

From Research-Training to the (Re) Construction of Knowledge and Practices in Teaching with Babies

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Abstract

The study was developed starting from an in-context experience of training, based on the theoretical assumptions of research-training. The objective was to think over the contribution of research-training in the process of construction and (re) construction of knowledge necessary to the activity of teaching with babies; to register the changes in the teachers' pedagogical practices with babies derived from the process of research-training; to contribute with the studies of teachers' continuous training in this line of research. The research was performed in a child education unit integrated to the municipal public network of Belém. Methodologically, observation and individual and collective meetings were used. The research-training revealed significance in the construction babies teachers' professionalism, favoring the reflection and deepening of theoretical-practical issues about babies' education, and contributed with the production and deepening of fundamental knowledge in the process of thinking about initial and continuous training for the Child Education teacher.

Key Words: Babies, Continuous Training, Research-Training.

1. Introduction

The context of the Brazilian Child Education in the last years has been marked by several changes deriving from the production of knowledge about children, in particular manner about their process of development and learning in collective environments, as well as because of changes in the Brazilian legislation, which deals with the education of children with ages under six years old. In parallel, the field faces gaps in professional's training, who act in the education of children in this age group, for that the University must give answers to the society in what concerns this training.

According to the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional – LDB (Brasil, 1996)* – Law of Basic Directions and Bases of National Education, “Child Education, first stage of basic education, has as goal the integral development of the child until the six years old, in their physical, psychological and social aspects, complementing the action of family and community” (Art. 29), besides establishing that this stage of education “[...] will be offered in day care centers, for children up to three years old, and preschools, for children from 4 to six years old” (Art. 30). It is emphasized that this legal determination was altered with the Constitutional Amendment no. 53, which determines the Child Education to be until five years old.

Therefore, for constituting the first stage of basic education, Child Education has a educative function characterized for its inseparability between education and the care towards the child. Soon, the focus is the child, with the potentialities, necessities and specificities, characters of his/her age group. This way, Child Education has an end in itself, which is to give opportunity to the affective, cognitive and cultural development and not to prepare the child for the future.

In what concerns the professional's training in order to act in this stage, according to new demands presented for the education of children, LDB determines the teacher to be graduated in superior education, in course of full degree level.

In this sense, nowadays, the advances in Child Education are visible, concerning both the concepts and public policies, which is translated in the augmentation of vacancies. However, these advances are not seen in changes of pedagogical practice of teachers who teach and care for babies and small children in collective environments. A possible explanation for this distance between advances achieved and the pedagogical practice concerns the teacher's training. In such sense, it is highlighted the need of investment in the training of the teacher as condition for the construction of pedagogical practices, which will answer to the specificities of the educative action with Brazilian children who are in the age group from zero to five years old, in institutions of Child Education.

Historically, the training for the exercise of teaching in Child Education is marked by gaps. According to Gatti (2009), Child Education concentrates the highest percentage of teachers without proper training. Literature also indicates that superior graduation offered to teachers of Child Education is not sufficient in order to make possible the development of necessary knowledge to the professional performance that educates and cares for babies and children in collective environments, in addition, several professionals enter the work market without any contact with the specific issues of the education here approached. This gap is accentuated when it concerns the education of children from zero to three years old, because, as it is clarified by Secanechia (2011), the small child is invisible in the training of pedagogues.

According to Secanechia (2011), it is notices that the institutions of superior education and their teachers deal with child education in day care center as a theme of low priority. This means that, however the course of Pedagogy being the *locus* for the training of day care center teachers, their actions have not made possible the development of indispensable knowledge to the professional's future in Child Education. However, it is known that in order to educate and care for babies and small children in collective environments it is necessary to have specific training, because, due to its peculiar characteristics, teaching is lined of specificities. This way, the organization of the pedagogic work to them offered must answer to this specificity.

In this context, the University, as training institution, is, according to Severino (2002, p.1), "employee of knowledge, it needs to put this knowledge at the service of society". Therefore, it is its role to train teachers in order to perform as teachers for babies and small children. For such, it is necessary to guide in the universities, particularly in Faculties of Education, discussion about the teaching in Child Education. This debate is made imperative, mainly in because of the fact that, in function of the marginalization that childhood and Child Education has suffered throughout history, few teachers are interested in developing researches about this theme. Consequently, several students leave the course of Pedagogy without knowing the reality of Child Education, particularly the one of the day care center.

