Article

LINHAS CRÍTICAS

Dossier | Listening and participation in research with (about) children

“*I danced a dance I did not know*”: art, teaching and research with children

“*Fazia uma dança que nem sabia fazer*”: arte, docência e pesquisa com crianças

“Hice una danza que ni sabía hacer”: arte, enseñanza e investigación con niños

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Highlights

Research with children by listening and participant observation of their corporeality.

Dance teaching and creation based on children’s corporeality and performativity.

Improvisation, chaos and drifting as investigative, artistic and pedagogical procedures.

Abstract

Based on the investigation of dance creation processes with children at the Escola Municipal de Iniciação Artística de São Paulo (EMIA), the article presents ways in which children participate, validating their languages and assuming improvisation, chaos and drift as investigative, artistic and pedagogical procedures. Supported by Childhood Social Studies, listening and dialogue with children allowed their perspectives on their investigative processes and aesthetic experiences to emerge, present in their speeches and gestures, contributing to the construction of teaching and research in dance with children.

Resumo | Resumen

Keywords

Children. Dance. Investigation.

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Introduction

By affirming that children are also culture producers (Fernandes, 2016; Prado, 2015), considering alterity and identities from adult culture, we assume that children have particular ways of creating, reading and reconfiguring languages and forms of expression, such as in dance/art. Depending on the context and relations between and with children fostered by adults, different creative processes can take place, in which children's participation in aesthetic productions assume singular aspects.

This article is a partial analysis of doctoral research conducted at the Faculty of Education, University of São Paulo, between 2019 and 2022, which investigated artistic processes in dance with groups of children at the Escola Municipal de Iniciação Artística (Municipal School of Artistic Initiation – EMIA), in the Jabaquara neighborhood, São Paulo city, and at the *Criança Criando Dança* event (Silva, 2023)[1].

We highlight a specific group of children who were observed by means of autoethnography and participant observation, informal conversations, field notebook recordings, as well as filming and photographs[2], subject to authorization. By discussing the different forms of child participation, we analyze the teaching process focused on dance, on an artistic pedagogical practice based on constant dialogue with the children, taking up the controversies and uncertainties of modulating adultcentrism (Rosemberg, 1976; Santiago & Faria, 2015).

What dances do children create based on their corporeality? How do they understand or feel this dance? What can we learn about children from their bodily investigations in dance and about dance from children's bodily investigations? Based on these questions, the research pointed to ways of creating dance that emerge from partnerships between adult artists and children at the EMIA, inquiring to what extent a meaningful, subjective, singular and unrepeatable dancing experience (Larrosa, 2011) is enabled by children's performance.

Such questions are linked to the EMIA program itself, which conceives initiation as a process of both individual and collective individuation (Simondon, 2005), as well as a transformative experience understood, perceived, and lived as genesis, in which children, art, artists and School are a constant becoming.

> More than once, in different times and situations at EMIA, I have heard children express that "*Here I can be **who** I am"* or "*Here I can be **how** I am,*" referring to a possible authentic expressiveness, to a singular corporeality and multiple performativities that demonstrate this artistic and existential initiation as an experience of becoming oneself while being able to be whatever one wants, to be together, to create oneself, to become. (Silva, 2023, pp. 29-30)

1 Awarded a Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (CAPES) grant.

2 Understood as social marks that document childhoods (Gobbi, 2012), not discussed here, and support the analysis of field notebook recordings.

EMIA Jabaquara is in the south zone of São Paulo, near a subway station, in a public park. Although park and school belong to different departments (Culture and Environment), they both constitute the same living organism for the EMIA inhabitants. Without walls, in adapted family houses with doors, windows and balconies that open directly onto the park we find a school, a space where art and childhood connect and merge from the interaction between artists, teachers and children, nature and things, sounds, gestures, affections and bureaucracies.

With a teaching staff made up of teacher-artists[3], EMIA received around 1,000 children aged between 5 and 13, in the after-school hours, in 2019. Its curricular structure includes classes[4] that integrate music, dance, visual arts, and theater taught collaboratively by two teacher-artists (with children aged 5 to 7) up to four teacher-artists (with children aged 9 and 10) of different languages. At the ages of 11 and 12, children choose their preferred artistic language. Additionally, they can choose to learn an instrument, take elective theater, dance and visual arts classes, join a choir, play in the orchestra and even participate in open workshops.

