

Teachers' conceptions of infants and literature: intersecting voices and perspectives

Concepções de professoras sobre bebês e literatura: vozes e olhares que se inter cruzam

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an empirical qualitative study that investigated early childhood teachers' conceptions regarding literature for infants, grounded in Historical — Cultural Psychology. The research was conducted in two methodological stages: the administration of a questionnaire to characterize the participants and their pedagogical practices, and the conduction of semi — structured interviews aimed at deepening the understanding of how literature is integrated into lesson planning. The findings indicate that, although teachers recognize the relevance of literature in early childhood, they face challenges such as limited book collections, constraints in time and space, a lack of continuing education, and the persistence of traditionalist conceptions. Literary mediation practices reveal the use of multiple languages, highlighting the importance of intentional and sensitive acts of reading. The study concludes that Early Childhood Education must promote meaningful encounters with literature from the earliest years of life.

Keywords: literature; infants; Historical – Cultural Psychology.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa qualitativa, de natureza empírica, que investigou as concepções de professoras de bebês sobre o trabalho com a literatura, à luz da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural. O estudo desenvolveu-se em duas etapas metodológicas: aplicação de questionário para caracterização das participantes e de suas práticas pedagógicas e realização de entrevistas semiestruturadas, visando aprofundar a compreensão sobre a inserção da literatura nos planejamentos docentes. Os resultados indicam que, embora as professoras reconheçam a relevância da literatura desde a primeira infância, enfrentam desafios como a escassez de acervos, limitações de tempo e espaço, ausência de formação continuada e a persistência de concepções tradicionalistas. As práticas de mediação literária evidenciam o uso de múltiplas linguagens, destacando a importância de atos leitores intencionais e sensíveis. Conclui-se que a Educação Infantil deve promover encontros significativos com a literatura desde os primeiros anos de vida.

Palavras-chave: literatura; bebês; Psicologia Histórico-Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

The research underlying this study is characterized as qualitative, as it seeks to understand the meanings, conceptions, and interpretations attributed by teachers to pedagogical practices involving literature within the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Reflecting on infants and their modes of insertion into the world — particularly within institutionalized ECE settings — has mobilized our curiosity regarding teaching practices centered on literature for children¹, primarily accessed through listening to texts and storytelling.

¹ We will use the term children's literature because we agree with the controversies surrounding the adjective "childish" as a way of inferiorizing the literary form intended for children, although we agree with Abrantes (2020) in stating that significant literary works constitute objectifications of interest to human beings and are linked to their problems in general.

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Study conducted at Universidade Federal de Uberlândia (UFU), Uberlândia, MG, Brasil.



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We begin with a defense of the child's right to access culture from early childhood², understanding literature as a human production of language that builds bridges to the subjects' subjectivity. Candido (2011) asserts that literature occupies a fundamental place and constitutes an inalienable human right, as it fosters the process of humanization: "Literature develops in us a quota of humanity to the extent that it makes us more understanding and open to nature, society, and our fellow human beings" (Candido, 2011, p. 180).

Thus, this work highlights the indispensable role of literature as both a necessity and a right, through which we reaffirm the fabric of becoming human in relation to the other within social spaces. This process begins in the first months of life, when the infant, immersed in their mother tongue, constructs meaning from words that are read, sung, or spoken.

According to Bajard (2012), a child's encounter with written language occurs through adult intervention and can happen very early. By crawling among books and listening to stories, infants already benefit from the richness of the written text even before learning to read it. Literary reading enables multiple interactions with language and strengthens affective bonds between the child and the adult reader, as well as between the child and the book as a cultural object.

The research was conducted in Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, in 2022, with teachers working in nursery classrooms (*berçários*) within the public municipal school system. Participants were selected through voluntary adhesion, respecting the ethical principles of human subjects research. The central objective was to understand these teachers' conceptions regarding literature for and with infants. Specifically, the study sought to identify whether literature was present in pedagogical planning, the frequency with which it was utilized, and the contributions and challenges perceived in daily teaching practice.

Furthermore, this investigation problematizes traditional paradigms concerning child development and access to literature, advocating for pedagogical practices that recognize infants as subjects of rights-active participants and producers of meaning within social and cultural contexts.

To produce the data, two instruments were employed: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire enabled the collection of information regarding the teachers' initial training, years of service, and experience with infants. The interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the participants' conceptions of literature, pedagogical practices, challenges faced, and their perceptions of the importance of literature in child development.