However, it is important to highlight that this debate must not happen in isolated manner. The dialogue between University and Child Education institution is profitable, because it allows everyone involved deepening and building much needed knowledge to the exercise of professionalism in Child Education, as well as it makes possible the widening of the view over the importance and the teacher's role in this stage of education in contemporary society. In such sense, it is registered how significant the aforementioned dialogue has been in the process of constructing / (re) constructing the knowledge on the educative practice with babies and small children. This dialogue with the daily of the Child Education institution, through the teaching activities, research and extension has contributed with the process of initial training of students of graduation and post-graduation, as well as the continuous training of teachers of Child Education from the municipal network (BAHIA, 2012).

Even if the existent gap is noticed in the initial training of teachers of Child Education, particularly in day care center, it is known that this training has no intention of offering finished products in order to be consumed in the teaching practice, however it is understood that this is the initial phase of a long process of professional development. In this sense, it is worthy to emphasize that continuous training has a fundamental role in the construction of necessary knowledge to the exercise of teaching with children younger than six years old. For such, according to Ferreira and Zurawski (2011), a curriculum is necessary in order to articulate contents and strategies, which aim the thinking and the qualification of the educative practices with small children. Thus, the training project must be articulated to the curriculum proposition, which is materialized in the situations experienced by children in the daily of the institution. Soon, the training process must be permeated by learning experiences, which are being or not guaranteed for children.

In this perspective, Zurawski (2009) advocates in favor of the construction of a training chain in order to guide the training plan for teachers. In the author's conception, the training chain has as basis the reflection about what is wanted for the children to learn, what teachers need to learn and what the trainer needs to learn to qualify the practices offered to children and to guarantee them good experiences in learning. In this sense, it is possible to infer that the training chain collaborates to the process of training in context, considering its object of study to be the demands of the institution and the teachers' needs and training interests, therefore, part of a work shared between the trainer and the professionals from the institution.

In recognizing the training chain as a possibility of enabling the teachers' training in context, an option was made: to work with the theoretical assumptions of the research-training, because according to Nóvoa (1991), it enables the insertion of the research in a perspective in which the researcher and teachers relate more cooperatively, in a manner so that both parts gain, aiming to conceive changes in the teachers' performance through reflection in and on the practice, valuing the knowledge people have, in way so that the person is at the same time object and subject of the training (NÓVOA, 2004).

Facing the thoughts aforementioned, it is questioned: what is the contribution of the research-training in the process of construction and (re) construction of knowledge needed to exercise of teaching with babies? Which are the changes in the teaching practice with babies deriving from the process of research-training? Thus, the present study aims to think about the contribution of research-training in the process of construction and (re) construction of needed knowledge to the exercise of teaching with babies; to register the changes in teaching practice with babies deriving from the process of research-training; and to contribute with studies about the continuous training of teachers that has as methodological basis the research-training.

1. Development of the study

The research was developed in the year 2013, in a Child Education Unit part of the municipal network of education in Belém, state of Pará. The choice of this Unit is justified by the fact that, in the last two years, the Federal University of Pará has been working in partnership with the Unit in the development of projects of Education¹, Research² and Extension³, which have enabled, besides the permanent dialogue between University and Child Education Institution, the production of knowledge related to education of babies.

The Unit in question serves about eighty babies in the age group from 06 to 48 months old, in full time, in classes of nursery and maternal. The classes of nursery are composed, average, of fifteen babies and three teachers. The classes of maternal are composed, average, of twenty five babies and two teachers. In order to serve the quantitative of babies, the Institution counts on 16 teachers, two coordinators and eight operational servers.

From the group of 16 teachers, 90% entered via public tender, in the public municipal network in the second semester of 2012. The professional experience was much diversified, there were the ones that had already worked with babies and children in educative spaces, but also there were the ones that had never entered a Child Education Institution.

Under the theoretical skeleton of research-training, the project of training in context was executed with the intention of collecting information about the work developed in the Child Education Unit, as well as contributing with the process of training of the teachers' group from the referred institution. Therefore, initially, the teachers' knowledge were surveyed, the experiences lived by them and babies in the Institution, all these information served as basis for the reflection performed during the training meetings with the purpose of widening and/or transforming the teaching practice in significant experiences for the babies and the professionals. The process of thinking about the teaching practice was conducted in order to establish the dialogue between teaching practice and the theorization about the educative work with the small ones. This procedure had as objective to enable to the teachers greater conscience about their tasks, in other words, turning clearer the do teaching. In this dialogy, among other questions, it is highlighted: what to do and why? The several actions occurred concomitantly, during the execution of trainings, but, in order to ease the reader's comprehension they will be explained independently.

¹ This Unit of Child Education is, since 2010, place of internship for students from the Pedagogy Course from UFPA in the discipline Supervised Internship in Child Education, comprehending 136 hours offered in two semesters.

² Organization of Nursery environment in the Child Education Unit Wilson Bahia

³ In the years 2012 and 2013, the *Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Educação Infantil (IPE) – ICED/UFPA* (Group of Studies and Research in Child Education) developed extension projects in this Child Education Unit under the coordination of the researcher from the group, Celi da Costa Silva Bahia.