Access to vacancies at EMIA is by public lottery for children aged 5, 6 and 7 (except for workshops open to all ages and accessed on a first-come, first-served basis)[5]. From entrance until graduation the children take part in an initiation into the Arts based on experience of artistic processes led by teachers who are also artists. Even with the proposed regular course – the integrated classes – there is no prior, sequential curriculum.

Children can thus build their path by the choices they make along the way, considering their affinities and, of course, the availability of their families.

Due to its creative effervescence, EMIA is full of “artistic happenings,” both in the form of organized events and informal sharing between classes (Fraga et. al, 2016; Rocha, 2017). The creative processes become evident in these moments through different aesthetic compositions. Creation and tradition merge in these various encounters – celebrations such as *Festa Junina* [June Festivals], erudite and popular repertoires in music teaching, as well as research, invention and composition between languages based on their own poetics and collective constructions. Playfulness is a constant in these processes, since one of EMIA’s principles is respect for children’s way of being.

At EMIA, art is lived out in everyday life, by peeking through every open door or crack one can glimpse moments of creation.

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3 Professionals with artistic education and practice (concomitant or previous), who bring to the structuring knowledge of the respective languages their investigative and creative attitude to the processes experienced.

4 Despite the school structure maintained by EMIA, with divisions by age group and nomenclatures such as student and class, the experiences that take place there burst these limits. What we call classes are encounters between artists and children in artistic pedagogical processes.

5 Of the number of places on offer since 2022, 50% are for children declared indigenous, brown or black, 20% for those coming from public schools and 30% are open to free competition.

> The art made by children at EMIA questions adult canons and is vigorously displayed on the walls, on the floor, in the corridors, in the foyers and bathrooms, it hangs from the ceiling and can be seen and heard beyond the walls of its three houses, when we intertwine with its large backyard: the park. (Cunha, 2016, p. 19)

A conversation starter

Field research was conducted with a group of seven children aged between 7 and 9, enrolled in the elective dance course[6], during one school year, with two-hour meetings once a week. In this context, we intend to affirm the aesthetic possibility of creating dance from children's corporeality and performativity.

The methodology was built throughout the research process based on assumptions that bring together autoethnography (Scribano & De Sena, 2009; Gama, 2020) and participant observation (Ingold, 2016).

In autoethnography, an experiential strategy, the researcher, as part of the culture they are investigating, prioritizes and describes their own lived experience and the various meaning-makings, involving personal and social elements. In this type of qualitative research, in addition to dealing with privileged information, the topics are analyzed in a more nuanced and complex manner than they might appear to outsiders. What happens to researchers is that:

> Recognizing their own experiences invites them to occupy a position that is not static, but dynamic, and to "play" with their centralization and decentralization in action. This strategy "combines" autobiography with ethnography, employing dialogue, self-reflection and emotions. (Scribano & De Sena, 2009, p.7)

As one of the researchers taught the class under investigation, it was necessary to constantly reflect on the phenomena experienced and observed, as well as to conduct a permanent, detailed, and systematic analysis of the materials produced and recorded. Despite its autoethnographic nature, the investigation focused not only on the researcher's experience, but also on the children themselves and their actions, addressing precisely what the two built together.

All the children and their families consented to participate in the research, which was approved by USP's research ethics committee and by Plataforma Brasil. In addition to the duly signed consent forms, research developments were shared with the families at parent-teacher conferences, and with the children in various situations, both in informal conversations and in direct participation as researchers who were investigating their process of improvisation in dance. Marchi (2018), in discussing ethics in ethnographies conducted with children, states that:

6 In EMIA's "artistic pedagogical map," elective dance, theater and visual arts courses are attended alongside the regular integrated languages course, as a way of offering children more specific experiences in the chosen artistic languages.