The theoretical and methodological framework is grounded in Historical-Cultural Psychology (HCP), articulating the teachers' voices with contributions from Vygotsky (1991, 2000, 2004), Mello (2004), Mello and Farias (2010), Mello and Singulani (2014, 2017), and other authors who view literature as cultural production and a human right.

Examining infants through the lens of HCP leads to an understanding of human development as a multidetermined process, marked by the intertwining of biological planes — the physical body and sensory organs — and cultural planes — social, historical, and symbolic. This creates the conditions for humans to develop within their human-generic dimensions. Literature brings social subjects together through experiences, traditions, knowledge, and identities, contributing to moral, intellectual, emotional, and social development.

Consequently, the narrative culture present in literature constitutes one of the most fundamental forms of culture developed by societies, transmitted from generation to generation. It represents a people's history, situating them in time and conferring specific identity and values. Given this, it is necessary to distinguish between certain concepts, such as reading and storytelling, which intersect with the term "literary reading" in pedagogical practice. Undoubtedly, the spoken narrative — whether through musical or enunciative means — represents one of the primary entry points to language in ECE.

In this study, we choose to use the term *spoken narrative* (*narrativa proferida*) to refer to loud reading performed by the teacher. According to Bajard (2012), this concept is often misused.

² In this work, "Early Childhood" is considered, as addressed in Law No. 13.257 of March 8, 2016, to be the period encompassing the first 6 (six) full years of a child's life (Brasil, 2016).

The author highlights the dual nature of reading: on one hand, it is a solitary activity, a moment when the teacher discovers the text before narrating it; on the other, reading aloud is directed at a listener, facilitated by the act of speaking or uttering the text. In this sense, Bajard warns that comprehension alone “is not enough to define the act of reading: listening to a spoken text — a task accessible to an illiterate person — is not reading” (Bajard, 2012, p. 24).

In this relationship, where there is a sender who utters the text and a receiver who listens, both are spared the task of reading itself. The author asserts that if, after “becoming acquainted with an unknown text,” the reader decides to utter it aloud, the reading has already occurred in the prior solitary moment; thus, the “publication” via the voice does not constitute a new reading. Therefore, Bajard proposes deconstructing the expression, suggesting the use of the terms “to utter” or “to speak the text” to specifically address the transmission of text through the voice (Bajard, 2012, p. 25).

But what, then, does it mean to tell stories? It is an ancestral cultural practice akin to theater and serves as a foundation for human education, present in all cultures. When telling or retelling a story or a practice Bajard characterizes as belonging to orality, or “*orature*,” to distinguish it from written literature — the storyteller transmits narratives received from their community to new generations, supported by a stable structure and conveyed through constantly transforming expressive forms (Bajard, 2012). In retelling, the narrator uses a particular form of communication, often linked to everyday vocabulary; in contrast, the written text explores language in an elaborate manner, with expanded grammar and vocabulary.

It is important to emphasize that Bajard (2012) differentiates the listening experience of a non-literate child accessing a written text through the voice of the one uttering it from the listening experience of an oral retelling. While retelling is situated in the universe of orality, listening to a written text — even when mediated by the voice — introduces the listener to the universe of writing.

When a child is included in a community of readers, they have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and approach different worlds and cultures. Literary narratives prove fundamental to emotional education and human development, as they allow the child to understand themselves, the other, and the world around them, expanding their experience with language authentically at any age. In this sense, Antunes (2009, p. 200) states:

It is necessary to experience literary texts to immerse oneself in the mystery, in the world of fiction, and in the scenes and images created by words. The care taken to develop competence in reading the textual genres that circulate daily in society (such as letters, notices, advertisements, etc.) must not weaken the commitment to promoting engagement with different literary genres and the works to which they belong. The history of our crossing, throughout the centuries, is also reflected in the great intertext that constitutes our literary collection.

It is fundamental to reflect on the book as a cultural object, imbued with social and human experiences, as well as on how it is presented within educational practices. The dimension of this object in human development is significant, as it fosters emotional, social, and cognitive development. According to Abramovich (1999), when children hear stories, they perceive their feelings regarding the world and discover places, rules, times, and ways of acting from other perspectives, for “[...] listening to stories can stimulate drawing, music-making, going out, staying in, thinking, role-playing, imagining, playing, looking at the book, writing, and wanting to hear it again (the same story or another one)” (Abramovich, 1999, p. 23).

