Polyphony and the re-signification of the teaching role:
transatlantic dialogue between teachers from Brazil and Portugal

Polifonia e a ressignificação do papel docente:
diálogo transatlântico entre educadores do Brasil e Portugal

Polifonía y a resignificación del papel docente:
diálogo transatlántico entre profesores de Brasil y Portugal

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Abstract: This study addresses the re-signification of the teaching role by analyzing the practices of three elementary school teachers from Paraná, in southern Brazil, and two educators from the First Cycle in Braga, northern Portugal. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews within a multiple case study framework. The objective is to examine how educators conceive spaces for dialogue with children in the classroom, in light of the concepts of polyphony and the right to a voice. The findings reveal that, despite institutional contextual differences, educators face similar challenges in promoting pedagogical practices that ensure the visibility of children's ideas and perspectives. It is concluded that adopting a polyphonic approach and valuing children's voices have the potential to significantly transform school practices, fostering greater engagement and critical thinking among children, as well as a more harmonious ethical and democratic balance between adult and child voices.
Keywords*: Re-signification of the teaching role; Polyphony; Right to a voice; Teacher training; Children.

Resumo: Este estudo aborda a ressignificação do papel docente ao analisar a atuação de três professoras do Ensino Fundamental no Paraná, sul do Brasil, e duas educadoras do Primeiro Ciclo em Braga, no norte de Portugal. A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa, empregando questionários e entrevistas semiestruturadas dentro de um estudo de casos múltiplos. O objetivo é examinar como as educadoras concebem os espaços de diálogo com as crianças em sala de aula, à luz dos conceitos de polifonia e do direito de voz. Os resultados revelam que, apesar das diferenças contextuais institucionais, as educadoras enfrentam desafios semelhantes na promoção de práticas pedagógicas que garantam a visibilidade das ideias e perspectivas das crianças. Conclui-se que a adoção de uma abordagem polifônica e a valorização das vozes infantis têm o potencial de transformar significativamente as práticas escolares, promovendo maior engajamento e criticidade entre as crianças, assim como um equilíbrio ético e democrático mais harmonioso entre vozes adultas e infantis.
Palavras-chave*: Ressignificação do papel docente; Polifonia; Direito de voz; Formação de professores; Crianças.

Resumen: Este estudio aborda la resignificación del rol docente al analizar la actuación de tres profesoras de Educación Primaria en Paraná, sur de Brasil, y dos educadoras del Primer Ciclo en Braga, en el norte de Portugal. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo, empleando

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cuestionarios y entrevistas semiestructuradas dentro de un estudio de casos múltiples. El objetivo es examinar cómo las educadoras conciben los espacios de diálogo con los niños en el aula, a la luz de los conceptos de polifonía y derecho de voz. Los resultados revelan que, a pesar de las diferencias contextuales institucionales, las educadoras enfrentan desafíos similares en la promoción de prácticas pedagógicas que garanticen la visibilidad de las ideas y perspectivas de los niños. Se concluye que la adopción de un enfoque polifónico y la valorización de las voces infantiles tienen el potencial de transformar significativamente las prácticas escolares, promoviendo un mayor compromiso y criticidad entre los niños, así como un equilibrio ético y democrático más armonioso entre las voces adultas e infantiles.

Palabras clave: Resignificación del papel docente; Polifonía; Derecho de voz; Formación de profesores; Niños.

Introduction

[...] From my language, one can see the sea.
(Vergílio Ferreira)

This article aims to reflect on the re-signification of the teaching role based on the analysis of data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted with five educators: three primary school teachers in the state of Paraná, southern Brazil, and two first-cycle teachers in the district of Braga, northern Portugal. The study is grounded in two central theoretical perspectives – the concept of polyphony (Brito, 2024) and the right of children to voice their perspectives – with the objective of investigating how these education professionals understand their pedagogical practice and how they conceive and promote spaces for dialogue with children within the school environment.

Drawing on a multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2010), this research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as data production techniques. The analysis of the findings suggests that, possibly due to a shared historical-cultural framework (Andrade, 2021), both Brazil and Portugal face similar challenges in implementing pedagogical practices aimed at fostering spaces for dialogue with children, despite contextual differences in institutional structures and children's characteristics. Nevertheless, the educators' narratives revealed practices and reflections that can serve as inspiration for new pedagogical approaches, marked by greater ethical awareness and respect in their relationships of alterity with children.

The results indicate that reinterpreting the teaching role, based on the perceptions of Brazilian and Portuguese educators, can lead to a profound transformation in teaching

practices with children, guided by pedagogical approaches more attuned to children's rights. Analyzing the educators' perceptions through the lens of the concept of polyphony reveals that those who adopt a polyphonic approach, recognizing children's autonomy and actively promoting their right to voice, tend to achieve greater classroom engagement, fostering the development of more socially critical individuals. Furthermore, such pedagogical practices demonstrate heightened attentiveness and responsiveness to the superior needs and interests of children, thereby promoting an educational practice characterized by greater sensitivity and respect.

This study concludes that reflecting on the concept of polyphony and the right of children to voice within pedagogical practices is essential for constructing a more democratic, inclusive, and equitable education. It is therefore recommended that teacher training policies incorporate these principles, fostering teacher education that values the multiplicity of voices and the active participation of children in the educational process. Such policies would ensure a learning environment that respects and amplifies diverse perspectives and the contributions of children.