> [...] researchers who conduct research with young children cannot use the alibi of young age or incompetence (limits of verbal language, comprehension, and social experience) to refrain from informing them about research involving them. (Marchi, 2018, p. 739)

At first, it was not simple to ask the children if they agreed to take part in the research, highlighting the complexity of conducting research with children (Martins & Prado, 2021). When presented with their doctoral research and their interest in investigating their dancing, most of the children agreed, while Carlos[7] (7 years old) said he did not want to "be researched" and Bia (8 years old) felt insecure about "being observed." We immediately explained that this would not be the case and that they would not do anything different, but we rapidly realized that this attitude could indicate the use of persuasion to convince them otherwise. We thus decided to address the issue again on another occasion, after reflecting on the marked presence of intersubjectivity in research and "the power relations that permeate the investigative act" (Marchi, 2018, p. 735).

Then, on another day, we tried inviting them to research together, as they then did, going to the park to measure the distances and sizes with their bodies and some materials to thereby create their dances. By perceiving themselves as researchers – observing, taking notes, filming, discussing – they agreed to take part in the research, when the subject was brought up again.

The children's resistance considerably changed and determined how we did research with them. Carlos and Bia were the ones who interfered the most with their singularities throughout the research process, questioning and challenging us to see the actions of the artist teacher, one of the researchers, in a different light. The question of actually listening to children is what we do from this, how we dialog with differences and modulate adultcentrism in our attitudes and proposals.

We also observed that intersubjectivity was a focus of investigation for a large part of the research, considering the relations between an adult teacher-researcher with the children as a singular corporeality and their respective performativities, which affected each other with their presence, in rapprochements, resistances, challenges and affections. The children were invited to research their own bodies in movement and the possibilities of improvising dances based on their investigations and games, having their visions and perspectives accepted and validated. At the same time, between ethnography and autoethnography, the researcher searched for a specific path of artistic creation with the children.

> There is a consensus among authors who discuss research methodologies with children that, in addition to ethnography, whatever methods or techniques are used in the research, there are significant gains when children's active participation in the process is requested, and their knowledge (visions, perspectives, points of view) is accepted as genuine and valid. (Marchi, 2018, p. 743)

In this regard, we unveiled situations, ways and developments of listening to the children, related both to the pedagogical and creative process and to the research

7 The names are fictitious, preserving the children's identities.

development itself. Observations and questions arose constantly about how this listening took place and to what extent it changed the course of the planned actions, considering teaching and research in dance with children (Almeida & Prado, 2022).

Who are we talking to?

Trying to understand childhood and children in order to identify what they produce as art/dance, culture and thought means daring to move in a multiple and shifting terrain and making some choices. Hence, the notions constructed by the Social Studies of Childhood, which situate, organize, research, and discuss the condition of children in the world, make sense for our reflection, as does the philosophical concept of childhood, which refers to the experiences that cross humans, erupts and make creation possible.

With Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology, all of which make up the Social Studies of Childhood, the idea of "child condition" emerges:

> Starting from the concept of the human condition as the sum total of human activities and capacities, which differs from the concept of human nature discussed by Arendt (1993), I conceive the child condition also differently from a notion of child nature, still present and widespread in literature, teacher education and training and educational practices, as well as in wider society. Child condition refers not to the universalization or naturalization of childhood, but to children's set of activities and capacities, what they are, how, with whom, where, for how long, etc. It also refers to the senses and meanings in the construction of their belonging and the alterity of childhood. Prado (2015, p. 16).

Linked to this notion is our understanding of children as capable of interpreting, creating meanings for their perceptions of the world and communicating them, but differently from adults, with their own forms of understanding, representation, and symbolization. They are therefore seen as producers of cultures, the so-called child cultures, which are part of and interact with the social culture in which they live.

Sarmento (2003) points to some characteristics that identify differences between child and adult cultures, such as the need for interactivity with other children, the ever-present play in how they relate to and understand the world, as well as the easy and constant transit between reality and fantasy, which allows these worlds to coexist without conflicting. Likewise, non-literality and a non-linear way of perceiving time, which allows us to experience the present in infinite reiterations, make up the traits that define the alterity of child cultures.

