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## **CRITICAL REFLECTION ON BODY CARE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

Children are interested in researching the world, included their selves as part of the world. Their body is used by them in those explorations. Food and feeding care, for example, are essential experience in the children's lives. Children need to feed by an appropriate way to get a global development, a good health and, also, to have opportunities to establish social relationship with the others and to explore the context where they are living. Health, culture, religion, economic power is appearing in the experiences that children live with their bodies, not only with food. Hidden curriculum is in the inner of the teacher practices and so it is necessary to try to analyze and explain what values is spreading those care practices. We propose in our paper to reflect critically about the stereotype and biases that could emerge in care situations in difficult times. Teachers, educators should be aware how the power relationship could appear while they are handling care in schools.

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## **1. Introduction**

Becoming aware of children world is essential. We wonder what kind of values they are learning in care experiences that they live at school every day. Teacher should observe children and understand the different languages that the use for expressing what they are feeling in those care circumstances. The right to participate must be respected by adults in the care experiences. Children are vulnerable and dependent, but it is not mean that they cannot be able to participate while the adults are involved with children in feed, changing nappies or sleep situations. Teachers, educators must generate environments where the participation of children is attended.

The value of care started to be studied for us exploring the aggressiveness during several years. We published two reports about the results writing two books in Spain. You can watch the book in our web page: <http://concepcionsanchezblanco.es/>. We continue studying this topic while we were participating as a partner institution in the following European Erasmus Projects coordinated by Campbell-Barr and Georgeson (Plymouth University): "Interpreting Child-Centredness to support Quality and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care" and "Child-Centred Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care" (2017-2021). We advance in our investigation during our research stays in two European countries: Poland (Adam Mickiewicz University) and Portugal (Minho University). We collected data using meetings at schools and with lecturer at the University. The stays were funded by the Erasmus European Union funds for the mobility of university staff; and in the second case by a research grant from the University of A Coruña.

## **2. Problem Statement**

There are historical milestones who have an important influence in care were considered a children's rights and their participation on them. Eglantyne Jebb (1876-1928) in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in 1924, states: the child that is hungry must be fed, the child that is sick must be nursed, the child that is backward must be helped, the delinquent child must be reclaimed, and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured (Mulley, 2009). Janusz Korczak (1878-1942): defended the idea that the child is the one who best knows his needs, desires and emotions, and therefore must have the right to have his opinion and taken into account by adults. Child has the right to be respected by adults; the right to make mistakes and fail; the right to privacy, as well as to freedom of opinion.

The Declarations of Eglantyne Jebb and Janusz Korczak would be later incorporated two more articles, serving in 1959 as the basis for the "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" of the United Nations.

Pikler (1902-1984) referred to the importance of care and free movement of the creature. Decroly years before (1871-1932), observing boys and girls in action, he would establish a set of children's interest centers from which the school should start to organize learning environments: Need to feed and to attend to physiological needs ( food, breathing); need to protect yourself from the elements (heat, cold, humidity, wind...); need to defend against various dangers and enemies (cleanliness, illness, accidents...);

need for action, joy and life in society, act and work in solidarity, to rest. These historical data show us that the concern for childhood care was part of the pedagogical concerns.

Actions involving care have the virtue of humanizing both those who are cared for and those who provide care (Lynch et al., 2009). We need to be cared for the other and, also, we need to care for others. Care shows us an unconditional love for the others. It responds to a public conversation about love (Talbert & Steinberg, 2000), which is vital to our wellbeing right from the moment we are born (Gerhardt, 2015).

Boris Cyrulnik (2013) reminds us of the role of body care in resilience processes after experienced traumatic situations, such as the case of refugee children, immigrants, the mistreated; those who suffer harsh medical treatment. Schools are capable of activating resilience processes if they are interested in take care of children primary necessities. Structure the work on body care and on the expression of the calamities experienced is essential. Now, note here how the phenomenon of resilience is being engulfed by the performance society, requiring the subject to be able to take advantage of misfortune to continue performing. It is as if we had to extract a product from everything that happens to us.