The right of children to voice: ontological and social perspectives in education

The ontology of the right to voice is based on the understanding that children are full-fledged subjects, possessing a unique worldview that must be duly valued and respected. This perspective challenges the traditional view that perceives children merely as beings in development or passive objects of socialization within an adult social order (Montandon, 2001; Sirota, 2001; Ferreira, 2002a, 2002b). In contrast, it recognizes their autonomous existence and intrinsic capacity to contribute to the learning environment, offering insights and perspectives that enrich educational dynamics. The ontological recognition of children as active subjects profoundly transforms the nature of pedagogical interactions, reshaping the conception of teaching and learning.

The Sociology of Childhood, emerging from a critique of the importance of situating children within space and time, promotes a deeper reflection on the invisibility and silencing of children, and of childhood in particular. As highlighted by Marchi (2010, p. 187), this critique is rooted in the conception of the child as "absent" or a kind of "omnipresent ghost," deprived of any form of recognition of their social protagonism and rarely considered as an autonomous object of study. According to the author, the fact that children "have never been studied with conceptual autonomy has often led to the denial of their status as social actors" (Marchi, 2010, p. 187).

Discussions on the right of children to voice have been expanded through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), proclaimed in 1989 and ratified by Brazil in 1990. Conceived as a fundamental principle, the convention guarantees children the right to freely express their opinions on all matters that affect them, with their views being duly considered according to their age and maturity. As a normative milestone in both public and political spheres (Rosemberg & Mariano, 2010), the UNCRC establishes an international commitment to recognizing children not only as subjects of rights but also as agents capable of active participation in society.

Thus, the commitment to social well-being and the discussion of the visibility of children's voices arise as outcomes of reflections stemming from both the UNCRC and the field of the Sociology of Childhood. In that way, efforts have been made to explore children's ways of life and their impact on society as subjects of comprehensive knowledge (James, 2007). In this context, the UNCRC has published specific articles advocating for children's participation and their right to voice.

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (UNCRC, 1989).

Despite normative frameworks that guarantee children's rights and extensive scientific research highlighting the positive impacts of incorporating children's voices in shaping new educational perspectives, little progress has been made in practically implementing the recognition of these voices (James, 2007). In the educational context, this right manifests as the need to listen to and respect children's voices within the pedagogical process, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into the construction of educational practices. However, many educational settings remain focused on the rigid fulfillment of closed curricula, which often limits the development of holistic educational practices that foster children's critical thinking about themselves and the world, relegating children to the passive role of "student-subject."

As Marchi (2010) analyzes, the theoretical development of the concepts of "child's craft" and "student's craft" represents a significant shift in the analytical perspective within the Sociology of Education. This development acknowledges children as autonomous subjects, endowed with an inherent capacity to contribute to their learning environment, offering insights and perspectives that enrich educational dynamics.

> The concepts of "child's craft" and "student's craft" should be understood within the interpretative framework of the paradigm of childhood/child as social constructions. These categories, situated within a shared environment (the school), [...] shape programs, rules, instruments, and pedagogical practices that establish the school as the quintessential space for the child. It is the place where they are expected to perform their "craft" and behave in accordance with the nature of their "child identity," as defined by the socially constructed notion of childhood (Marchi, 2010, p. 190).

This framework assigns institutional roles to children, even in early childhood, centering the "institutionalization of childhood" as a movement of invention and rationalization of activities for this life stage. This process results in the social construction of the modern norm of childhood and child behavior. However, research by authors such as Malaguzzi (1993), within the Reggio Emilia approach, reinforces the perspective that children can be, and often are, protagonists in the educational process, possessing potentialities and rights from birth. The emphasis on children's multiple languages and forms of expression, as highlighted by the author, is a central element of this approach, promoting an education that recognizes and responds to the complexity of children's experiences (Malaguzzi, 1993).

In the social context, the right of children to voice represents a paradigmatic transformation in power and alterity relations within the classroom. Traditionally, educational structures have been characterized by a rigid hierarchy, wherein teachers exercise absolute control over content and methodology while students are positioned as passive recipients. This dynamic reinforces societal images of children as unfinished and incomplete beings (Prado, 2014). Valuing children's right to voice requires deconstructing this hierarchy and decentralizing power, thereby promoting a more democratic and participatory educational approach.

As Mayall (2002) asserts, actively listening to children enables a deeper understanding of their needs and interests, allowing education to respond effectively to their expectations and potential. In this sense, by recognizing children as full ontological subjects, education becomes a space for dialogue and co-construction, where knowledge is transformed through the sharing of insights between adults and children, facilitated by listening and acknowledging what is heard.

Thus, implementing the right of children to voice within schools demands a profound reflection on the necessary structural and cultural changes. Furthermore, progress in integrating children's voices into the formulation of new educational perspectives requires that educators not only recognize children's autonomous capacities but also foster harmonious and polyphonic dialogue between children's and adults' voices (Brito, 2024). It is through this

polyphonic interaction that knowledge grounded in ethics and respect for children can emerge, enabling the creation of new, more inclusive and meaningful educational approaches.

