.

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4 Time as a pedagogical and existential dimension in the daily life of Early Childhood Education

> "If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you would not say anything about wasting it. He is a person."
> "I do not understand what you mean," said Alice.
> "Of course you do not!" said the Hatter, shaking his head with disdain. "I bet you have never spoken to Time!"
> "Perhaps I have not spoken to him," Alice replied carefully, "but I know I have to beat him when I study music."
> "Ah! That explains everything!" said the Hatter. "He cannot bear being beaten. Now, if you had a good relationship with Time, he would do anything you wanted with the clock. [...]"
> "That would be wonderful, for sure," said Alice thoughtfully. (Carroll, 2023, p. 52)

The excerpt from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll (2023), reveals the need to understand the importance of time in our existence. The word "time" has its origin in the Latin *tempus*, which means the division of duration into instant, seconds, minutes, hour, day, month, year, and so on. According to Gandini (2016), time and environment, in their various dimensions, are deeply connected.

Considering children's different needs and rhythms shapes how the environment is arranged, and "the time we have at our disposal allows for the use and enjoyment of this carefully designed space at the child's pace" (Gandini, 2016, p. 147). To discuss the pedagogical dimension in the sense of advancing our understanding of planning and time organization, we consider it necessary to offer a brief reflection on time, analyzed in its chronological dimension and in its subjective dimension.

Chronological time concerns the linear dimension, organized and perceived in years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds. Alongside *Chronos* time, there is the perception of time in a subjective dimension, which corresponds to how each of us perceives time, as already asserted by Kohan (2008). If *Chronos* is sequential and measurable, *Aion* is intensity. The way time is organized can shape an environment that is potentially calm or stressful, powerful or fragile, constraining or fertile.

The understanding of time, based on contributions from the philosophy of childhood, is related to the concept of the child as a socio-historical subject of rights and a producer of culture, a notion that has already been widely discussed by the sociology of childhood

and is presented in regulatory documents such as the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (*Brasil*, 2010). These understandings are directly related to the pedagogical organization of time and space in Early Childhood Education institutions.

Nevertheless, it is possible to come across some questions raised by teachers, such as: how should I write the plan? In what way? We agree with Ostetto (2000) that, from the standpoint of foundations, if the teacher is clear about what planning is and what it is for, the way it will be translated onto paper is a secondary issue, since the way of recording daily life is highly personal.

The central issue is not the form but the principles that ground pedagogical praxis. From this perspective, planning in its macro or collective dimension pedagogical proposal and in its micro or individual dimension course plan, plan of activities or experiences, didactic sequences, investigative projects is intrinsically linked to conceptions of the child, childhood, and Early Childhood Education. In other words, planning, as a guiding instrument of teaching work, is a reflective and formative process that encompasses all actions and situations in the daily life of early childhood education.

Historically, pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education have been tied, at the preschool level, to training skills for literacy; therefore, tasks that emphasized drills, copying, body control, and attention to the teacher were predominant. Historically, planning in Early Childhood Education, in terms of both content and form, has reflected an adult-centered and top-down view; consequently, teaching work has been tied to commemorative dates, aspects of development, and subject areas. In this regard, time organization was determined by an adult-centered and traditional view of teaching. As Ostetto (2000) points out, activity proposals were centered on organization based on commemorative dates or aspects of development and took on a fragmented and imposing connotation. There is no participation of the child as a co-constructor of the curriculum and, therefore, the child is seen as a passive being.

Rigid times governed by a productivity mindset impoverish everyday life, as Barbosa (2006) emphasizes, in which children do not fully live their rights to learning and development and do not find meaningful opportunities to give meaning to their actions. If

time rigidity impoverishes children's actions, perhaps opportunities for creating and imagining other temporalities can offer boys and girls new ways of fully living their childhood. Hoyuelos (2020, pp. 24–25) argues that "giving time to children without unnecessary anticipation means knowing how to wait for them, where they are, with their own way of learning."

