

## Care in the interactions and play of babies in childcare centers

O cuidado nas interações e na brincadeira dos bebês na creche

El cuidado en las interacciones y en el juego de los bebés em la guarderia

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on teaching in Early Childhood Education, particularly teaching in childcare centers. Its objective is to understand the meanings of care in the field of Early Childhood Education, with particular attention to pedagogical practices with babies and young children. Based on dialogue with authors from the fields of Philosophy and Psychology, care is discussed as ethics, as a way for adults/teachers to pay attention to themselves and to children, as ethical listening, affective commitment, and responsiveness. From this perspective, based on the observation of scenes in context of internships, the focus is placed on attentional movement with babies and young children. In the observed scenes, play situations in which they pretend to care for babies/dolls stand out. In this process, care as affective attunement gains prominence. In addition to imitating the external behavior of adults, imitative play during moments of care reveals intersubjective capacity and the resonance of sharing feelings between adults and children.

**Keywords:** Babies; Care; Teaching professionalism

## RESUMO

Esse trabalho tem como foco temático a docência na Educação Infantil, de modo especial, a docência na creche. Apresenta como objetivo compreender os sentidos do cuidado no campo da Educação Infantil, de modo particular nas práticas pedagógicas com bebês e crianças pequenas. A partir da interlocução com autores do campo da Filosofia e da Psicologia, discute-se o cuidado como ética, modo de atenção das pessoas adultas/professoras a si mesmas e às crianças, escuta ética, compromisso afetivo e responsividade. Nesta perspectiva, a partir da observação de cenas do contexto de estágio, focaliza-se o movimento atencional com bebês e crianças pequenas. Nas cenas observadas, destacam-se as situações de brincadeira nas quais eles/elas brincam de cuidar de bebês/bonecas. Nesse processo, ganha relevo o cuidado como sintonia afetiva. Para além da imitação do comportamento exterior do adulto, o brincar imitativo dos momentos de cuidado revela a capacidade intersubjetiva e a ressonância da partilha de um sentir entre adultos e crianças.

**Palavras-chave:** Bebês; Cuidado; Profissionalidade docente.

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como eje temático la docencia en Educación Infantil, especialmente la docencia en guarderías. Su objetivo es comprender los significados del cuidado en el campo de la Educación Infantil, particularmente en las prácticas pedagógicas con bebés y niños pequeños. A partir del diálogo con autores del campo de la Filosofía y la Psicología, se discute el cuidado como ética, forma de cuidar a los adultos/maestros hacia sí mismos y a los niños, escucha ética, compromiso afectivo, capacidad de respuesta. En esta perspectiva, a partir de la observación de escenas del contexto de la pasantía, se enfoca el movimiento atencional con bebés y niños pequeños. En las escenas observadas destacan situaciones de juego en las que juegan a cuidar bebés/muñecos. En este proceso gana importancia el cuidado como armonía afectiva. Además de imitar el comportamiento externo del adulto, el juego imitativo durante los momentos de cuidado revela la capacidad intersubjetiva y la resonancia de sentimientos compartidos entre adultos y niños.

**Palabras clave:** Bebès; Cuidado; Profesionalidad docente

## Introduction

In Early Childhood Education, it is essential to debate the meanings of care, always intertwined with the challenges and potentialities of education and teaching, when we consider the daily lives of children, from infancy, in institutions that share such purposes with families. Especially since the legal frameworks of the last 30 to 40 years, which establish education as a right of every citizen residing in the national territory from birth, the relationship between educating and caring has emerged as an important perspective.

In the early 1990s, prior to the enactment of the current Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* – LDB, 1996), an intense debate began regarding the binomial of educating and caring for young children, including infants, advocating the inseparability of these dimensions. In 1993, the governmental document National Policy Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (*Diretrizes de Política Nacional de Educação Infantil*) included one of the first official mentions that childcare centers and preschools assume, among their functions, the responsibility to care for and educate children, from infancy onward. Two of its assertions state: “The education and care of children from 0 to 6 years are the responsibility of the educational sector,” and “Early Childhood Education must be guided by the inseparability between care and education.”

In the following year, 1994, two documents were issued within the scope of the Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação* – MEC), entitled National Policy for Early Childhood Education (*Política Nacional de Educação Infantil*) and Toward a Policy for the Training of Early Childhood Education Professionals (*Por uma política de formação do profissional de Educação Infantil*). The first explicitly expressed the intention of strengthening the conception of education and care as inseparable aspects of the pedagogical work carried out with and for children in childcare centers and preschools. The second discussed the issue of qualification and professionalization for education and care work in institutions for children up to 6 years of age.