The concept of polyphony and the spheres of children's rights

In the field of Childhood Sociology, the concept of polyphony (Brito, 2024) is grounded in both ontological and social perspectives. This concept seeks to foster more horizontal and harmonious practices by addressing the integration of children's voices with adult voices, as well as legitimizing the multiplicity of children's vocal expressions, manifested through diverse networks of meaning and expression. The underlying understanding asserts that children's voices must operate freely, reflecting their individual perspectives and capacities, which are simultaneously independent and equally significant (Brito, 2024).

It diverges from the traditional approach of "giving voice" to children, as this perspective, by itself, perpetuates an authoritarian power dynamic in which adults retain control over "if" and "when" children's voices will be heard. According to Brito (2024), rather than limiting action to the unilateral act of granting voice, the concept advocates for the re-signification of adult power, shifting it toward genuine collaboration and co-construction between adults and children. In this sense, polyphony emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where children's voices are not only heard but equitably and dynamically integrated into all contexts.

Within the scope of interpretative studies in Childhood Sociology, which focus on analyzing processes of subjectivation and the symbolic construction of children's lifeworlds (Sarmento, 2008), the concept of polyphony proposes an in-depth investigation of these processes in light of the social cultures and contexts in which they are situated. James (2007, p. 266) emphasizes that such interpretative research stems from the "need to recognize that the diversities that distinguish one child from another are as important and as significant as the commonalities they might share".

Thus, the polyphonic approach entails not only valuing the multiplicity of children's voices but also engaging in a critical and contextualized analysis of their individual experiences, highlighting the relevance of cultural and personal differences in the construction of meanings and educational practices. In the educational domain, this perspective broadens the understanding of children's realities and contributes to more inclusive classroom contexts that are sensitive to the varied dimensions of children's experiences.

The concept of polyphony proposes the implementation of policies that uphold children's rights by integrating three essential political spheres: culture, autonomy, and

recognition (Brito, 2024). The polyphonic approach aims to articulate these spheres in a way that fosters a comprehensive and integrated understanding of children's rights. According to this logic, "the intersection of these spheres becomes crucial for the development of policies that not only recognize but also integrate the multiple dimensions of children's experience" (Brito, 2024, p. 268).

Reflecting on the right to culture, this sphere seeks to understand the symbolic universe of children, including their artistic expressions, communication forms, and social interactions. This sphere approaches culture as a network of meanings (Geertz, 2009 [1973]) and examines various aspects, such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989; 1998), children's cultures, and their forms of transmission (Corsaro, 2001; 2011; Sarmento, 2003; 2004; 2008; 2021). Additionally, it highlights playfulness as a crucial medium through which children communicate and interact with the world around them.

Regarding the right to autonomy, the concept focuses on validating children's capacity for independent cultural creation and their potential in decision-making processes. It moves away from the image of the child as "passive, weak, dependent, immature, and therefore incapable of making responsible decisions about their life" (Pechtelidis, 2021, p. 53). This sphere examines children's authorship skills when their rights to expression are fully guaranteed (Girardello, 2018). The discussion includes the importance of promoting values of freedom in the ethical construction of relationships with children and in the practices developed in their life contexts, ensuring they can exercise their autonomy meaningfully.

The recognition of the instinctive and particular nature of an individual has profound impacts on both the dynamics of social life and the formation of the individual as an active member of society (Honneth, 2009). This aspect is analyzed in the sphere of the right to recognition. Here, the relationships between the social categories of childhood and adulthood are explored, investigating the alterity and intergenerationality of these relationships (Hermann, 2005). As the author highlights, "the other and the self are in a complex relationship that mutually refer to one another" (Hermann, 2005, p. 9). This right is addressed by recognizing and incorporating children's skills and experiences into adult proposals. It is understood that promoting social freedom, both individual and collective, is essential for constructing children's personal identities and including their voices in the social and political spheres.

In the educational context, the concept of polyphony challenges the traditional monological conception, where only the teacher's voice is considered legitimate. This concept redefines the role of educators, encouraging a reflection on knowledge constructed collectively

through the interaction and dialogue of all voices, both adult and child, present in the classroom. From this perspective, by valuing, recognizing, and incorporating children's voices, education becomes a more democratic process, where all participants have the right and opportunity to participate. This approach not only fosters the development of critical and reflective skills but also strengthens children's self-esteem and sense of belonging, preparing them to become active and engaged citizens in society.

Methodological pathways of the research

This investigation is configured as a multiple-case study, according to Yin's (2010) approach, involving the participation of five education professionals: three elementary school teachers from the state of Paraná, southern Brazil, and two educators from the First Cycle in the district of Braga, northern Portugal. According to the distinction established by Yin (2010), the concept of "literal replication" refers to the identification of similarities between the analyzed cases, while "theoretical replication" pertains to the analysis of observed contrasts. Thus, the choice of this method aims to identify both similarities and differences in the pedagogical practices of Brazilian and Portuguese educators, highlighting the nuances present in each educational context.

Embora Brasil e Portugal compartilhem uma matriz histórico-cultural comum (Andrade, 2021), este estudo não tem como objetivo principal realizar uma comparação direta entre as realidades educacionais desses países, tendo em vista as profundas distinções geográficas, econômicas e sociais que os caracterizam. O cerne desta investigação reside na análise das percepções das educadoras acerca de sua prática pedagógica com crianças, evitando, assim, a necessidade de expor dados demográficos ou estruturais das instituições de ensino às quais as participantes estão vinculadas. Limito-me, portanto, a apresentar informações essenciais, como a idade das educadoras, o tipo de instituição (pública ou privada), as idades das crianças sob sua responsabilidade e a carga horária de trabalho de cada profissional. A seguir, apresenta-se a tabela com os dados das participantes do estudo.