Despite the attempt to encompass what might be common between children, these characteristics do not fail to embrace the possibility of rupture, creation (Kohan, 2007), the novelty that is born with each child (Larrosa, 1999) and childhood as an experience:

> We understand childhood as an experience that may or may not cross adults, just as it may or may not cross children. From this perspective, the idea of childhood is not linked solely to age, chronology, a psychological stage or a

> linear, cumulative temporality. It is therefore linked to a kind of de-ageing. Childhood, in this sense, is that which promotes a becoming, a coming-to-be, which has nothing to do with a future, a tomorrow or a temporally marked chronology, but with what we are capable of inventing as an experiment in other things and other worlds. (Abramowicz et al., 2009, p.180)

It is in this sense that we conceive of childhood in children's dance improvisations, as part of a child culture that coexists with adult culture and as a ground for creating and experimenting with other worlds. Nogueira and Barreto (2018, p. 627) present, from an Afro-perspective, the verb *infancializar* [infancialize] (different from *infantilizar* [infantilize], which is trying to fit children into a pedagogical model of childhood), as "[...] a way of perceiving in childhood the conditions of possibility for inventing new ways of life."

Thus, they point out the difference of this concept of childhood, which refers to a "condition of privileged human experience," or as an additional sense, beyond the five known senses. "A sense that is more acute in children, but which is not lost in adults. *Infancializar* is activating childhood in adults" (Nogueira & Barreto, 2018, p. 631).

Childhood, thought of as a state or another sense, which is more acute in children, is revealed in their bodies and has its poetic/aesthetic version in the dance improvisations they produce. In this regard, perhaps children's contribution to dance would be precisely its *infancialização* [infancialization].

Walter Kohan (2007), in proposing to think of childhood as power and becoming based on Nietzsche (1991) and Deleuze and Guattari (2012), repeats Spinoza's (1974) question: "What can a body do?", in the form of: "What can a child do?" and replies:

> We do not know. Perhaps the question is not so different from the one that asks what a body can do. We are not sure. But in this space that the insistent question opens up – and which no answer can close – we may find the strength to unfold powers unheard of in childhood. (Kohan, 2007, p. 98)

Uniting the two questions into one, the central question for thinking about the possibility of a child's dance is precisely "What can a child-body do?" Buss-Simão et al. (2010, p. 160) also take this path of reflection to think about a body-infancy in education, tracing a path from the Sociology of Childhood to Philosophy in order to "[...] conceive children and their bodies as potentialities, and no longer as a nature that needs to be controlled and shaped," as a "biopsychosocial unit produced concomitantly" (Buss-Simão et al., 2010, p. 154).

We can thus affirm that children

> [...] are not just a set of bundles of natural characteristics developing over time, they are also complex, variable and inventive bodies that circulate, at the same moment, through a natural sphere (age) and a sphere of history, of culture—which is not exhausted in social inheritance, as something finished or as a static object. (Prado, 2015, p. 71).

We thus use the notion of corporeality as a body “embodied” in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1994), or as a lived body, encompassing: body shape, sensory experience, movement or mobility, orientation, capacity, gender, metabolism/physiology, co-presence, affection and temporality (Csordas, 2013).

After all, how can we think about children’s corporeality in terms of artistic creation? We can speak on the movement of being a body while becoming a body in spatial outlines that are continually reconfigured. In other words, creation is intrinsic to bodily experience as a founding part of the world, based on the investigation of one’s own motor skills and interactions with others’ corporeality and diverse materialities, both similar and different, such as childhoods.

Machado (2010) has proposed to think about children’s art-making as a form of existence, based on their corporeality and in tune with what is happening on the contemporary scene. Through an attentive gaze at their ways of acting and being in the world, the author reads children’s actions as performative acts. From the interconnections between the notions of child, body, and performer, based on phenomenology, on the idea of child culture and of performance within contemporary art, emerges the concept of child performer.

> The child performer is their total body, their corporeality; they are mobile, plastic, polymorphic and shapeable; their repertoire is rich in theatricality and musicality, in the contemporary sense of the terms: they improvise, they embody emotions, they are able to make themselves a score while enjoying the soundscape of the places they inhabit, etc. and their ability to use space makes present the notions of installation, happening and performance, so dear to the visual arts today. (Machado, 2015, p. 59)

Just as Machado (2015) sees the utterances and performances of children’s bodies as full of theatricality, we observe in the plasticity of their movements actions filled with dance, even if all of this is simultaneous, mixed with everyday life and manifested in a hybrid manner. In the artistic experiences at EMIA, for example, these times and spaces of encounter between corporeality and childhoods reveal to adults what they can learn about teaching and improvising dances with children.