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* – LDB, 1996) consolidated the place of Early Childhood

Education within the Brazilian educational system by incorporating this stage and making explicit its eminently educational function, within which care is constitutive and intrinsic. Considering the trajectory of early childhood education in Brazil, becoming part of Basic Education was of singular importance, as it recognized and valued its purpose of promoting the integral development of children in complement to family and community actions, regarding children in their indivisible wholeness (body, intellect, emotion), and contributing to their ability to construct and exercise citizenship as a condition of the present, while still children.

It is important to emphasize that, since the 1990s, the relational dimension of pedagogical work has been underlined as central in the constitution of what has been recognized as a Pedagogy of Childhood or Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education (Farias, 1993; Rocha, 1999). In this context, Anthropology, Geography, the Sociology of Childhood, among other fields, contributed to affirming the social function of Early Childhood Education institutions, as well as play and experiences with culture as important forces in pedagogical work. For Rocha (1999), while Elementary Schools are centered on the student and on teaching relations, traversed by various fields of knowledge, childcare centers and preschools take children as subjects and focus on educational relations constructed in collective life contexts.

More than a decade later, in 2009, the following document was published: Contributions to the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education – National Curriculum Guidelines Specific to Early Childhood Education (*Subsídios para diretrizes curriculares nacionais para a Educação Básica – Diretrizes curriculares nacionais específicas para a Educação Infantil*), resulting from work commissioned by MEC/SEB (Ministry of Education/Secretariat of Basic Education), in which the authors highlight:

to care is to welcome the child, to encourage their discoveries, creativity and imagination; to respect play; to listen to children in their needs, desires, and concerns; to support children in their challenges; to interact with them, recognizing oneself as a source of information, affection, and care. (Brazil, 2009, p. 17).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Original: “cuidar é acolher a criança, encorajar suas descobertas, criação e imaginação; respeitar a brincadeira; ouvir as crianças em suas necessidades, desejos e inquietações; apoiar as crianças em seus desafios; interagir com elas, reconhecendo-se como fonte de informação, carinho e afeto.” (Brasil, 2009, p. 17).

Given our work in teacher education for Early Childhood Education and the above considerations, which underscore the centrality of care in its relational dimension at this stage of Basic Education, the present paper raises some problematizing questions: In which situations does the importance of care become evident in the daily interactions of childcare centers? How can professional education and the work of teachers who work with young children, especially those up to 3 years of age in childcare centers, be redefined, considering care as the axis of pedagogical practice? How can we rethink the meanings of care and attention in childcare centers, considering the social dimension of the Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education?

Based on these guiding questions, the article is structured as follows: we present the contributions of several authors in the field of Philosophy, with the aim of highlighting care as ethics and responsiveness, as opposed to a merely technical attitude; next, we set out considerations on care in Brazilian Early Childhood Education, showing how it occurs within the tension between control and attention; along this path, we draw on references from Psychology to articulate care with the concept of joint attention.

This dialogue with authors in these fields emphasizes the social and affective dimensions of child development, in line with the literature of Early Childhood Education. Finally, we discuss some everyday practices that focus on care between adults and children, including infants, in the professional teaching practice of childcare centers. In this context, the play of babies that evokes bodily care stands out, showing that, beyond the imitation of adult behaviors, one perceives affective attunement and the sharing of feelings between adults and babies.

## Care, ethics, and otherness

One of the first studies to address care and the education of young children after the enactment of the LDB was conducted by Maria Thereza Montenegro and completed in 1999 under the supervision of Fúlvia Rosemberg. In this investigation, the author argues that care is a cultural practice constructed historically and socially,

in opposition to premises that naturalize care as a gender-specific task, as an exclusive and inherent function of women, while also acknowledging that Early Childhood Education is largely carried out by female teachers. She defends care as part of the moral conscience of those who exercise it and, in this sense, raises as the central discussion of her research the question: how to educate for care (*como formar para cuidar*)?