Although Brazil and Portugal share a common historical and cultural matrix (Andrade, 2021), this study does not primarily seek to directly compare the educational realities of these countries, given their profound geographical, economic, and social distinctions. The core of this investigation lies in the analysis of educators' perceptions regarding their pedagogical practice with children, thereby avoiding the need to expose demographic or structural data of the educational institutions to which the participants are affiliated. Therefore, I limit the presentation to essential information, such as the

educators' ages, the type of institution (public or private), the ages of the children under their responsibility, and each professional's working hours. Below is a table summarizing the participants' data.

Table 1 – Description of research participants

Name	Country	Age	School	Children's Ages	Working Hours
Carla	Brazil	25	Private	6 – 10 age	20 hours
Bruna	Brazil	38	Private	6 – 12 age	40 hours
Valeria	Brazil	42	Public	6 – 10 age	20 hours
Maria da Graça	Portugal	29	Public	6 – 10 age	40 hours
Filipa	Portugal	28	Public	6 – 10 age	40 hours

Source: Author, 2024.

Given the geographical location of the participants, data collection procedures were organized into two distinct stages. The first stage involved gathering the necessary information for designing the data collection instrument by constructing a semi-structured interview guide with educators in Portugal. In the second stage, a questionnaire and the same semi-structured interview guide were sent to the teachers in Brazil. The questionnaire was distributed via the Google Forms platform, which facilitated the subsequent processing and analysis of the collected data.

For the development of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview guide, preliminary data obtained from participant observation in the five classrooms, both in Brazil and Portugal, were already available. These preliminary observations allowed for a deeper formulation of questions to elicit more detailed information about each professional's teaching practice. Participant observations took place between February and March 2021 in Brazil and between November and December 2023 in Portugal. These preliminary data enabled comparative analysis with the interview results, filling informational gaps in certain aspects of the investigation.

The interview guides were designed with a semi-structured format to encourage participants to express themselves freely, while revisiting and adjusting topics to achieve an "understanding of the other's world" and to "structure their thinking" (Savoie-Zajc, 2003, p. 285). These guides played a fundamental role in conducting the interviews, functioning not as a rigid set of questions but as a structured framework ensuring that all relevant themes were addressed (Savoie-Zajc, 2003). This semi-structured approach reduced uncertainty regarding the breadth and depth of participants' responses, fostering richer data collection (Flick, 2005).

To optimize the analysis and interpretation of material collected through interviews and questionnaires, the data were systematically organized into charts. These charts were accompanied by relevant excerpts from the interviews to provide a deeper and more detailed understanding of the findings. This procedure also allowed for identifying potential contradictions or confirming the study's results, contributing to a more robust and grounded analysis.

The systematization of the data facilitated the identification of themes where the teachers demonstrated greater depth, as well as those that appeared more sensitive or challenging when discussing their teaching practices with children. It was observed that teachers' responses were more elaborate and reflective during in-person interviews compared to those obtained via the Google Forms-administered questionnaires. Based on the organization of themes identified in both the questionnaires and interviews, it was possible to analyze variations in the depth and nature of the responses collected through the two distinct methods. The incidence of these themes is visualized in the word cloud presented below.

Graph 1 – Incidence of Themes from Questionnaires and Interviews

Source: Author, 2024.

In the educators' statements, expressions such as "fear" and "insecurity" emerged repeatedly, alongside a constant concern with meeting the demands of the "curriculum" and the "school." These expressions were largely associated with the underlying pressure faced by educators in their professional daily lives. Conversely, and in a subtler manner, the teachers acknowledged the importance of valuing children's perspectives within the school context. This recognition was evidenced by the frequency of terms such as "freedom", "participation", and "protagonism", as well as references to the work of "Paulo Freire".

It was observed that mentions of these terms were associated with the implicit recognition of the need to adopt a more participatory and child-centered approach in the educational environment. Consequently, data analysis was structured around two main topics: 1) the crossroads in re-signification of the teaching role; and 2) polyphony and children's right to voice in the classroom: impacts and challenges. These will be detailed in the subsequent sections.

The crossroads in re-signification of the teaching role

When prompted to reflect on their teaching role in educational practice with children, educators from Brazil and Portugal expressed similar perspectives, particularly regarding the inherent challenges of the profession. Despite variations in the institutions where these educators work, a common theme emerged from the interviews: the expressions "fear" and "insecurity" were recurrent among the five participants, revealing a sense of apprehension regarding what they described as "the new" concept of viewing children as co-constructors of their own knowledge.

The educators Bruna and Carla, both active in the Brazilian educational context, shared similar perspectives on the difficulties associated with effectively including children as active participants in classroom pedagogical proposals. Bruna highlighted the tension between the concept of children's protagonism and the institutional demands for meeting curricular content requirements. As Bruna reported: "Although I understand the importance of positioning children as protagonists, I have to address the school's curricular demands throughout the year. It's not easy. Knowing what needs to be done is one thing; doing it amid so many school obligations is another."