For the construction of the training chain, a meeting with teachers and coordinators from the Institution was made in order to know their knowledge about the specificities of education with babies and the teaching work performed with them in that Unity. In this meeting, the teachers' expectations about the needs of learning of babies and the necessary knowledge for teachers working with them were also listed. With this, it was noticed the lack for the teachers of a specific knowledge about the educational process in a day care center, therefore they manifested more doubts than certainties about the teaching work to be developed. In what concerns the needs of learning and development of babies, the teachers' ideas were synthesized in the following aspects: movement, language, autonomy (care his/her own body), live in group (to learn what is right and wrong, learn to share, to obey rules, rights and duties), environment, motor coordination (wide and thin), among others. In front of this list, the teachers pointed as needed knowledge to teachers: knowledge about the child's development process, particularly about the competences and babies' needs, the specificity and the objectives of education destined to them, relation with the family, and the curriculum of Child Education and organization of space.

In order to know the learning experiences proportionate to the small ones in the Institution, twice a week sessions of observation of teaching practice were performed. The information from them extracted were registered and stored on videos, photography and field journal. The preliminary reading of the actions directed to the small ones revealed that they were mainly related to physical care, without planning for the development, in other words, the practices were predominantly spontaneous, in general the teachers were much uneasy, insecure and tense, especially about the constant complaints from the families. Besides that, the room space was empty of objects. The work was turbulent and the dialogues with the small ones almost inexistent.

Based on this information from teachers and on the data observed the training chain was organized having the following themes: the process of teachers' personal and professional constitution from the Unit and its articulation with teaching in Child Education; the babies' development and learning in collective environments; care and education as specificities of the teaching in Child Education; the curriculum in Child Education and the organization of the teachers' work; and the importance of space organization in babies' educational process.

With the purpose of securing the assumptions of research-training in context, after the organization of the training chain, it was decided to perform monthly meetings, in two moments, namely: one, with the teachers collective from the Institution; the other, with the group of teachers from each class. The methodology used in these meetings was distinct in function of the objectives of each one, as it is demonstrated.

The monthly collective meetings had as objective to discuss the specificity of the teaching practice with babies. Thus, it was aimed to create, through theoretical and practical interventional actions, conditions so that the teachers from Unit could, in first place, to dialogue about their process of personal and professional constitutional and how such process is articulated with the teaching in Child Education. For such, the teachers were invited to revisit their childhoods through cultural artifacts, which could rescue possible childhood memories. At widening this memory of personal and professional constitution, each teacher shared with the group how they were constituted babies' teachers. In the debate about professional identity, the discussion approached the specificity of the teaching practice in education and care of babies in collective spaces, focusing on the teacher's role in the babies' humanization process. During the discussion, it was made sure how much this specificity of educating and caring for babies is marked by subtlety action, these not always noticed in the daily routine, but determining in the characterization of this profession. This subtlety is present in daily actions, apparently of little significance, but which reveal the complexity of the teacher's role in humanizing pedagogic practice.

In another moment, the discussion was directed to the space as mediator element of learning and as product of social relations. Based on the thoughts, which permeated this debate, the training activity was directed to the experimentation of several possibilities of space organization, having as reference the babies and their biological, cultural, social, affective and cognitive needs.

Posteriorly, this discussion was widened for the debate about the curriculum in Child Education, with the purpose of making possible the teachers' comprehension for the organization of a curriculum lined in the learning experiences. For such, initially, an approach to the theoretical fundamentals for this discussion was made; after, a circuit through interactive spaces was organized, so the teachers could live through their hands, eyes, ears and body different learning experiences. Such experiences were conducted through ludic-body experiences with the purpose of favoring the teachers' comprehension that the child uses many forms for expression: the gesture, the word, the drawing, the music, the play, the movement. This is the babies and small children own way of being in the world, which gives to them opportunities of expression, knowledge appropriation and culture production.

The moments of experience were conducted so they could sharpen the teachers' perception about how the corporal expression is the vocabulary used by the child, including the babies, to express their subjectivity, their desires and their needs, as well as the body is a fundamental element for them in the construction of their identity and in the process of knowing the world and things. Therefore, for them the process of knowledge is given through the body. The child is the body in movement in the expression of ideas, affects, sensations, thoughts. The body is the child's first instrument of thinking, in which he / she anchors his / her knowledge. In such sense, the teachers also reflected about the need of creating spaces and times, in the daily of the Institution, in which the children's manifestations are present and being comprehended in their integrity, with multiples expressions. And, in this context, the teacher's role as researcher of the rich diversity of child manifestations in conducting an humanizing pedagogic practice is doubtless indispensable.