Montenegro (1999) considers in her study care actions related to the individuality of the child, with special attention to their emotional needs, respect for their own timing and rhythms, and for the differences among children. She refers to the philosophical roots of the term “care” to indicate the division resulting from associating care with affection and education with cognition, which could lead to the mistaken interpretation that professional training is unnecessary for people, mostly women, to work with young children and infants in activities that involve caregiving. Within this distorted understanding, it is expected that professionals will provide “good care” to children, including infants, regardless of whether they have adequate and appropriate training for such work.

In the field of Philosophy, Emmanuel Lévinas (1982) proposes that ethics be thought through the senses, affections, and sensitivity. To be affected by the other, by difference, by otherness, requires what he calls an “ethical listening.” Approaching care as ethical listening implies an attitude of responsiveness to the needs of others. According to Lévinas (1982, 1988), this means a “responsibility toward the other” and, at the same time, a “disinterested” relationship. To be affected by and to welcome the other according to their demands for respect – without objectifying them, appropriating their alterity, being indifferent, exercising power over them, or, above all, annulling them – is at the core of this ethical stance.

An ethical relationship of care implies recognizing, valuing, and preserving the singularity and individuality of the other, of the one who is cared for, with the awareness that “the intersubjective space is not symmetrical” (Lévinas, 2005, p. 184). Such an ethical relationship would thus imply an encounter of alterities, of subjectivities, that are preserved, thereby ensuring the identity of each of those involved.

When weaving an ethical conception of care, it is also important to recall the words of Leonardo Boff (1999, p. 33), when he asserts that to care is “an attitude of occupation, concern, responsibility, and affective involvement with the other.” Caring requires the capacity to go beyond subjectivity in order to focus on intersubjectivity, interactions, the protagonism of those who care and those who are cared for, and the appreciation of difference and the singularity of each individual and their ways of participating.

In this direction, Michel Foucault’s (2004) work on care in the Greco-Roman world also stands out, particularly regarding the correlation between power, freedom, and ethics. For the author, within the power relations constituting human organizations, there are reflective practices of freedom, that is, possibilities of ethical manifestation. In the Greek context, care oscillated between techniques of domination, moralization, subjugation, and “techniques of the self”, which constitute practices of self-examination and self-care.

The work of caring for oneself is placed at the heart of the constitution of an art of existence, of the development of a culture of the self. It is a way of living that constitutes itself as a social practice, opening up to interindividual relations, in the simultaneous movement of caring for the other.

These avenues of understanding care encourage us to reflect on its meanings in the education of infants and young children in Brazil.

## **Meanings of care and early childhood education: between control and attention**

Throughout the history of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, care has been understood in different ways and experienced differently in pedagogical practices. It has taken the form of control and surveillance in situations in which bathing, sleeping, and feeding, among other activities affecting children’s bodies, are carried out in automated, serialized ways. On the other hand, it has also been constituted as an ethical experience, of educators’ attention to themselves and to the other, in situations



in which the relationship between adults and children is characterized by ethical, dialogical, and responsive quality (Guimarães, 2011).

Recent studies place the experience of care in the education of infants and children up to 3 years of age at the level of bodily or personal care, identifying moments of bathing, diaper changing, sleeping, and feeding as moments of humanization, curricular components of Early Childhood Education that concretize the inseparability of care and education, and that enhance the effective conditions for the construction of children's identity and their intellectual and emotional development (Akuri; Kohle; Pereira, 2020; Gomes; Lima; Schneider, 2022; Barbosa; Quadros, 2017).

In expanding this perspective and in line with Montenegro (1999), Lévinas (1982, 1988, 2005), Boff (1999), and Foucault (2004), it is important to emphasize care as an ethical manifestation, that is, as a way for adults/teachers to pay attention to themselves and to children, including infants. It is a way of questioning the meaning of these interactions in various everyday situations, in the form of ethical listening, affective commitment, and responsiveness.

Along this line, in dialogue with Muniz, Lima, and Teodoro (2002), it is possible to understand care as inherent to the pedagogical relationship, constituting itself in the adult's openness to the affective and singular manifestations of infants, which question and produce deviations in relation to established practices, going against the grain of a possible "universal care".