Thus, the literary book in the education of children from the earliest age functions as a cultural object that guides the course of human development. Depending on how, how frequently, and with what intentionality it is integrated into pedagogical practices, it may enhance — or limit — the movement of reading acts in the constitution of the human subject.

METHOD

The epistemological framework adopted is the Qualitative Epistemology of González Rey (2017, p. 5), which understands knowledge as an interpretive, singular, and dialogical construction.

Starting from Qualitative Epistemology, I attempt to develop an open reflection, free from *a priori* anchors regarding the demands and necessities of producing knowledge within a qualitative perspective; I seek to take a stance on the new questions and answers created when implementing a different process of knowledge construction, thus avoiding the transition through new options using principles already established by previous epistemological representations that do not respond to new challenges. This attempt [...] [aims at] the development of epistemologies in different fields of knowledge, a fact I consider the only real way to face the epistemological challenges emerging in the methodological fields of each science.

This approach highlights three basic principles for knowledge production. The first refers to its constructive-interpretive nature, which understands knowledge as a human construction in constant transformation, rather than a linear process. The second pertains to its singularity, considering the importance of particularity in explaining reality based on the theoretical framework adopted by the researchers. Finally, the third principle emphasizes the communication process, whereby knowledge is constructed through dialogue with the other.

So, these principles from González Rey's (2017) theory highlight the subjective character of the research and its understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and affective aspects that permeate the entire investigative process, even when not immediately perceptible. Due to its interpretive nature, qualitative research allows the researcher to engage in an intensive experience with the participants, as it considers that the construction of knowledge does not occur in isolation from the constitution of the subjects involved in the study.

As a starting point for data construction, documentary research was employed to seek indicative clues of possible connections leading to the encounter between literature and infants. By approaching the sense and meaning of working with literature, the research focus turned toward specific and historical paths present in the documents that regulate Early Childhood Education (ECE), prompting reflections on the place occupied by children in accessing literary culture.

The purpose of the documentary research in this study was not to provide an in-depth historical analysis of the following official documents — the Federal Constitution (CF/88); the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA/90); the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI/2009); the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC/2017); and the Municipal Curriculum Guidelines of Uberlândia (DCMEI/2020) — but rather to search for clues indicating paths of encounter between literature and infants, as well as new routes and possible linkages. Certain terms guided by this search, such as reading, culture, literary books, and telling and listening to stories.

In this sense, documentary research served as one of the pathways in the composition of the investigation, acting as a complementary and fundamental methodological procedure to support the investigative work. The context of data production occurred in public ECE schools within the municipal system of Uberlândia, Minas Gerais (EMEIs), which had classrooms for infants up to 1 year and 9 months old.

In May 2022, following authorization from the Municipal Education Department (SME), 31 emails were sent to the respective school units, including the signed authorization term from the SME as an attachment. In June 2022, the request was resented to schools that had not confirmed receipt of the email or the principal's acceptance for the administration of the questionnaire.

The research participants were teachers of infants working in 13 of the 31 EMEIs that served children up to 18 months old in that year (2022). Subsequently, a general mapping table was developed covering all regions of the municipality, indicating the location of the schools that agreed to participate in the study, as illustrated in Figure 1, based on field research records.

The school units were numerically identified from 1 to 13 and designated by sequential letters of the alphabet (A through M) to ensure the anonymity of both the institutions and the participants, following the effective confirmation of participation by the teachers from these units.

To elicit the participants' perceptions, the instruments utilized for data construction were a printed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Table 1 presents the overall number of participants:

A total of 37 printed questionnaires were delivered, and some were sent virtually; however, it is noteworthy that two school units did not return them, despite multiple contact attempts. This stage was concluded with a total of 28 completed questionnaires, 6 of which were submitted virtually and 22 in printed form.