Drawing on *Resolução* no. 05/2009 and the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (*Brasil*, 2010), which are important regulatory documents for Early Childhood Education, we observe, among other aspects, the clarification of the nature of Early Childhood Education and its principles, as well as the conception of the child and of curriculum. These conceptions are fundamental for organizing pedagogical time, routines, and the organizational modes of the teacher's pedagogical work projects, didactic sequences, workshops, and studios. Regarding work with didactic sequences, it is important to note that this proposal does not constitute a rigid and imposing structure; rather, it offers a way of tracing an intentionally planned path based on the teacher's attentive observation and listening to children.

Listening and observation involve moving from a state of naive curiosity to epistemological curiosity, as Freire (1996, p. 88) would say, that is, a rigorous, retrospective, and prospective look at one's own praxis, aimed at ensuring the quality of proposals aligned with the goals of Early Childhood Education, whose purpose is to ensure the child's holistic development and to provide education for the exercise of citizenship, in accordance with *Lei* no. 9.394/96. It also ensures access to knowledge, participation in diverse experiences, and the learning of different languages, as well as the right to protection, health, freedom, respect, dignity, play, coexistence, and interaction with different forms of culture, in line with *Parecer* no. 20/2009, which revises the *Diretrizes Nacionais da Educação Infantil*.

5 What teachers report about planning and organizing environments in Early Childhood Education

The environment conveys messages, reveals the educational context, and therefore must be a dimension carefully planned within pedagogical practice. This dimension is sometimes not discussed in its aesthetic aspects, which diminishes the process of constructing these environments, especially regarding children's participation in their planning and organization.

5.1 Criteria for planning and organizing environments and their relationship with pedagogical practice

The organization of environments presupposes establishing selection criteria in the decision-making process. Among these criteria, it is important to highlight the characteristics of the children and of the group, as emphasized by the participants.

> The **needs of the group** in different aspects. (Teacher 1, our emphasis);
> After **observing** the behavior and interactions among the children during their exploration of the environments and in the experiences, I plan according **to what they show the greatest interest in**, enthusiasm for, and curiosity about. (Teacher 5, our emphasis).

The protagonism of children and legal documents, such as the *DCNEI* (*Brasil*, 2010) and the *DCRC*[3], which identify interactions and play as the structuring axis of the curriculum, are indicated as references for the organization of environments, as can be seen in the excerpt from the statements of the teachers participating in the research.

> With the **child as the protagonist** of their own learning and through the official documents of Early Childhood Education. (Teacher 2, our emphasis)
> Ensuring the **protagonism of children** through **interactions and play**. (Teacher 3, our emphasis)
> We seek to start from playful activities that awaken the **children's interest** and respond to their needs, always valuing interactions and play. (Teacher 6, our emphasis)
> We are guided by the ***DCNEI* (2010)** for carrying out and organizing experiences in the reference room. (Teacher 10, our emphasis)

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[3] Documento Referencial Curricular do Ceará (2019).

> Children freely use the spaces; for 40 minutes, when they arrive, they have the possibility of **choosing** the space for toys, stories, beauty, or art. (Teacher 15, our emphasis)
> Practicality, **playfulness**. (Teacher 9, our emphasis)
> **Children's rights to learning** and the guiding documents we use as a basis, as well as the needs of the child. (Teacher 11, our emphasis)
> **Children's rights to learning**, the guiding documents of Early Childhood Education, and placing the child at the center of planning. (*BNCC, DCRC*). (Teacher 12, our emphasis)
> **Children's rights to learning** in the guiding documents we use as a basis, aiming at the child's needs. (Teacher 13, our emphasis).

In addition to the criteria presented above the centrality of children's interests and the guarantee of children's rights to learning and development, it is important to highlight the role of the teacher as an observer and, therefore, as a mediator of learning, as emphasized by the research participants.