It is through their corporeality that children talk about themselves and the world, allowing us to get to know them from their perspective:

> If it is by movement that small children think, live, speak and remain silent, it will by movement that they will tell us about themselves: about being a child, their joys and anxieties, their search for the form-content of their poetics. When the adult allows it, the child’s corporeality traces and tells stories, mixes factual biographical data and intense subjectivity, and tells us a lot about who that child is. (Machado, 2015, p. 58)

In this regard, we agree with James et al. (2000, p. 155) that:

> [...] unsurprisingly, gaps often appear in sociological and anthropological descriptions of the body and childhood. This gap is also evident in ethnographic research that seeks to contemplate the experience of childhood from children’s perspective, in which the body is also an absent presence, and the focus of attention is always on children’s discourses.

Therefore, we propose to conceive of children's corporeality as forms of discourse that follow their own logic, a syntax made from perceptions, investigations and inventions, creating differences as rips in adult language. What do these wordless discourses communicate? How capable are we of reading, or at least of listening to and embracing what these bodies say and dance?

Creation processes in dance with children that start from listening to their corporeality and cultures consider alterity and dialog in relation to adult culture's conceptions of the world and ways of existing (Silva & Prado, 2020), in view of the possibility of experience, in its subjective, contextual, provisional, sensitive quality and starting from an event logic that has the body as its territory (Larrosa, 2014).

By considering the performativity (way of being in the world related to personal, social, political, cultural and artistic relations) present in contemporary dance as part of children's dance, we seek to highlight ways of improvising dance with them that start from who they are (their corporeality), what they do (their child cultures) and how they show who they are and what they do (their performativities)[8].

Hence, we wonder to what extent dance that starts from children's corporeality is not their child thinking in action, asking, affirming, inquiring, refuting, with bodies that question space, objects, bodies that measure, occupy, transform, create. In the absence of words, the body speaks. What do they say? How do they say it? What do we hear? How do you create from it?

Audible voices, possible listenings

As for the investigated process, we identified a way of working with children based on improvisation as both an artistic and pedagogical practice, as well as on chaos and drifting. Although improvisation in dance is the foundation of these classes, we speak of thinking about class itself as improvisation, thus assuming it as a pedagogical procedure.

We are referring to a way of operating analogous to improvisation in the artistic sphere within contemporary forms of dance, which is instantaneous creation based on a state of individual and/or group attention (presence) to spaces, temporalities and relations. In this way, the children also become co-creators of the lessons (Oliveira & Prado, 2022), since the encounters involve listening to them and perceiving the unfolding events.

The classroom, then, is a field of constant investigation in which several things happen simultaneously, often resembling a seemingly uncontrollable chaos. It is, however, a creative chaos where different potentialities, constructive and destructive, dwell which can be developed or not, both in dance and in class, taken here as overlapping and concomitant planes. As proposed by the

8 A reference to the definition of performance: "Being is existence itself. Doing is the activity of everything that exists, from quasars to sentient beings and super galactic formations. To show oneself doing is to perform: to point out, underline and demonstrate the action" (Schechner, 2003, p. 27).

Filosofarconchicxs Collective (2018, p. 25): “It is not chaos that blocks doing, but it becomes a condition of doing. Chaos as a moment that gives rise to something new. Chaos-event.”

In this logic, the experience of drifting, like that of chaos, is also ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean lack of control, going off course due to external interference or getting lost; on the other, it can be a decision to set off on an undefined route, allowing oneself to be carried away, not inattentively, by other perceptions. In the class, combined with the artistic desire and pedagogical commitment, among these perceptions is listening to the children’s will. We call will not only what they express verbally, but what we read in their bodies. It is not simply a question of doing what they want, but of dialoguing with their interests, bringing them together for a common purpose, which is to dance.

In this school context, therefore, although the roles of educator and learner exist, relationships are more permeable, in which these roles are diluted in moments of joint creation. Regardless of the differences between the various ways in which teacher-artists work, children are not always agents, but for the most part. Their participation, to varying degrees, characterizes the work developed there (Cunha, 2017).