## **Joint attention and intersubjectivity in the constitution of implicit relational knowledge**

In connection with the view of care as ethics, in the field of Psychology, studies on care as *joint attention* stand out, that is, the capacity to modulate attention in co-presence. From this perspective, caring and being attentive involve movements of openness and sharing in relation to the other and to oneself. It refers to the act of paying attention with someone, rather than merely paying attention to something, or being able to concentrate on a defined object. According to Caliman, César, and Kastrup (2023, p. 249), "the attention required by care work is not control, but, on the



contrary, the capacity to cultivate the person with their own experiences and in always unique situations”.<sup>2</sup>

The studies of psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Daniel Stern inspire this perspective. Stern (1992) carried out research with infants in the early periods of life, indicating that senses of self emerge from the very first days, as well as relational domains that are constituted throughout development. In other words, there is no undifferentiation of the infant in relation to the mother and other reference adults in the first months of life, but rather self-agency and the capacity to regulate the adult (not only to be regulated), in intersubjective experiences that constitute ways of *feeling with the other*. Over the course of development, an experience of self is composed, mobilized by the presence of the other, whether the mother or another caregiving figure. Shared regulation is oriented toward specific goals and requires negotiation, adjustments, corrections, and ongoing consolidations in adult–child/child–adult intersubjective interactions.

In pursuit of a plural understanding of the pathways of human subjectivity, the author explores the relational possibilities of infants, pointing to levels of subjectivation that unfold throughout life, distinguishing this from the proposition of linear and sequential phases of development, as found in other projects of orthodox, modern-inspired psychology.

Along this trajectory, according to Stern (1992), by the end of the first year of life, with the construction of a psychic intimacy, infants acquire the ability to follow and check the focus of the adult’s attention, while simultaneously sharing intentions and affects. This is what he calls *joint attention*; that is, the possibility of paying attention to the adult’s attention, following the direction of their gaze. Thus, an *inter-intentionality* and the capacity to share affective states, the *sharing of a feeling*, are developed, accompanying human possibilities throughout life.

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<sup>2</sup> Original: “a atenção requerida pelo trabalho de cuidado não é controle, mas, ao contrário, é capacidade de cultivar a pessoa com suas próprias experiências e em situações sempre únicas” (Caliman, César, and Kastrup, 2023, p. 249).

This perspective on attention broadens the meanings of care. In the understanding of care as joint attention, care is displaced from the realm of technique, located in the adult/caregiver, to being considered as an attentive attitude that involves both. Caring involves being attentive to something that happens *between two*.

In this process, what gains prominence, based on Daniel Stern's work, is the capacity of children, from infancy, to share intentions, developing communication at a pre-verbal level. For the author, communication is, above all, affective. Affects are both the primary medium and the primary subject of communication (Stern, 1992). He emphasizes that infants who are learning the "discursive mode," that is, verbal language, are therefore much more skilled in the domain of affective exchange.

We can say that the affective dimension emerges as central to care as ethics. Joint attention, affective attunement, and care reverberate in responsive and responsible pedagogical relationships between adults and infants.

We highlight imitations that develop from the first year of life as gestures of shared meaning with the adults involved in the relationship. It is not merely motor contagion or reproduction of behavior. There is a quality of feeling in which the behavior is immersed, being reiterated in the affectively attuned situation. Stern (2007) calls this process "affective attunement". For the author, it is not the actions of the other that become the reference; rather, the feeling behind the actions becomes the reference. In affective attunement, the temporal dynamics, intensity, and rhythm of the imitated behavior are reproduced. It is about resonating with the emotion of the other.

Mignosi (2017), from the perspective of the human being as active and purposeful in contact with their environment from the first year of life, highlights the movement of reciprocal imitation and emotional regulation that marks the social relations involving infants. In dialogue with Daniel Stern's contributions, she situates a pre-verbal, non-symbolic, and processual relational capacity that constitutes an intersubjective field, a way of being with the other, from the first months of life.

In this context, emotional involvement in everyday care situations stands out, as well as the recognition of infants' intentionality and sense of agency (there is not only passivity in bodily interactions). This finding is important for reflecting on routines,

which, as reiterated and daily repeated situations, generate expectations and mobilize relational and affective experiences.

Routines mobilize adults toward sensitive care, a necessary condition for the development of secure bonds between adults and infants. We may say that experiences of bodily care and the dimension of care in the daily life of childcare centers promote unique occasions for the experience of affective attunement between adults and infants.

Henri Wallon (2008), also in the field of Psychology, focuses on the initial processes of human interaction, highlighting the emergence of practical gestures, ritual gestures, and motor contagions in the presence of a model, as the genesis of imitation proper, that is, reproduction of adult behavior in the absence of the model. We understand that Stern's (2007) notion of affective attunement brings a distinct contribution, placing the sharing of feeling (the possibility of *feeling with* the imitated adult) as central in imitative experience, from its very beginnings.