> Based on **observations** in the reference room, on the children's enthusiasm, on creating strategies, and on their needs, in order to have good planning and organization. (Teacher 7, our emphasis)
> Based on **observations** in the reference room, bearing in mind that we must offer a welcoming and pleasant place in which children feel free to play and handle materials. (Teacher 8, our emphasis)
> **Planning** is necessary for organizing time, space, and materials. Through **planning**, it becomes clear what has been successful and what needs improvement so that children can develop their skills. (Teacher 14, our emphasis).

Planning and assessment are intertwined processes and are highlighted by the teachers when they state that observation is a criterion for planning and for organizing spaces and time. Although these terms planning and observation are familiar to teachers, it is always important to broaden their meanings and senses. Observation and listening complement each other: attentive eyes and ears to identify and record each child's learning pathways, creating documentation that attests to their learning processes, as established by the *LDB*/1996.

To document experiences, the teacher needs to develop the skill and the practice of observing, which implies thinking about times, spaces, and situations that welcome children

in their lived experiences. An attentive gaze is required to observe children's daily life in an investigative, curious, and intentional way, without losing sight of educational intentionality.

5.2 Environments: learning and child development

When they arrive at school, children coexist, that is, they live together with peers other children of different ages and with adults. Considering that school is the place where children expand their social relationships beyond family life, the structure of this space must present a sense of familiarity within the conditions of formal and collective education for community coexistence, which, for us, strengthens awareness of oneself and of others. When asked about the relationship between environment and learning, the teachers were unanimous in stating that the organization of environments is directly connected to children's learning, as can be seen in the excerpt from their narratives.

> Yes, because **children understand that, for each experience, there is an environment** that enables imagination and the development of each child in our reference room. (Teacher 1, our emphasis);
> **The organization of environments is very important** because it enables interaction among children so that they can express their ideas, share toys, use their imagination, and feel confident when taking part in experiences. (Teacher 2, our emphasis);
> Yes, because **with an organized environment, children are able to learn more** and develop better. (Teacher 3, our emphasis);
> Yes, **it is noticeable how much more interested children are** in the school environment. (Teacher 4, our emphasis);
> Yes, because **the space supports learning** in terms of interactions and play. (Teacher 5, our emphasis);
> Yes, because **the environments are planned intentionally, in keeping with children's interests** and with the kinds of learning we want to foster in them. (Teacher 6, our emphasis);
> Yes. The child has that moment to play, explore the environments, the teacher makes observations and sees the child's development; from there comes planning, **a practice geared toward the child's needs**. (Teacher 7, our emphasis);
> Yes! Because children show greater interest and participation. (Teacher 8);
> The organization of the reference room is fundamentally important, since it is from this that the child's development takes place, as it involves their motor and emotional potential. (Teacher 9);
> Yes, **children are much more interested** and participate with greater enthusiasm. This has contributed to their learning. (Teacher 11);
> Yes, in the interaction among them; children attend school more often and the **responsibility of using materials and then putting them away carefully**. (Teacher 15, our emphasis).

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It is important to emphasize that placing the child at the center of the educational process calls on us to reflect on: 1) learning and development, and 2) what we consider content in Early Childhood Education. Before that, however, it is necessary to clarify our understanding of teaching in Early Childhood Education. In the light of historical-critical Pedagogy, as Lazaretti (2022) explains, the important biological condition of the human being is articulated with the cultural process as a condition for the apprehension of knowledge; that is, learning presupposes a methodical and intentionally planned process for the pedagogical relationship and for the choices of curricular content.

According to Vigotski (2007, p. 111), "we can safely take as our starting point the fundamental and indisputable fact that there is a relationship between a given level of development and the potential capacity for learning." This means that, from the perspective of historical-cultural Psychology, learning is not development and that, although they are different, they are interrelated and reciprocally interdependent, which calls for a methodology for teaching content.