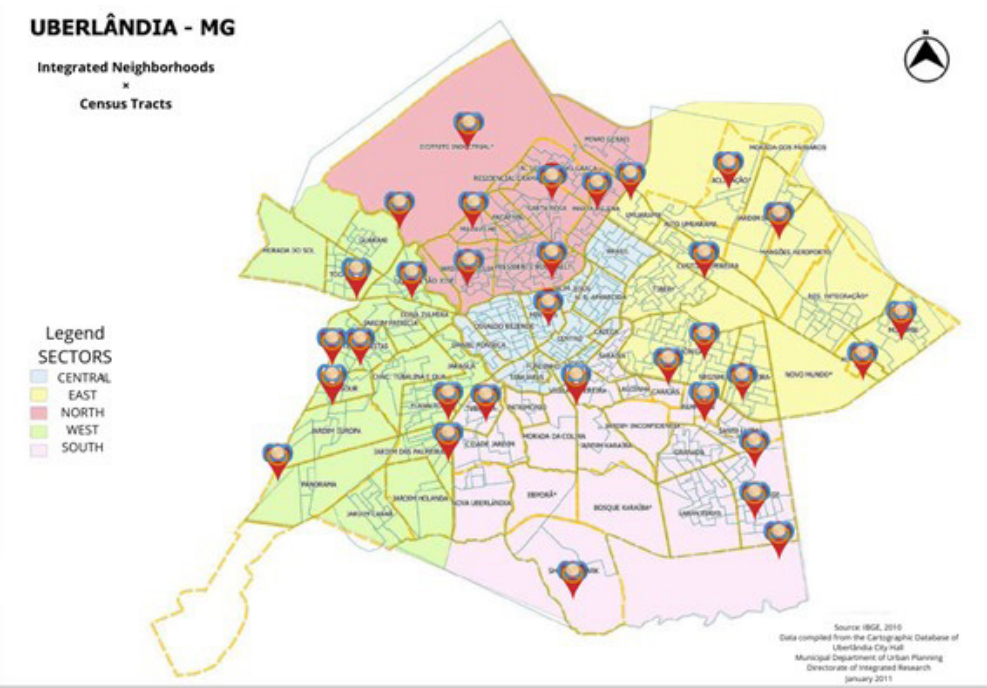


Figure 1. Zoning of participating EMEIs.
Source: Municipality of Uberlândia (2026). Adapted by the author.

Table 1. Overall number of participating teachers.

School units	Lead teachers working with infants up to 18 months old
1. School A	3
2. School B	3
3. School C	3
4. School D	2
5. School E	2
6. School F	6
7. School G	2
8. School H	2
9. School I	2
10. School J	3
11. School K	2
12. School L	5
13. School M	4
Total	37

Source: Prepared by the researchers (2022).

In the second stage of the research, conducted through semi-structured interviews, the participants were those teachers who had confirmed their acceptance and provided their contact number or email address at the end of the questionnaire.

In this process, our objective was to identify the conceptions of teachers working with infants in the municipal system of Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, regarding literary work. Based on the results obtained, we sought to investigate whether literature was included in pedagogical planning, as well as to map the primary contributions and difficulties related to working with literature for and with infants. For the analysis of the collected data, the premises of Historical-Cultural Psychology (HCP) were adopted, as they offer relevant principles for understanding child development.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed that the teachers' conceptions of working with literature for and with infants are permeated by recognitions, tensions, and challenges, evidencing both advancements and limitations in the organization of pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education (ECE). The results indicate that, although there is a consensus regarding the relevance of literature for child development, its materialization in the daily life of institutions remains marked by contradictions between teaching discourse and concrete working conditions, as well as by pedagogical conceptions that alternately approach a historical-cultural perspective and reproduce traditionalist, centralized models.

To systematize the analysis, the results were organized into four axes: (1) professional profile; (2) organization of pedagogical work with infants; (3) school structure and material conditions; and (4) work with literature and certain propositions.

Professional profile

Broadly speaking, the participants in this research are predominantly women, mostly aged between 31 and 45, with significant experience in Early Childhood Education. The average duration of service in infant classrooms was approximately three years, although many teachers already possessed between nine and thirteen years of experience in ECE.

This data reinforces the historical feminization of this stage of basic education—a phenomenon that is not only numerical but also symbolic, as it relates to the social construction of care as a female attribute. The results corroborate data from the 2020 School Census (Brasil, 2021), which indicates that 96.4% of ECE teachers are women. Such a massive presence reveals not only a characteristic of the professional field but also a political and pedagogical challenge: the need to recognize teaching work with infants as an intellectual, cultural, and formative activity — rather than merely an extension of maternal care.

The participants are mostly tenured teachers (*professoras efetivas*) in the Uberlândia municipal system, working with “G1” groups (children up to two years old) and “Nursery” (*Berçário*) groups (children from four months to one year old). This profile indicates professional stability, which could favor more planned and reflective pedagogical practices. However, the data evidence that such stability does not automatically translate into specific training or adequate material conditions for working with literature.