In imitation and affective attunement there is a movement of experiencing the other within oneself, participating of and in the other's action. For Stern (2007), this consists of the assembling of the perception of the other through a proprioceptively guided movement. In this process, alongside the faithful imitation of open, visible behavior, there is also a harmonization or affective synchronization, a sharing of inner feelings, which configures the concretization of an intersubjective matrix constitutive of the human being from the beginning of life.

When interacting with very young children, we realize that we are engaged in a relationship full of communicative and emotional exchanges that take place through the body (facial expressions, quality of movement, muscle tone, modulation of voice). How does a human being understand another person from the very first days of life? What happens, and what characterizes the quality of the encounter between an adult and a child who does not yet speak?

These are crucial educational questions, because the positions we take and the explanations we provide influence not only how we understand children, but also how we act and behave toward them.

Numerous theoretical and research perspectives,<sup>1</sup> despite their differences, converge in considering the human being active and proactive in relation to their life context from the very first days after birth. In particular, the intersubjective approach holds that children, from birth, are social beings who constantly seek others in order to engage in reciprocal imitative exchanges and mutual emotional regulation (Trevvarthen; Aitken, 2001; Gallese, 2016).

This approach shows that infants are immediately active protagonists in dialogue with adults, because they are capable of understanding others as “people” similar to themselves. This understanding is closely tied to an “embodied” conception of the mind, which emphasizes subjective involvement in dialogue, and which highlights psychological aspects such as openness and intimacy in interpersonal relationships. This relationship involves “feeling” oneself and the other in the “present moment,” being internal to the relationship from a psychophysical perspective (Gallese, 2015b). Perceiving others is, in fact, closely connected to perceiving oneself (thus, for example, when one sees, one does not merely see, but also feels oneself seeing something with one’s own eyes).

Infants and adults can encounter one another in a relationship that implies emotional and affective involvement because they recognize each other as similar from a perceptive and proprioceptive standpoint.

Stern (1998, 2004) speaks of *implicit relational knowledge*, which is pre-verbal, non-symbolic, and processual, and concerns interpersonal and intersubjective relations, that is, ways of being with others. This knowledge occurs through *intersubjective interactive processes* that modify the relational field within the context in which the subjects are engaged, and it constitutes a fundamental motivational component not only for the development of attachment, but also for learning at the linguistic and cultural level. Adult and child are, therefore, mutually engaged in an exchange in which they learn together to regulate affective and behavioral states.

Moreover, based on lived experience through communicative events, children construct an image of themselves and, therefore, also an image of how they are regarded and accepted. The quality of the psychophysical relationship and the

experience of being seen and recognized give rise to the quality of self-construction. The more infants experience positive emotional situations, the more open they become to involvement and interpersonal knowledge. In addition, positive emotions increase infants' attention toward others, and this condition, in turn, enhances active participation. Developmental processes (as well as processes of knowledge) therefore appear to be substantially influenced by participation (Gallese, 2015a).

## ***Play of caring in childcare centers, experience of self and other, affective attunement***

The considerations regarding the ways in which, within relationships, infants experience feeling themselves and others invite us to reflect on the communicative and emotional relationships that occur in childcare centers.

In research experiences and in initial teacher education during practicum activities, it is possible to notice scenes in which infants between one and two years old imitate bodily care actions with the dolls available. What might this movement indicate? What is the affective quality of these situations, given that they are so often reiterated in infants' actions?

Bondioli (1998) emphasizes that, beyond the exploration of the physical world, infants' and young children's play presents a social quality. For the author, "the space of play is, from the beginning, a space that is constructed, an experience that is acquired as shared" (p. 213), enriched by the cultural models in which they participate. Over the course of development, social interactions and the different ways of relating to objects become more intense. Gradually, situations emerge in which "the child gathers objects that correspond to similar activities of daily life; objects begin to be used according to their affective or conventional meanings" (Bondioli, 1998, p. 219).<sup>3</sup> This entry into the fictional world, into the experience of make-believe, arising from an affective mobilization, indicates that, beyond motor and sensory exploration of objects,

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<sup>3</sup> Original: "*a criança junta objetos que correspondem a atividades similares da vida cotidiana; os objetos começam a ser usados de acordo com seus significados afetivos ou convencionais*" (Bondioli, 1998, p. 219).

infants and young children are engaged in expressing affects, constructing meanings, and exploring the relationship between the inner and outer world.