Analyzing the teacher's statement reveals the strong institutional pressure she faces in her teaching practice, particularly concerning rigid curricular goals. This pressure often hinders the implementation of more participatory and child-centered pedagogical approaches. The educator herself encapsulates this situation by stating, "we end up caught between a rock and a hard place," underscoring the constant dilemma between meeting institutional demands and promoting education that values, in her words, children's protagonism.

When asked about the same issue, Carla argued: "I always try to propose activities where children can make group decisions or create something based on their existing knowledge". However, she also noted: "When I need to return to the textbook to cover the content, I end up having to interrupt the proposal". Carla's statement reveals a teaching practice guided by attempts to foster activities that encourage collective decision-making

among children, aiming to make them more critical of classroom content. However, by mentioning the interruptions due to curricular requirements, the educator exposes the limitations imposed by the prevailing educational structure. This scenario raises questions about the feasibility of child-centered pedagogical practices in a system that prioritizes efficiency and content coverage, often at the expense of flexibility and children's autonomy.

Carla also highlights the conflict between her desire to grant children greater freedom and the pressure to meet curricular requirements within established deadlines. In her words: "The fear of not meeting all the expectations by the end of the semester often outweighs our desire to give more freedom to children. I know the change depends on me, but it's complicated", she emphasizes. This dilemma can be interpreted in light of Giddens (2003 [1989]) analysis of the concepts of structure and agency. According to the author, "the constraining influence of social structures is deeply rooted in everyday practices, but these same structures are simultaneously the medium and the outcome of the practices they organize" (Giddens, 2003 [1989], p. 25). In this sense, the author suggests that although social structures impose limitations, they are also shaped by daily actions and practices, indicating that change, while challenging, is possible and can be achieved through individual agency.

Analyzing Carla's dichotomy reveals that the tensions inherent in teaching practices, in light of the constraints imposed by the curricular structure and institutional expectations, tend to limit the implementation of more polyphonic pedagogical practices. From this perspective, the harmonious coexistence of children's and educator's voices is often compromised, hindering the development of a dialogical space where active participation and children's right to voice can be fully realized.

In an even more restrictive context, Valéria underlines that the pedagogical coordination at her institution imposes strict control over the progression of educational activities, exacerbating her insecurity regarding her teaching practice. The teacher explains that, in addition to the requirement to fully cover the syllabus prescribed by textbooks, all teachers at the institution are obligated to maintain a "synchronized rhythm" of instruction. "At my school, all teachers must teach the same content simultaneously and finish each term together. This creates even more insecurity because it's as if all children must be the same and learn in the same way, at the same time", Valéria states.

Furthermore, Valéria highlights that this standardization of pedagogical practices not only limits her possibilities for action but also compromises the creation of meaningful spaces for dialogue and interaction with children. By imposing uniform teaching methods, the system disregards individual differences and diverse learning paces, reinforcing children's role as passive learners (Marchi, 2010), without voice or agency. The teacher reflects on how this

rigid structure impacts her practice: "There are days when the process boils down to arriving, opening the book, putting the content on the board, and that's it," she notes.

Despite the educator's assertions, this uniformity and standardization reflect a universalizing conception of childhood, grounded in the idea that children learn homogeneously and within identical timelines. This limiting view ignores the plurality of childhoods and children, silencing their distinct forms of meaning-making and expression (Sarmento, 2004). By neglecting the sociocultural and subjective differences that permeate the learning process, this perspective contributes to the invisibilization of children's singularities, contradicting their right to culture, as discussed in the concept of polyphony (Brito, 2024).

Moreover, this standardized and unitary view of children and childhood delegitimizes the individual and collective capacities and experiences of children, nullifying the diversity of their knowledge and experiences. Such an approach undermines the recognition of children as agents of their own trajectories, a central issue within the framework of the right to recognition (Honneth, 2009). By disregarding the multiplicity of voices and experiences present in the school environment, this approach hierarchizes forms of knowledge, establishing a logic that prioritizes efficiency and standardization at the expense of valuing children's subjectivity and autonomy.

Cunha (2020, p. 4), analyzing the relevance of educators recognizing the plurality of childhoods and children, emphasizes that "the practice becomes more aligned with children when educators understand that childhoods differ based on class, race, gender, and culture, and that this reality impacts relationships and pedagogical choices." In this context, it is crucial to formulate pedagogical practices that not only recognize but also value and celebrate the diversity of childhoods. These practices should be flexible and sensitive to the multiple realities and experiences children live, adapting to their needs, sociocultural contexts, and individuality.

The analysis of the fear and insecurity expressed by Brazilian educators highlights the tension arising from the need to balance opposing demands: on one hand, adhering to a rigid and prescriptive curriculum, strictly evaluated; and on the other, the pedagogical aspiration to promote children's intellectual autonomy and reflective capacity. These feelings, therefore, not only reflect a response to institutional pressures but also reveal a conflict between adherence to traditional teaching models and the aspiration for more democratic and inclusive educational practices in which children's voices and critical participation are duly valued. This dilemma underscores the urgency for systemic rethinking and structured confrontation, as suggested by Giddens (2003 [1989]), to align institutional expectations with educator's agency, fostering transformations that enable the construction of a more plural and child-centered pedagogical practice.