Some situations, however, led to confusion between embracing ideas and desires and imposing individual wills, such as thinking that one can do whatever one wants at any time. In such case, we discussed with the children what was being built as a collective, what was and was not permissible. ‘Doing it together’ was the established criterion. They could all be doing different things as long as it was in harmony with the rest.

In this type of more democratic and less hierarchical relations between adults and children, dealing with wishes as a function of what is common and not simply as individual satisfaction, as in a neoliberal perspective, is a constant challenge in relation to children’s participation (Bae, 2015). At various other points in our journey, we had to remind the children that listening to them did not mean doing their bidding, but rather embracing whatever might work for the group, both in an aesthetic and existential sense.

Hence, there would be no room for individual wishes that made no sense to the others, or that prevented us from doing something together, otherwise there would be no reason for us to be there. In other words, the freedom to do whatever one wished was circumscribed by the common purpose of bodily investigating and creating through dance improvisation.

Among the events that made up the research process, we picked some situations that show different forms of child participation.

Observant participation: other ways of taking part

In the course of teaching and research, we sometimes came across surprising testimonies from family members telling us everything the children did at home based on their experiences at EMIA, while at school they hardly participated explicitly. In the performing arts, what does it mean to be part of a body activity? What takes place in the corporeality they observe that is not shown?

One strategy used when a child refused to participate in a proposal with their body was to make observation a way of participating, by giving them an object to look through, or by choosing a place to look from. This happened several times with one of the boys in the class, yet some situations caught our eye and pointed to a misreading of his interest or assimilation. One such situation was a visit to an exhibition by choreographer and dancer William Forsythe called “Objetos Coreográficos” (Choreographic Objects) (at SESC Pompéia/SP), made up of mostly interactive installations.

During the visit, guided by a monitor, he stood to one side with his arms crossed, refusing to take part in an apparent lack of interest. However, in the meetings that followed at EMIA, contrary to what it seemed, he was very excited, not only talking about everything he had seen but also showing what he had understood in his body. This makes it clear that we cannot measure the other’s experience, in this case, by reading an explicit participation in the bodily action, making the subjective and passive dimension that Larrosa (2014) attributes to experience even clearer.

In another proposal, in which the teacher used her adult body to show a specific movement during lessons, the same boy moved to the corner to sit on a stool (his place as an observer) and said he was mesmerized by that movement:

> As I showed the girls, he narrated the movements... When I asked him to do it together, he said he did not know how, I told him that everyone was learning and that in dance you learn by doing, it is the body that thinks. But when he finally joined us, his body was the one that had learned the mechanics of movement best! In addition to the excessive self-judgment that comes with his refusal to experiment straight away, there is a minute observation of the actions, which although not initially manifested in movement, happens with the body. (Field notebook, 2019)

In that action, he showed how attentive he was and that his body was being mobilized even as a spectator. As Hubert Godard (2001, p. 24) states:

> The other’s movement brings into play the viewer’s own experience of movement: visual information provokes in the viewer an immediate kinesthetic experience (internal sensations of the movements of their own body). The changes and intensities in the dancer’s body space will find resonance in the spectator’s body. The visible and the kinesthetic, absolutely inseparable, will mean that the meaning produced at the moment of a visual event will not leave the observer’s body untouched.

Observation is therefore a powerful form of enjoyment, learning and participation, even when it comes to body movement. We must keep this in mind when we do not

consider a child “simply” observing as participation, when we judge participation through the lens of activity as opposed to passivity and not as changing possibilities of presence and experience.

The forms of participation in pedagogical processes sometimes contradict children’s performativities, both in the sense of the immobile body that seems to be absent in a class that requires movement, and the body that moves and does not seem to be paying attention in conversation situations.

Educators and learners: what agency do children have?