For their turn, the meetings of groups aimed to discuss specific situations of each class of babies, teachers and family. For such, as method, the conversation circle (MELLO ET AL, 2007) was used. In these meetings, the teachers brought situations experienced in the daily of the Institution, their knowledge, their concerns, their doubts and insecurities about the educational process of the small ones in collective environments. Therefore, the discussions started with the teachers' descriptions about the work they were performing, the results achieved, the difficulties faced, as well as the possibilities of intervention in the focused situation. In that moment, the researchers received the ideas and feelings from the teachers, through attentive and reflexive listening, with the aim of valuing the work of these teachers and being able to help them thinking their practices from the studies performed in the collective meetings. In such sense, the teaching practice was the starting and arriving point of the entire work developed, because the situations experienced by the children and teachers in the daily of the Institution were object of analysis and reflection and subsidized the construction and reconstruction of new experiences aiming to widening and/or transforming the learning situations offered to the babies.

The conversation circle potentiated the debate about the themes from the training chain, which permeated the collective meetings in singular manner, because it made possible articulating these with the situations that emerged from the daily. Besides that, the circle also represented a space for the teachers to express their ideas and feelings, which influence very much in the teaching work. The opportunity of sharing not only experiences and knowledge, but also doubts, insecurities, dissatisfactions, as well as soliciting suggestions and support for situations faced day by day was significant in the process of learning to be a babies' teacher. This way, it was identified that, in the process of continuous training, the training chain is important and necessary. However, this training is not restricted to the study of themes previously decided, on the contrary, it includes the context daily experienced in the institution. Therefore, the demands from the Unit teachers, who were in their majority entering the Child Education, needed to be received aiming to proportionate more safety and tranquility in the process of learning to educate-care for the little ones.

2. Considerations

From the studies performed during the process of training in context, it was possible do identify that the dialogue established between University and Child Education Institution was much profitable for these institutions. For the Child Education Institution, the wrok developed during the process of research-training served as basis in the process of babies' teachers' constitution, because through the meetings they widened their views over what it is to be a teacher of babies. The meetings made possible for them to deconstruct and reconstruct ideas about the babies and their process of learning in collective environments; to better comprehend the specificity of the teaching work with babies; to widen the ideas about curriculum in Child Education through the perspective of valuing the small ones and ways they use to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings.

The comprehension of who is the baby and his / her educational process favored the review of the pedagogic practice and the teachers started to see and understand the baby in the moment he / she is living and, consequently, they started to hear and to pay more attention to them and what they say, as well as on the singularity through which they learn. The teachers had learned to organize in better manner the teaching work so they could be more available for the babies and families. As example of new practices construction, a teacher reported: "before I bathed the babies in a hurry, today I do not do that anymore, I talk, I sing in the bath hour, because this is a moment of intimacy between teacher and baby and in it many learning happen". With the meetings and dialogues, the teachers opened the doors for the families to know the work developed by the Institution. This dynamic allowed the teachers understanding their role in the search for approximating the families.

In front of the reflections made during the development of this study, it is possible to affirm that the training in context, based on research-training, revealed to be significant in the construction of the Unit teachers' professionalism. Through the discussions performed, of sensitive listening, which valued the teachers' knowledge and also the receiving of their doubts, the training activities contributed for the comprehension of the specificity of the pedagogic work with babies, which is marked by subtlety of actions present in the relation between teachers and babies. In this process, the teachers had comprehended their importance in the small ones' humanization. On last instance, it contributed on the teachers' development of self-esteem and it was translated in the recognition of the Child Education teacher's importance in the contemporary society.

For the University, the dialogue with the institution was also marked by many learning, because the involvement of the researchers in diverse training moments, such as the theoretical discussion, the dialogue about the practice and researchers' several moments of participation in the day care center daily routine, made possible to see how much is there to learn about the specificity of the teaching practice in the babies' education in collective environments. All that favored the reflection and deepening of theoretical-practical questions that are posed on literature about babies' education and about the training of teachers who will perform in this field. Therefore, the researchers' immersion in the Institution at study contributed with the production and the deepening of fundamental knowledge for the student's training process from the Degree in Pedagogy course and the teachers' continuous training.

Finally, the research-training revealed to be effective in the process of research about the educational practice with babies in collective environments. In the Unit teachers' training course, we learn that the continuous training is not a linear process, because the context is dynamic and of difficult prediction. Thus, the historical patience said by Paulo Freire is necessary. Each one (child, parents, teacher, researcher) who shares the teaching in different instances has his / her time of learning. The same way, the results intended are not achieved in immediate manner, however daily investment is necessary to build them.

3. References

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