In this same line, Savio (2013) points to play as a place of expression from the child's perspective, relevant in the discussion of children's participation, starting from infancy, in the contexts of educational institutions.

Silva and Neves (2021), in dialogue with the cultural-historical perspective of Psychology, in their analysis of infants' play, emphasize that social and cultural events, including family and school care routines, permeate play precisely because they singularly affect infants. For them, play is an activity constituted by action/imagination simultaneously, evidencing a process of cultural appropriation, a way of coming to know everyday life, in addition to a process of meaning production and subjective constitution. Analyzing the processes of cultural production of play in a group of infants, they observed that certain play situations are reiterated. Some of these were grouped as play with care routines (putting to sleep, breastfeeding, offering food), evidencing acts of creating meanings for care practices.

These play situations that involve imitation and affective attunement also lead to reflection on the quality of observing children and infants in educational contexts, understanding observation as a pedagogical action, in the movement of following infants' meanings in social interactions.

To observe is to develop a quality of presence, self-care, and exchange of gazes, within the scope of joint attention and care as ethics. Along this path, the interactive scene between adults and infants is transformed through the interested and responsive gaze established between the subjects in interaction.

This reflection on observation as joint attention expands its pedagogical possibilities. In the construction of an *indirect pedagogy*, in the organization of contexts that foster the interaction of adults with children, and of children with each other and with materialities, observation can be understood as a practice of *attention with* infants, prompted by a quality of the teacher's presence – non-intrusive, yet careful.

For Mignosi (2023), this is a specific professional competence: the educator's capacity for presence, that is, the development of a listening attuned to the present

moment, in synchrony with the infant. The excessive focus on care as meeting the child's needs, and the perspective of the infant's dependence on the adult, present the risk of weakening and automatizing the routines that mark the educational day in childcare centers.

In this regard, to connect with infants and young children, it is important to attune to their playful and creative dimensions, in the construction of shared meanings.

From the investigative movement that traverses our practice as teacher educators, accompanying internship experiences in Pedagogy programs within municipal childcare centers in our contexts, we have compiled a set of records in which we highlight doll play carried out by infants:

*In the middle of the morning, teachers gradually bring toys into the solarium, and the children accompany them, beginning to occupy and play in this outdoor space, which alternates between areas fully exposed to sunlight and others shaded by mesh coverings. The children move about or seek corners according to the play in which they are engaged. Clara, 1 year and 9 months, and João, 1 year and 11 months, are both with their babies (dolls), sometimes in their arms, sometimes in the crib, offering bottles and covering them to sleep. Their gestures are attentive, deliberate, and delicate with their babies, ensuring their well-being and helping them fall asleep. João, beside the crib, while keeping the bottle in his baby's mouth, adjusts the blanket over him. Clara, while feeding with the bottle, gently pats her baby's body with the other hand and repeats, "nãna nenê" [Brazilian lullaby].<sup>4</sup> Olivia, 2 years and 1 month, takes advantage of the moment when the teacher picks up Ana to change her diaper and sits in the small armchair in the room. There she begins to undress the doll she is playing with; she pauses, redresses the baby, stands up, leaves the baby on the armchair, and fetches a baby diaper. She returns and starts to undress the baby again. She tries to put on the diaper she retrieved but has difficulty making it stay on the baby's body. The teacher, who has finished changing Ana, approaches Olivia, asks if she may help, and receives Olivia's assent with a nod. Then she sits down with Olivia and begins to change the baby, talking with her about what she is*

<sup>4</sup> Original: "No meio da manhã, as professoras vão aos poucos levando os brinquedos para o solário e as crianças as acompanham, passando a ocupar e brincar nesse espaço externo, que alterna áreas nas quais a luz do sol passa integralmente e outras cobertas com telas de sombreamento. As crianças se movimentam ou buscam recantos em função da brincadeira na qual se envolvem. Clara, de 1 ano e 9 meses e João de 1 ano e 11 meses estão ambos com seus bebês (bonecos) ora nos braços, ora no berço, oferecendo a mamadeira e os cobrindo para dormir. Seus gestos são atentos, determinados e delicados com seus bebês para assegurar o bem-estar e fazê-los dormir. João ao lado do berço, enquanto mantém a mamadeira na boca de seu bebê, ajeita a coberta sobre ele. Clara, enquanto dá de mamar com a mamadeira, com a outra mão bate levemente no corpo de seu bebê e vai repetindo 'nãna nenê'."