Within this discussion, significant differences emerge between the perspectives of Brazilian and Portuguese educators regarding the spaces for dialogue in the classroom. In their self-assessment of pedagogical practices, Maria da Graça and Filipa, both educators in Portugal, emphasized that their experience in schools with a markedly traditional profile taught them, in their own words, "how not to teach kids". Filipa, in particular, pointed out that many educators in the Braga region continue to reproduce traditional teaching models, which, according to her, leads to increasing disengagement among students. The educator observed: "The kids no longer engage because they're tired of all this. And these are such simple things to change. Meanwhile, these educators don't care about change. They want to keep doing the same things over and over".

Filipa's remarks reflect a strong critique of the traditional teaching model, which tends to prioritize the unidirectional transmission of knowledge and adherence to rigid curricular scripts at the expense of active participation and authentic dialogue with children. Aware of these limitations, Filipa reported that, in recent years, she has integrated outdoor activities as an essential part of her pedagogical practice, regardless of the content being taught. According to her: "The kids pay more attention when we change the setting. They need something new – funny things that make them wake up and show interest". Filipa's comments suggest that simply altering the learning environment can revitalize children's engagement and participation, promoting a more dynamic and engaging educational experience.

Her experience underlines the necessity of critically reassessing traditional pedagogical practices, especially in contexts where children's passivity is exacerbated by curricular rigidity and a lack of methodological innovation. By proposing a shift—both physical and conceptual—away from the traditional classroom, Filipa argues that she can engage children more meaningfully, creating a more dynamic learning environment. This approach highlights the importance of creating dialogical spaces where children's voices can harmoniously integrate with educator's propositions, fostering pedagogical practices that are both polyphonic and dialogical, expanding interaction and co-construction of knowledge (Brito, 2024).

From a similar perspective, Maria da Graça's reflections on her pedagogical practice align significantly with the methodologies adopted by Filipa, emphasizing a child-centered and actively constructive educational approach. However, Maria da Graça acknowledged that implementing these methodologies presents specific challenges, especially during the early months of the school year. She noted that, during this initial period, children tend to exhibit heightened levels of agitation, which makes proposed activities centered on invention and creativity prone to generating an apparently chaotic classroom environment. In her words:

"Changing how we engage with children isn't easy, but it's necessary to try. For example, at the start of the school year, they're much more restless. I present the proposals, ask them to invent things, and the plans go off track".

Maria da Graça emphasized that this dynamic tends to stabilize as the school year progresses: "By the second term, things flow much better, and it's no longer as challenging as before". This progression suggests that adapting to more flexible and participatory methodologies requires time and persistence from both educators and children. It also implies that the benefits of a pedagogical approach that values autonomy and creativity tend to manifest more fully in the medium and long term. "Our role is to stay constantly updated", she emphasized.

Like their Brazilian counterparts, Maria da Graça and Filipa face significant institutional pressures related to covering curricular content, adding an extra layer of complexity to the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices. Maria da Graça acknowledged: "It's necessary to meet what is required of us from the start of the year". This indicates a persistent tension between formal institutional demands and the desire to implement a pedagogy that prioritizes children's holistic development. However, she also noted that despite these pressures, it is possible to "work around" curricular requirements so that children still acquire the necessary knowledge: "They learn everything anyway".

Maria da Graça's statement carries particular relevance as it addresses the dichotomy often observed between pedagogical innovation and meeting curricular demands. It aligns with Giddens (2003 [1989]) proposals on confronting institutional structures. The Portuguese educator emphasized that, through creativity and flexibility, it is possible to integrate both demands, promoting an education that not only meets formal objectives but also meaningfully engages and motivates students.

The experiences shared by Maria da Graça and Filipa underscore the importance of a pedagogy that, even in the face of institutional and behavioral challenges, persists in striving for a more dynamic, child-centered education. Their reflections demonstrate that balancing curricular expectations with fostering a learning environment that values children's active participation and creativity is undoubtedly a constant challenge. Nevertheless, as Maria da Graça evidenced, this balance is achievable and, when attained, results in a richer and more meaningful educational experience for children. This approach, harmonizing institutional demands with children's development, not only equips them with the tools to become critical and autonomous thinkers but also empowers them to navigate and thrive in a constantly evolving world.

Regarding the re-signification of the teaching role, the five educators who participated in this study emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing the prior knowledge and experiences that children bring to the school environment. This acknowledgment allows pedagogical practices to be tailored to the best interests of the children. Bruna, in her response to the questionnaire, highlighted: "We cannot continue to work with them [the children] as teachers did in the past. We need to update ourselves because children today are not the same as those of decades ago". This statement underscores the pressing need for the continuous updating of pedagogical practices, guided by the decentralization of adult authority and the re-signification of alterity (Brito, 2024) in the contemporary educational context.

When asked about her perspective, Bruna expanded on her reflection, acknowledging that although the challenge is considerable, the benefits are evident. "The challenge is great, but you can see how much more interested the children become in class when they are encouraged to speak, share their opinions, and make decisions," the educator affirmed. This statement reveals a broader understanding that the active involvement of children in the learning process not only enhances their interest and motivation but also significantly enriches the overall educational experience.