The organization of pedagogical work with infants

Teaching work with infants revealed itself to be permeated by a permanent tension between care and pedagogical intentionality. Daily time in nursery rooms is divided between basic care (feeding, hygiene, sleep) and pedagogical activities, among which literary reading appears intermittently.

Teachers recognize that working with infants requires sensitivity, emotional availability, and an attentive reading of gestures and body expressions, as discussed by López (2018). Nevertheless, institutional routines frequently prioritize physical care, relegating literature to brief and often improvised moments, as observed in Figure 2.

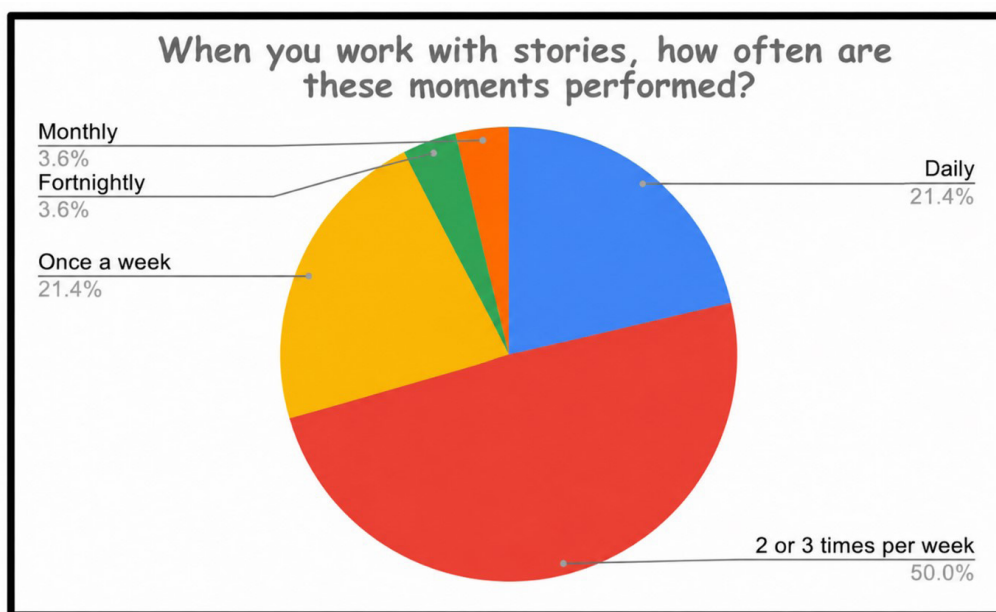


Figure 2. Frequency of work activities.

Source: Prepared by the researchers, based on research data (2023).

In analyzing the frequency of literary activities, we observed the following:

- Item 1: 21.4% of the teachers reported working with literature daily;
- Item 2: 50% stated they perform activities with books two to three times a week;
- Item 3: 21.4% reported working biweekly;
- Items 4 and 5: 3.6% mentioned doing so monthly.

These data indicate that, although most teachers recognize the importance of literature, its presence is not yet systematic within the pedagogical routine. This variation in frequency suggests differing conceptions regarding the role of books in childcare centers: for some, it is a central practice; for others, it remains a complementary or occasional resource.

From the perspective of Historical-Cultural Psychology (HCP), this oscillation is problematic, as continuous contact with written culture is fundamental for the development of higher psychological functions, especially language, attention, and imagination (Vygotsky, 2000, 2004). When literature appears sporadically, much of its formative and humanizing potential is lost.

School structure

Regarding structural conditions, all participants stated that their schools have available literary collections. However, consistent criticisms emerged concerning the quality, suitability, and diversity of these materials.

A primary issue identified was the inadequacy of the books for the infants' age group. Many teachers reported that most of the collection is intended for older children, typically over four years old, featuring lengthy texts, fragile pages, and images that are unappealing to infants. This limits opportunities for sensory exploration and autonomous handling of books.

Another recurring aspect refers to the fragility of the materials, which leads many teachers to prevent infants from having free access to books for fear of tears or damage. While understandable from a material standpoint, such restrictions ultimately limit fundamental experiences of tactile, visual, and motor exploration with the book as an object.

Given these gaps, some teachers reported producing their own materials—handmade books, sensory panels, and story adaptations—as a strategy to circumvent the inadequacy of the institutional collection. While these initiatives demonstrate teacher commitment and creativity, they also reveal the absence of effective public policies for bibliodiversity aimed at early childhood.