The challenge for teachers is to be able to take care of children by structuring their actions like liberation, as Paolo Freire (2018) would say. It implies promoting children's participation in care situations. We need to develop environment which give them power over them Formosinho and Pascal (2016). Children should take decisions about adult's care situations and should be understood their wishes and be respected by adult. Children need to be respected on their corporeity.

Finally there are studies which show us that it is fundamental that teachers, educates explore their own early childhood stories about care. They need to think on their own experiences, and to reflect very deeply about the own affections and disaffection lived in these care experience (Tilley-Lubbs & Calva, 2016). Teacher should to reflect very deeply about care taken when they were children and research about their influences in their teaching practices for destroying power relationship established with children (Sánchez Blanco, 2018).

### **3. Research Questions**

Our research questions are:

- i. What kind strategies could be necessary for generating liberation processes in care situations live with children at school?
- ii. How could teacher give value to the care children experiences lived at home and be used at school?
- iii. How could children participate in care situations which involved short ages?

### **4. Propose of the Study**

Our porpoise is to explore the care experience at early childhood level. Care experiences at schools permit to adult reflect about them and about children who are taking care. Teachers, educators, have values that show while they are taking care of young children. These experiences of care should produce liberation processes in children and adults. Values about care must be analysed and deconstructed.

Understanding the different languages of children is essential for doing it. So, observation processes and documentation at school are necessary for building a critical knowledge about the care practices.

## **5. Research Methods**

Several case studies and reflections belonged to several report about studies develop about aggressiveness at schools, the Erasmus Projects developed about child-centred practice and the open interviews developed during our research stays in Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland) and Minho University (Portugal).

## **6. Findings**

We are living, as we are seeing, without a doubt, a care crisis. If we do not act, we run the risk of naturalizing carelessness, getting rid of the utopia that a better world is possible, that we can act. Remember, for example, the situation of the elderly in residences that this pandemic revealed in our country or the holes in the national health system itself; the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in wars; the hunger and misery they bring, the selective processes to which refugees are subjected in the world; the walls erected (Frye, 2020), the deaths it brings; the brutal attacks on forests through intentional and interested fires and massive deforestation processes or the economic crises that have condemned some families to food and energy poverty and are exterminating others. The world needs that we take care. Boys and girls, from the earliest ages, are attentive observers of all this, but, in addition, there are more and more who suffer it in their own flesh, directly or indirectly, through the carelessness that they and their families experience.

Children who have been cared for, and/or have been placed in a caring situation, have hypotheses about care that differ from the hypotheses held by children who have been care or neglected in their primary needs. Caring for others or for oneself through play provides an excellent context to reflect on the love that all human beings need. In care context children can develop all their potentialities. The challenge for educators is to be able to care by a liberating way for children. It is essential that educators observe, interpret and explain children's actions. Children reconstruct by play their care experiences in their own way.

They have curiosity and interest about care, and they develop strategies to research their body and the body of adults in the care experience. They are very interested in cares and get valuable learning while adults take care of them (love, respect, body, empathy, culture, gender...) and construct stories associated with the kind of care and primary needs demand. They show us what they learn about care while they are playing. For example, the show us ways of parenting.

Children live shared power relationship or oppressive power during care situations and the early childhood teacher has a deep influence in their care practices for children. Adult experiences lived on early childhood never should oppress children. In difficult times like we are living now is easier that this oppression appears because our capacities for reflection could be blocked by the very stressful situations that take place with wars and pandemics.

Education is care and care is education. The power of care over the emancipatory processes of the subjects is decisive. Education and care go hand in hand. Care offers rich contexts to encounter life in general in a respectful framework. Teachers who do a and promote the academic ways at early childhood education extend the separation between care and education. This academicism detaches children and adults at school from what we are: life in interrelation, living beings with a corporeity, with bodily needs, not just mind

## 7. Conclusion

Through such care, we are showing creatures liberating forms of attention that, embedded in their identities, can be transferred in time to moments, places and/or generations to come, when they must develop care practices with others, either with their peers or as future adult subjects. Just as we ourselves have required care to survive and develop, others will require it as well. And very likely in the future we ourselves will need them again (old age, illness, etc.). From this perspective, creating caring environments at school where children and adults participate is, therefore, a necessity.

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