It is crucial to highlight that this pedagogical approach, by recognizing and valuing children's voices and participation, transcends the mere adoption of a teaching strategy. It represents a paradigmatic shift in the conception of the teaching role. The educator, moving beyond the function of a mere knowledge transmitter, creates an environment where children are invited to actively participate in the reflection and co-construction of knowledge. Such re-signification requires educators to be willing to reconfigure power dynamics in the classroom, fostering a space where children's voices are not only heard but also substantially influence curriculum development and pedagogical pathways.

However, this transformation is not without its challenges. Analyzing it through the concept of polyphony, this shift necessitates constant critical reflection on the dynamics of alterity in pedagogical practices and a willingness to navigate the inherent complexity of the school environment, where polyphonic voices and perspectives coexist. Additionally, the effective implementation of this approach requires institutional support that recognizes and values children's right to voice, ensuring that these practices are not merely sporadic but systematic and sustained.

Therefore, when discussing the re-signification of the teaching role, it is crucial to consider both the potentialities and the challenges inherent in this transformation. Recognizing the importance of valuing children's knowledge is a significant step, but the effective realization of this idea demands an ongoing commitment to creating spaces where

children can fully exercise their role as authors of their educational process. Ensuring the polyphony of children's voices not only enriches their learning experience but also fosters the development of critical and reflective individuals capable of actively and constructively engaging in society. This principle, as will be further explored in the educator', statements below, offers a perspective that transcends the mere transmission of knowledge, cultivating a more conscious and participatory citizenship.

Polyphony and children's right to voice in the classroom: impacts and challenges

In the interviews, the educators were asked about their perceptions of spaces for dialogue in the classroom and the opportunities provided for children to actively participate in decision-making. Additionally, terms such as "participation", "protagonism", and "autonomy" were used to inquire into the extent to which the educators understood these concepts and how these principles were effectively incorporated and made visible in their daily interactions with children.

The Portuguese educators Maria da Graça and Filipa highlighted, when reflecting on the importance of creating spaces where children act as authors in the classroom, that their undergraduate studies included a course dedicated to children's rights. "I remember that during my degree, we had a course unit that extensively addressed children's rights, the importance of child participation, and children's ability to make their own decisions", explained Filipa, emphasizing that this course was part of the curriculum for the Basic Education degree. "The course was Sociology of Childhood and Education, and we read several texts on concepts of participation and children's voice," the educator added, demonstrating the academic relevance of this topic in her training.

In contrast, Maria da Graça explained that, having completed her degree some years earlier, there were no courses addressing children's rights at the time. "I didn't have any course units in my degree that covered these topics. However, I did participate in some university events where these issues were already being discussed. These discussions should be more valued for us, educators". When asked how she evaluates the impact of discussions about children's right to voice and authorship in schools, the educator was emphatic: "Oh, we are quite behind. We need to adopt a more modern approach in our pedagogical practices with children. These discussions during the degree are extremely useful and provide a broader, more open perspective", emphasized Maria da Graça.

Similarly, when asked about the impact of course units on her teaching practice, Filipa highlighted: "Without a doubt! It's a very different perspective on childhood. And I must say,

early childhood educators in Portugal would greatly benefit from having more course units like this". These statements demonstrate the recognition of the importance of more updated academic training aligned with contemporary pedagogical demands, emphasizing the centrality of children as protagonists and social actors (Sarmento, 2004).

In the statements of Filipa and Maria da Graça, the relevance of the course units taken during their degree programs, particularly those addressing children's rights, emerges as fundamental to shaping their pedagogical practices. Both educators underscore that they understand the right to voice and authorship not merely as principles to be applied in the classroom but as central and profound concepts within the field of childhood studies. This deeper understanding reveals the importance of systematically and robustly incorporating courses that address childhood, children, and their rights into the initial and continuing education of teachers working directly with the childhood.

Brazilian educators Valéria and Carla, when reflecting on child participation in the classroom, also emphasized the relevance of specific training for working with children. Valéria, recalling her academic experience, highlighted that during her degree program, there was an intense focus on discussions about Paulo Freire's philosophy. According to the educator, "Paulo Freire is almost like the guru of pedagogy courses. Those books, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', 'Pedagogy of Autonomy', we read them all. I think it's important to read about how to involve children in the classroom, but then, when you get to the school, the reality is different". When asked about her understanding of the concepts of "participation" and "right to voice," Valéria stated: "For me, participation means involving them [the children] in the lessons. Letting them speak, right?".

Similarly, Carla expressed her understanding of the importance of ensuring children's right to voice in the school environment. "Children need to speak, express their ideas, participate, and choose. I know that's very important [...]. I think ensuring their right to voice means creating these spaces in my lessons where they can contribute in some way", said the educator. However, when asked how she incorporates children's contributions during these moments, Carla replied: "It depends. If I see that it fits with what I planned for the lesson, why not?".

The analysis of the teacher's statement reveals that, despite valuing children's right to voice during lessons, their contributions are evaluated to determine whether they will be integrated into the pedagogical proposals. This observation invites reflection on the practical challenges associated with incorporating children's perspectives into the school environment, highlighting the need for adult approval. In this way, it is possible to examine the intrinsic challenges arising at the intersection of children's right to voice and the re-signification of the

educator's role. In light of the concept of polyphony, it is essential that the discussion about "giving voice to children" transcends mere theoretical debate, deeply integrating into practices and relationships established with children. It is necessary to let children's voices resonate and allow them to speak about themselves, the world, and what they know about it.