These results indicate that guaranteeing the right to literature depends not only on the presence of books but on the availability of a suitable, durable, aesthetically qualified, and accessible collection for infants.

Literary work and proposals

The analysis of the interviews showed that teachers attribute great importance to literature in child development, associating it primarily with the expansion of oral language, the development of imagination, and the construction of affective bonds between adults and children.

However, the way literature is incorporated into pedagogical practice reveals significant contradictions. In many classrooms, reading occurs in a “circle” format, with infants sitting in a semicircle while the teacher narrates stories or shows videos. This organization tends to privilege passive listening and teacher-centeredness, reducing the possibilities for active exploration by the infants.

Some teachers reported frustration with children’s wandering attention during reading, interpreting this behavior as a lack of interest. However, in light of HCP, such dispersion can be understood as the result of practices poorly suited to infants’ learning styles, which are primarily constituted through the body, movement, manipulation, and sensory interaction with the environment.

Another central challenge identified relates to pedagogical time. Teachers reported that much of the day is consumed by basic care, which restricts the space allotted to literature. Reading is often inserted into 10-to-30-minute intervals between bathing, feeding, and sleeping, characterizing it as an accelerated and fragmented practice.

This organization reinforces the historical dichotomy between “care” and “education,” which persists in ECE despite legal and pedagogical advancements. The data indicate that literature tends to be understood as a pedagogical activity dissociated from care, whereas, from a historical-cultural perspective, both should integrate into a humanizing educational practice.

Despite these limitations, important advancements were also identified. Many teachers reported using multiple languages in literary mediation, such as music, body gestures, dramatization, and retelling. These strategies demonstrate pedagogical sensitivity and alignment with contemporary conceptions of childhood that recognize the infant as an active and expressive subject.

Nevertheless, such practices still lack greater theoretical intentionality and systematic planning. In many cases, literature appears as a playful or recreational resource rather than a structural aesthetic and cultural experience for human development.

When analyzing the difficulties reported by teachers in implementing this work, the time dedicated to physical care and basic needs emerges as a complex aspect of the infant routine. Teachers express concern with “welcoming” (*acolhimento*), which differs from other routine moments such as songs, toys on the floor, or the use of television. However, teachers do not mention using books in these situations due to the accelerated pace of the routine.

Bia (2022) expresses this tension by stating the difficulty of “[...] *reconciling the few moments of being with them with the various moments infants must have, such as bathing, sleeping, and meals*” Furthermore, the infants’ attention spans and the adaptation period appear in the reports as factors that hinder systematic work with literature.

The research highlights the need to overcome teacher-centered practices, which are often influenced by maturationist conceptions of learning still rooted in ECE. It is essential that teachers promote experiences that enable the constitution of meaningful reading acts within children’s social groups.

Finally, the study identifies a fragility in the participants' initial training regarding literary work. This underscores the importance of investing in both initial and continuing teacher education for literary mediation. A federal initiative in 2024, the *Leitura e Escrita na Educação Infantil* (LEEI) program, is a significant reference in this regard.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of literary work depends on the conception of the child that guides pedagogical practice, corroborating Mello and Singulani (2017), p. 42), who discusses:

[...] the intelligence and personality of very young children are formed through lived experiences and depend on the place they occupy within these experiences: how much they act, participate in the choices we allow them to make, and how much they decide, explore, and experiment. This is because it is only through their activity — their active engagement — that their learning and development advance. [...] Development is a possibility and depends on what infants and very young children experience and how they feel within those experiences.

Mello and Singulani's (2017) words direct our focus toward the organization of pedagogical work and suggest the possibility of developing practices that differ from those reported by the research participants during literary reading moments. These reported situations are predominantly characterized by everyone performing the same activity at the same time, with a strong emphasis on the teacher-centered figure. This aspect can be observed in the following accounts:

I work on reading in semicircles with infants sitting on the floor using videos (Danielle, 2022).

The infants are not interested; they scatter and frustrate the reading moment. Narration/storytelling is more accepted; however, the stories that capture their attention and spark their interest are few and become repetitive throughout the year (Mariana, 2022).

Broadly speaking, it is identified that the participating teachers recognize literature as a relevant element in child development, associating it with the expansion of language, imagination, and interactions with infants. In their accounts, the presence of the book appears linked to attentive listening, image observation, the adult's vocal intonation, and the possibilities for affective bonding established during reading moments.