> And then there was the barrel, the berimbau and two children. After everyone had performed, I asked them to comment on what they had seen. Bia invented that they were testimonies that each one gave from behind the barrel, like from a pulpit. Much more interesting than a conversation circle, which she expressed hating. (Field notebook, 2019)

The children’ also participated in the construction of lessons bringing playful and imaginative performativity by incorporating the barrel as the setting for that dialogue, defining the space and the role of the speaker, in place of the dry and intellectualized adult conversation. A dramatized context in which the children expressed seriously and sincerely what they had seen in each other’s investigations, in a respectful manner and recognizing their differences. If this had been a suggestion from the teacher, this would probably have been forced, as an attempt at artificial play in the form of an activity.

When children’s actions have an effect on the process, changing the lesson plan, their role as agents becomes visible. Allowing children’s imagination to materialize in these moments also means recognizing and embracing their status as performers and enabling plural and unrepeatable experiences to take place (Larrosa, 2011).

In another situation, dialoguing with the children’s performativity, one of them assumed the place of “teacher.”

> As he moved, Carlos talked about this dance of experimenting with the body in movement, his speech was animated and well-articulated, he seemed to have discovered something, as if by talking about what he was doing he understood it better. I was so involved in my conversation with him that I was not able to record or write down his words; he just kept completing my sentences, without being rude or disrespectful, but as if thinking along with me. “*That’s right, Carlos!”* I said. At one point he proposed, “*What if we walked around the room in different ways?”* So I proposed that we play a game where he was the teacher and I, his assistant. I organized the path he had proposed and added an observation about the use of supports and articulations. (Field notebook, 2019)

Within the game, considering the performativity of all those involved, other children commented as they took part:

> Tina: *I love doing cartwheels! I can't stop*!
> Nina: *Too bad the other teacher won't let you...* Referring to Carlos, who said cartwheels were not allowed because he couldn't do it and the activity was about discovering new moves. (Field notebook, 2019)

They also questioned adult participation:

> Nina: *You don't plan anything, do you? You just let us do whatever we want*... (in relation to Carlos being the teacher). I replied that it was not so, and explained that I had plans, but that they would change when meeting with them. (Field notebook, 2019)

Even in the symbolic game of swapping roles, we can see how aware the children were of the asymmetries in their relations with adults, and how they expressed their discomfort with the most common model of interaction between teachers and students. Importantly, however, the child agency to which we are referring, as a creative action that modifies and affects the course of events, is circumscribed by a specific context of building artistic pedagogical processes, without neglecting their still subordinate and dependent place in society[9]. Understanding these processes as improvisation/drifting, their agency lies in the sharing of joint decision-making about which direction to take on that journey.

Insofar as the investigative action took place within the pedagogical action, the children's participation also took place in this sphere, in a mixed way, driven by their own curiosities. In this regard, Luciana Hartmann (2020, p. 35) indicates some paths for thinking about research with children, such as:

> [...] the researcher's willingness to relinquish central control of the research, the constant exercise of creativity in dialogue with the children, and awareness of the instability of the processes (each context is a context, each day is a day, each child is a child). To these I would add another fundamental path: instead of closed answers, children might instigate and challenge us with other questions.

How do we talk about it?: "*I danced without knowing how to!*"

Even so, the curious adult researcher sought ways of engaging the children, since one of the research aims was to unveil how they understood those bodily experiences we were calling dance.

Despite the unstructured approach adopted, the question of how to engage the children in dialogue remained a challenge throughout the informal conversations, a tool already employed by the artistic pedagogical practice. As the children taught us, their best reflections and statements not in the moments of sitting in a circle to talk, but amidst playing and discovering their bodies. Nonetheless, the children were provoked into talking about their experiences:

9 Szulc (2019) denounces the danger of uncritically glorifying the concept of child agency, insisting on a reformulation that situates children's social action within intergenerational, interethnic, class, gender and specific socio-historical power relations.