In the context of the discussion addressed in her questionnaire, the Brazilian educator Bruna mentioned attending a conference where concepts of the Sociology of Childhood and the importance of "listening to children" were introduced. In her account, Bruna stated: "I remember that during this lecture, the professor talked about the importance of giving children a voice. It impacted me a lot because she said that giving voice is more than letting children speak. It's about letting them make decisions and change the reality of their environment". When asked during the interview about the importance of this lecture in her training, Bruna highlighted: "I think it's very important that this kind of discussion is explored more deeply in degree courses. At least, I didn't study anything about the Sociology of Childhood during my undergraduate studies". The educator's statement underscores the need to integrate disciplines focused on the Social Studies of Childhood into education degree curricula, aiming to provide more specialized training in understanding children's social contexts (Sarmento, 2008). "It's an important way to think about childhood. It's different from educational psychology, for example".

The analysis of the educator's statements, both Brazilian and Portuguese, highlights the importance of teacher education courses that address children's rights and authorship in the school context. While Portuguese educators Filipa and Maria da Graça emphasize the substantial influence of disciplines such as Sociology of Childhood on their pedagogical practices, Brazilian educators Valéria and Carla reference their conceptions to Paulo Freire's work. However, practical limitations in applying these theories in everyday school settings were observed. The differences in training, context, and interpretation of concepts among the educators reveal that, although the notion of children's rights and authorship is valued in theory, in practice, children's voices face significant structural challenges. These challenges include pressure to rigidly adhere to the curriculum and the constant evaluation of children's contributions from a predominantly adult perspective. This scenario indicates the need for a more effective alignment between theory and practice (James, 2007), especially in the school environment.

Thus, the conclusion that emerges is that, although the recognition of children's rights is a principle widely understood among educators, its practical implementation encounters institutional and pedagogical challenges. Teacher education that delves deeply into childhood studies, specifically the Sociology of Childhood, proves essential for educators to develop a

broader and more sensitive understanding of the polyphony between their voices and those of children, allowing the latter to be, more than social actors, authors of their own learning process. However, as previously analyzed by James (2007), the theoretical, political, and popular advocacy of such rights does not guarantee, in itself, the transformation of pedagogical practices. A continuous effort is required to integrate these perspectives into daily school life so that children's contributions are not merely allowed but genuinely incorporated and valued in the educational process.

Final considerations

This study aimed to examine how education professionals perceive their role in the classroom and the conception of spaces for dialogue with children through a transatlantic exchange between Brazilian and Portuguese educators. However, given the significant geographical, economic, and social differences between Brazil and Portugal, this investigation did not seek to compare the educational realities of both countries but rather to analyze how the data reflect the distinct contexts in which the educators perform their duties.

It was observed that the educators face similar challenges in implementing pedagogical practices that aim to create spaces for dialogue with children, despite substantial differences in their institutional contexts and the characteristics of the children they teach. Nevertheless, even in the face of institutional constraints highlighted in the educator's statements, practices and reflections were identified that have the potential to inspire new models of educational action.

Concerning the analysis of the concept of polyphony, it was noted that educators contend with difficulties imposed by the universalizing conception prevalent in the institutions where they work, which demands strict adherence to established curricula. From the perspective of the right to culture, children's modes of meaning-making are systematically silenced, as curricular rigidity tends to render the plurality of children's experiences invisible and limit the ways in which they can interact with the presented content.

The dichotomies of alterity, discussed in the realm of the right to conceptual autonomy, also manifest in the challenges educators face when attempting to balance the importance of promoting spaces for dialogue in the classroom with institutional pressure to meet curricular demands. By emphasizing that, on certain occasions, the procedure is reduced to "arriving, opening the book, and delivering the content", such practices disregard children's authorship and hinder the implementation of polyphonic pedagogical approaches in the school context.

This scenario raises critical reflections on the need to reassess educational policies that, by prioritizing efficiency and standardization, ultimately overlook the complexities of the teaching-learning process. The fear and insecurity highlighted by the educator's point to the urgency of fostering an educational environment that is more flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of children, where dialogue and critical reflection can occupy a central place in teaching practice.

In conclusion, reflecting on the concept of polyphony in school practices reveals the importance of considering the multiple voices present in educational spaces, especially those of children, who often remain silenced in pedagogical decisions. In both the Brazilian and Portuguese contexts, the educator's statements demonstrate that, while there is a growing awareness of children's right to voice, its effective implementation encounters institutional and pedagogical barriers that limit teaching practices from embracing a more dialogical and participatory perspective. The differences between educational practices in the two countries, particularly regarding teacher training and curricular pressures, underscore the need to revisit and expand pedagogical approaches to make them more inclusive and genuinely welcoming of children's contributions.

Polyphonic practice, by interweaving the voices of all participants in the complex educational tapestry, not only enriches the learning process but also cultivates a more just and reflective pedagogy, in which children emerge as essential agents in the construction of knowledge. Building school environments that foster genuine participation and continuous dialogue thus becomes the foundation for a profound re-signification of the educator's role. This movement reveals education not merely as an act of knowledge transmission but as a collaborative and transformative process, where knowledge is co-created and continuously reshaped through the encounter between children's experiences and thoughts.

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