This understanding dialogues with the premises of Historical-Cultural Psychology (HCP), which conceives human development as the result of social interactions mediated by culture (Vygotsky, 2004). Even though infants do not make autonomous use of written language, early contact with literature constitutes a fundamental mediating experience in the formation of higher psychological functions, especially regarding language, attention, and memory.

Despite understanding the importance of literary work and recognizing that it should begin from the earliest age, teachers encounter challenges to its effectiveness, such as low diversity in collections, dissatisfaction with the conditions for literary reading — specifically regarding timed schedules, insufficient space, and a lack of material resources — and the absence of permanent continuing education.

Furthermore, although they recognize the importance of literature, the participants do not always understand it as a practice with its own pedagogical intentionality, revealing an incipient conception of the role of literature as a cultural right of infants. Regarding literary mediation, it is observed that work with and for infants often occurs through interfaces with other artistic languages — such as oral utterance of the text, theater, retelling, music, and the body — which, while potent, does not always guarantee the centrality of the literary experience itself.

In this sense, it is necessary to understand the relevance of reading acts and recognize the essential nature of contact with written language, as well as the fostering of aesthetic experiences for the constitution of the infant's human subjectivity. Overly centralized conceptions of learning can limit or even restrict the possibilities for robust literary work that enhances the development of human qualities.

Literature in the routine: between care and pedagogical intentionality

Another recurring aspect in the participants' voices refers to how literature is inserted into the nursery routine. The data indicate that work with books and narratives occurs predominantly during care moments, such as welcoming, rest, or transitions between activities.

This presence of literature in daily life can be understood as a strength, insofar as it recognizes care as an educational space. However, it also reveals a tension: literature often appears as secondary, associated with a specific theme to be explored rather than as an intentionally planned aesthetic and cultural experience. Mello and Farias (2010) emphasizes that the organization of pedagogical work with infants requires conscious and planned actions capable of promoting the child's encounter with historically produced cultural assets.

In this context, it is necessary to problematize the quality of the established interactions. In an infant classroom, multiple situations happen simultaneously. These actions should favor the observation and recording of mimetic gestures, imitations, and expressions, valuing children's unique ways of acting and signifying the world. Ultimately, psychic development cannot be thought of as dissociated from the affective bonds built between the child and the adult.

Challenges: collection, training, and working conditions

Among the main challenges highlighted by the teachers, the scarcity and inadequacy of literary collections intended for infants stand out. The participants report a lack of durable, diverse, and age-appropriate books. This research advocates for the availability of a qualified collection built on criteria of bibliodiversity.

The teachers also point to the need for continuing education specifically addressing literary work in childcare centers (creches). Although they participate in training within the ECE field, they claim these moments rarely cover the particularities of literature for infants in depth.

DISCUSSION

Experience and research have shown that a fact imbued with emotion is remembered more solidly than an indifferent event (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 121). We assume that the experiences offered to children only become meaningful when lived in a way that produces sense for their future trajectories and their human development process.

Pedagogical actions are only truly effective when permeated by affect. Vygotsky (2000, p. 146) highlights that "[...] love can become a talent as much as genius," evidencing that affectivity is not a secondary element of development but a constitutive dimension of human experience. Thus, there is no learning dissociated from affect, nor psychic development apart from the social relations that sustain it.

According to Mello and Singulani (2014, p. 882), assuming this historical-cultural understanding of the humanization process implies:

[...] understanding the essential nature of education—that is, of all the experiences lived by the child within a culture and mediated by others — for the constitution of personality. It implies, therefore, resizing the teacher's role in organizing the set of experiences that children encounter in school, so that the relationship between culture, the teacher, and the child promotes this formation of personality to its fullest potential.

Recognizing that child development does not occur spontaneously or in a naturalized manner, but is constituted by the social, cultural, and educational conditions provided, is essential. This requires intentional, conscious, and committed action from adults to promote experiences that enable the appropriation of cultural assets historically produced by humanity. For infants, this intentionality is materialized in the organization of time, space, relations, and mediations that foster meaningful encounters with language, art, and literature.