> "Which object did you like most dancing with?"
> Lia: *The big and small barrels, it looked like a Viking ship*.
> Moon: *The big and small barrels*.
> Nina: *With the soft tissue*.
> Tina: *The big barrel and 'god's eye*.'
> Carlos: *Conduit, because it moved the articulations.*
> "What do we do in this class?" (for the new student)
> Carlos: *Lots of movements, new things, we dance*.
> Lia: *Lots of games and performances*.
> Tina: *Games, movements and actions*.
> Nina: *We have fun dancing.*
> "What does your dance look like?"
> Nina: *Like the slime* (referring to the soft toy dough).
> Bia: *Like the ball, closing and opening* (referring to the hinged ball we use in class).
> Someone said: *Gymnastics!*
> Lua: *Pretty! Contemporary dance.*
> "Why do we dance?"
> Nina: *To express* [ourselves]*, to express culture.*
> Lia: *To learn many things.*
> Lua: *While dancing, we play and do not stand still.*
> Other comments:
> Carlos: Y*our body makes the words, then Bia plays the music* (explaining the relationship between movement and music).
> Tina: *I danced without knowing how to* (seeing herself in the video). (Field notebook, 2019)

As previously stated, these questions were intended as an invitation to reflect on what one does, not necessarily intellectualizing the experience but putting into words the embodied knowledge construction that took place. For the research on dance processes with children, the questions reflected the researcher's adult curiosity about how the children understood or felt their dance and gave it meaning.

We observed that the objects and materials helped both sensorially and pictorially in describing what they were experiencing bodily, as well as their previous references when identifying their dances. More than just answering the research questions, understanding and communicating about what they were doing and creating aesthetically was part of the children's artistic learning and was fostered in conversations with and between them.

Regarding Tina's comment, "I danced without knowing *what* I was dancing," we can observe what Midgelow (2018) calls "knowledge-as-process," an improvised development similar in both dance and research.

> [...] If improvisation is a critical mode of investigation (as I propose), in which knowledge is explored, generated and shared, then improvisation in dance has a significant role to play in realizing our understanding of how we produce knowledge in embodied and emergent, truly spontaneous ways. (Midgelow, 2018, p. 143)

Looking at her dance, Tina was surprised to realize she did not have a priori knowledge, because she was actually discovering it at the very moment she danced.

Hence, layers of research and knowledge production overlap, with the children creating instantly and then observing their created dances, while the researcher observes this process as an investigative action. As such, the knowledge built with the children is deeply intertwined with the research development.

Back to one of the children's comment: "You don't plan anything, do you?" In addition to an observant attitude, we can see a bond of trust between educators and learners who investigate each other, even though they come from different places and with different purposes. Nothing could be more precious in a research process with children focused on dialogical teaching practice.

Importantly, the route described here is not an idea to be replicated in its form, since it is defined precisely by its character as a singular experience. Its greatest relevance lies in giving visibility to children's participation in the creative processes, both of each meeting (class) and of the dance itself.

By way of conclusion, more than the results obtained, what we have tried to show are ways of listening to children by observing their corporeality and performativities as a tool for dialog and joint creation. In the case of this experience, improvisation, chaos and drifting proved to be coherent choices that not only incorporate children's listening, but are also tools that start from this listening. As in a conversation, between speaking and listening, understanding and estrangement, we can weave pedagogical and artistic processes that bring about dances as diverse as the generations that make them up.

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Resumo

A partir da investigação de processos de criação em dança com crianças da Escola Municipal de Iniciação Artística de São Paulo (EMIA), o artigo apresenta modos de participação das crianças, validando suas linguagens e assumindo a improvisação, o caos e a deriva como procedimentos investigativos, artísticos e pedagógicos. Amparadas nos Estudos Sociais da Infância, a escuta e diálogo com as crianças deixaram emergir suas perspectivas sobre seus processos investigativos e experiências estéticas, presentes em suas falas e gestualidades, contribuindo assim com a construção da docência e pesquisa em dança com crianças.

Palavras-chave: Crianças. Dança. Investigação.

Resumen

A partir de la investigación de procesos de creación de danza con niños de la Escola Municipal de Iniciação Artística de São Paulo (EMIA), el artículo presenta formas en que los niños participan, validando sus lenguajes y asumiendo la improvisación, el caos y la deriva. como procedimientos investigativos, artísticos y pedagógicos. Con el apoyo de Estudios Sociales de la Infancia, la escucha y el diálogo con niños permitieron que emergieran sus perspectivas sobre sus procesos investigativos y experiencias estéticas, presentes en sus discursos y gestos, contribuyendo a la construcción de la enseñanza y la investigación en danza con niños.

Palabras clave: Niños. Danza. Investigación.

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