In opposition to content-based teaching and understanding the inseparability of care and education; the ethical, political, and aesthetic principles; interactions and play as structuring axes of pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education; children's rights to learning and development (living together, playing, participating, exploring, expressing, knowing themselves); and the fields of experience as the "organizational structure" of the curriculum, we emphasize that there is content of/in Early Childhood Education and that this content is linked to the knowledge socially accumulated by humanity, according to *Brasil/DCNEI* (2010), mediated in dialogical relations under the objective conditions of existence. Content is not an end in itself; it is a component of pedagogical praxis and is articulated with the objectives proposed in the pedagogical relationship.

From this perspective, in order to ensure the relationship between teaching and rights to learning, and based on the aspects narrated by the teachers, we consider the contributions of Lazaretti (2022), grounded in the studies of Davidov (1988), who emphasizes *ensino desenvolvimental*. According to Lazaretti (2022, p. 727), "to think about

didactics from the perspective of *ensino desenvolvente* means understanding this process of human development that depends on intentional and qualified actions and interventions provided by school teaching."

Thus, we understand that the process of children's education must be guided by pedagogical means that promote psychic development, in its fullest potential, within the culture in which they are immersed. According to Vigotski (2007, p. 114, our emphasis), from the perspective of potential development, "**the only good teaching is that which gets ahead of development**," that is, metaphorically, teaching is a driving spring for the development of children's potentialities.

From this perspective, it is the school's role to transform knowledge of the physical world into teaching content, as Lazaretti (2022) has pointed out. In this way, the Early Childhood Education curriculum needs to move beyond a stereotyped view in which the notion of content is conceived on the basis of lists, commemorative dates, and fragmented, tedious tasks, toward an understanding that the organization of time, space, and materials are dimensions that promote learning, and that the child is a (co)constructor in this community of learning.

We also emphasize that, although the teachers' narratives reaffirm the discussions about the importance of planning and organizing environments, the narratives of four teachers raise an issue that deserves attention, since they highlight the development of skills by children. We know that the development of skills, when articulated with the capitalist mode of production and devoid of a critical and reflective movement, can reinforce the reproduction of inequalities.

> Yes, because it is through play that the child develops their **skills**, acquiring knowledge in cognitive, emotional, and motor coordination aspects. (Teacher 10, our emphasis);
> Yes, because we know that children learn through play and that, in this way, they are happy. Therefore, we combine what is useful with what is pleasant to support the development and improvement of their **skills and competences**. (Teacher 12, our emphasis);
> Yes, children are much more interested in taking part, with greater enthusiasm, in order to better develop their **skills**. (Teacher 13, our emphasis);

> Yes, a school with **spaces that support teaching** provides an appropriate school environment in which **children develop their skills...** (Teacher 14, our emphasis).

Thus, we understand that, assuming the use of this terminology as a dimension of the child's transposition from real development to potential development, it is necessary to replace the use of the word "skill", considering that, in understanding Early Childhood Education as a stage committed to emancipatory education for working-class children, we must distance ourselves from alienating and uncritical movements.

6 Final considerations

Without exhausting our reflections and attentive to the objective of analyzing the implications of organizing the environments of experience rooms for children's learning and for the pedagogical praxis of the Early Childhood Education teacher, we have opened the map that leads to the conceptual and praxeological dialogues that are fundamental in planning and organizing pedagogical time the routines, the organizational mode of the teacher's pedagogical work, the environments, and the selection and arrangement of materials.

Therefore, if we metaphorically aim for babies and children to be able to "jump rope with the horizon line", as Murray (2018) poetically affirmed, our conception of the child calls for activity proposals that require a critical-reflective and investigative posture from the Early Childhood Education teacher, enabling, through *ensino desenvolvente*, a didactics that offers opportunities for children to incorporate knowledge socially constructed by humanity through pedagogical mediations that consider the specificities of children and childhoods. In this way, observation and listening are foundational elements for constructing a praxis whose interweaving of planning and assessment constitutes a fundamental dimension for the learning and development of babies and children in the various institutions of our territory.

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