Some reflections highlighted in this research concern the child's encounter with written culture. We advocate for the infant's "reading of the world," as they are born immersed in it and, consequently, "read" voices, gestures, scents, spaces, and the bodily tones of those who cradle them. This reading is facilitated by encounters with the other, with others, and with oneself. It is within the narrative gestated through the shared relationship of affective care with the adult that infants construct meaning. In this sense, Marx (1962) mentions that all relations with the world involving our organs individually constitute an objective action for the appropriation of human reality (seeing, hearing, tasting, desiring, thinking, acting). In this relationship, woven within the spaces that open up to the infant, moments of encounter with the elements of human culture are created.

An action directly related to the conception of education manifests in the adult's practices involving literature. In this case, we refer to the literary mediator, who, according to Mello (2004, p. 153), is one who "approaches the child, presents the world of culture to them, and creates in them needs, interests, and motives, according to the experience provided". From the earliest days of child development, their activities acquire specific meaning within a system of social behavior and are directed toward defined goals, refracted by the environment in which the child is situated.

The path from the object to the child and from the child to the object necessarily passes through the intermediation of another person. The complex human structure is the product of a development process deeply rooted in the relations between individual history and social history (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 33). Intentionality in planning literary work for and with infants in institutionalized education environments allows us to conceive and bring an inalienable human right — access to the cultural elements necessary for the development of their maximum human potential — closer to these historical and social subjects.

Intentional and reflective pedagogical practices awaken human needs in the child; in the case of literature, these needs are expressed internally through retelling and literary reading practices within the specific context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Such experiences are part of the learning process and open possibilities for the development of human skills. Therefore, we highlight the fundamental role of embryonic acts of reading, as well as the essentiality of language and affect as the fabric enveloping literary reading, for as Coelho (1986, p. 13) emphasizes:

Not every story comes in a book ready to be told. It is necessary to select and consider, among other factors, the literary point of view, the listener's interest, their age group, and their socioeconomic conditions. If the story does not awaken sensitivity, the emotion in the listeners will not be heard with success and attention.

It is understood that, in Early Childhood Education, the educator's role is to safeguard children's right to education and promote their holistic development. According to Kramer (2006), this process occurs through caring and educating, conceived as inseparable dimensions that encompass different aspects of the child's life, such as the biological, cultural, psychological, and cognitive. From this perspective, in addition to care, the teacher must provide children with access to playful and diverse experiences, introducing them to different ways of thinking and acting in the most varied situations.

Thus, we can rely on the epistemological assumptions of Cultural-Historical Psychology (CHP), which highlight the relevance of social experiences for children to understand the world. This approach understands infants as active subjects, endowed with potential, who need to be welcomed and recognized in their capacity to perform activities that carry a humanizing meaning in their lives. In this context, pedagogical planning emerges as an opportunity to offer infants moments of contact with the cultural, social, and historical resources produced by humanity.

Therefore, we are supported by a theoretical framework that considers the child, from birth, as an active subject in the humanization process and a fundamental recipient of the right to reading and literature, understood as universal human rights. We advocate for literary reading in its multiple learning possibilities within the environments frequented by infants, provided that their pace, singularities, and interests are respected, a foundational condition for the construction of truly humanizing pedagogical practices.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms the indispensable role of literature as a human necessity and right, understood as a constitutive element of the humanization process from early childhood. In light of Historical-Cultural Psychology, intentionally mediated literature provides infants with access to humanity's cultural productions and the construction of meaning in social interactions, articulating language, affect, and culture.

The data evidenced that teachers recognize the relevance of working with literature from infancy; however, this recognition does not always materialize in systematic pedagogical practices. Tensions persist regarding traditionalist pedagogical conceptions, the fragmentation of pedagogical time, the material conditions of institutions, and the fragility of specific teacher training for literary mediation in childcare centers.

Understanding learning as the attribution of meaning to educational experiences requires intentional, grounded pedagogical planning committed to the totality of child development. Literature cannot be treated as an accessory activity but as an aesthetic, cultural, and formative experience capable of mobilizing emotions, imagination, and singular ways of understanding the world.

The research indicates that working with literature in infant classrooms demands mediators sensitive to children's unique forms of interaction, organized environments, and bibliodiverse collections suitable for sensory and symbolic exploration. Guaranteeing the right to literature implies investing in initial and continuing teacher education and recognizing the space of Early Childhood Education as a potent territory for cultural and humanizing encounters from the very beginning of life.

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Simene Gonçalves Coelho: Developed the empirical research, constructed the theoretical part and performed the data analysis. Fernanda Duarte Araújo Silva: Guidance for the organization and development of the research and reviewed the entire process of data construction and analysis.

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