*doing and allowing Olivia to participate. When the change is finished, Olivia leaves with her baby toward the play kitchen area and begins to make food.*<sup>5</sup>

The narrated scenes allow us to consider different dimensions of care involved in actions related to children's bodies. As a physical dimension, they involve delicacy, respect, and sensitivity toward those who are cared for. They constitute actions that carry an affective valence, potentially supporting the development of children's self-confidence and autonomy. It is also necessary to consider the affective and organizational dimensions of care. Both of these dimensions refer to the need for planning and reflection on what is conceived and practiced. Carrying out bodily care in groups of infants and young children, whether individually or collectively, often depends on the actions of several adults and professionals. Therefore, it requires synergically coordinated actions for and with children, within the spaces of the Early Childhood Education institution and with the materialities necessary to support and promote children's potential so that they may become consolidated achievements.

In the book *Play to Build Worlds (Brincar para construir mundos)*, authors from Brazil and Italy discuss their research and interventions in the educational spaces of childcare centers and preschools, revealing the ever-present and formative articulation of pretend play and care, which is offered to babies/dolls or toy animals that come to life in the coexistence of the educational and family community, in the human gestures of care, attention, and protection manifested in such play (Savio; Moro, 2023).

## Considerations

We regard care as both a necessity and a possibility of the human condition. Human beings are relational beings, and generally, any care situation involves at least

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<sup>5</sup> Original: "Olivia, 2 anos e 1 mês, aproveita quando a professora pega Ana para fazer a troca de fralda e se senta na poltrona pequena que tem na sala, ali começa a tirar a roupa da boneca com a qual está brincando; para, recoloca a roupa do bebê, se levanta, deixa o bebê na poltrona e busca uma fralda do bebê. Volta e recomeça a retirada da roupa. Tenta colocar a fralda que buscou, mas tem dificuldade de fazê-la parar no corpo do bebê. A professora que terminou a troca de Ana, vai ao encontro de Olivia, pergunta se pode ajudar, recebe o assentimento com um aceno de cabeça de Olivia. Em seguida, senta-se junto e começa a fazer a troca do bebê, vai conversando com Olivia sobre o que está fazendo e a deixa participar. Terminada a troca, Olivia sai com seu bebê em direção ao espaço da cozinha de brinquedo e começa a fazer comida."

two people. Care implies a relational dimension, anchored in the interactions of human subjectivities, in networks of affection and solidarity. When speaking of a care relationship involving infants and young children, the relationship established there permeates and unfolds into play situations that reveal the meanings of care that children construct from the intersubjective encounter between themselves and the adults responsible for their care. In the daily life of childcare centers, caring implies a relational ethics that must always remain attentive to children's alterity, from infancy.

In this work, we sought to show that care involves an attentive and responsive attitude, which is constituted *between two*, adults and children, from infancy, and even in peer interactions, in which infants experience sharing and affective attunement. In this sense, moments of bodily care in childcare centers are singular, as they mobilize eye contact, touch, and sensitive exchanges. Play among infants that reenacts sleeping time, feeding, or bathing reveals the meaningfulness of these situations. It becomes evident that, beyond motor contagion, there is an attunement of affect, the sharing of a feeling, which constitutes an important learning in collective life in the childcare institution.

What has been stated involves an ethical level and strongly underscores adults' responsibility toward children in the early years of life. From a pedagogical standpoint, it highlights for teachers of infants and very young children the importance of being present and participating in the relationship as whole persons (in which mind, body, and emotions are interconnected), reiterating the need for a professionalism in which observation, self-observation, contact with one's own emotions, psychophysical self-awareness, the capacity to decenter, and to "listen" moment by moment, in the here and now, during the relationship with the little ones are central. Therefore, a "binocular vision" (Bateson, 1979) should be adopted, simultaneously considering the child in their specificity, oneself, and the level of interlocution.

This is particularly important when reflecting on the inter-weaving of care and education and also provides important insights into the role of adults in children's play.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Among these, in addition to the psychoanalytic perspective since its inception and in its different developments, the socioconstructivist perspective, child research, cultural psychology, psycholinguistics, and neuroscientific research stand out.