

Current Reflections on the Principal of Caring in the Nursery and the Physical and Human Space Devoted to Early Childhood

Ana Katia Alves Dos Santos

Department of Methodologies and Practices in Education, Faculty of Education, Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Salvador, Brazil

Email address:

aksantos@ufba.br

To cite this article:

Ana Katia Alves Dos Santos. Current Reflections on the Principal of Caring in the Nursery and the Physical and Human Space Devoted to Early Childhood. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. Vol. 3, No. 6, 2018, pp. 92-101. doi: 10.11648/j.ijecs.20180306.11

Received: October 31, 2018; **Accepted:** December 6, 2018; **Published:** January 4, 2019

Abstract: This article updates reflections since the first version published in a Brazilian scientific journal in 2017 relating to the study of one of the basic principles of Early Childhood Education in the nursery segment: the caring. Caring is a concept widely debated in the field of human formation devoted to young children/infants. The theme of Early Childhood today occupies in the international scene an ample and complete debate in view of the establishment of a new world culture which looks at infants as a part of nations' patrimony (assets). Therefore they should be cared for and protected with more rights and receive a dignified life beginning with its uterine constitution and then strengthen upon the child's arrival in the nursery. In this sense the thesis is defended that the care of young children and infants is an ethical and affectionate way to educate, thus surpassing the vision based on assistentialism. Caring in educational institutions devoted to early childhood is meant to guarantee watching over, shelter and safety; it is the locus of protection, welcoming, development and learning. It also expresses itself in the form that its physical environment is built and organized. Therefore the reflections presented here emphasize the organization of the physical environment as a significant element in caring. In this reflexive path the metaphor of the "uterine environment" was utilized. In this text it was done as a form of comparison of the nursery as the extension of the former, given that the later should provide continuity to the functions provided by the former. The conception of the research here is qualitatively based utilizing the focus group method which is composed of children's professors in training linked to a component of the curriculum of the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Bahia with the code EDC308. In addition the research is supported by the action of the group coordinated by the author with the name Criethus (Center of Investigation, Defense and Education of Infants). It is also linked to the research project with registration 4391 in SIDOC-UFBA and depends as well with the implications of the author's experience as having been a school teacher and administrator devoted to Early Childhood and Infantile Education. In this role she dialogued with architects in order to guarantee meaningful and quality spaces in which to educate children. [...] are among the authors whose theories provide the foundation for this study.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Caring, Physical Environment, Human Environment, Education

1. Introduction

This text readdresses the reflections which I started in 2017 in a scientific study published in the Brazilian academic journal "Humanidades e Inovação"¹, focused on current innovations in the field of human development. It emphasized the principle of Caring in Early Childhood

Education, focused on the Nursery. This study was related to investigations being undertaken by the research group which I was coordinating called Criethus (Center for Investigation and Defense of Early Childhood Education)². It formed part of the SIDOC³ Research Project #4391 of the Federal University of Bahia entitled "Studies of infancy in the perspective of citizenship and the ethics of human

¹ Magazine Humanidades e Inovação v.4, n.5, 2017

² linked to the group Educational Epistemology and Pedagogic Practices
³ System of Information about Teaching Production

preservation in Education". It delved into the understanding of the child as a subject of rights with special focus on early childhood. The study verified the guaranty of quality education in Brazil and particularly in Salvador, Bahia. It also gave special consideration to the Focus Group⁴ as a method of qualitative research⁵ as per the EDC308 component where the professors of the children being taught contribute with their words and reflections about the theme considered in this article. Therefore this study was especially significant in my professional activity in the field of Early Childhood Education principally because I was the administrator of *at least three institutions devoted to early childhood education. In that role I was required to think about the construction and the quality of young children's physical environment in partnership with architects and other school administrators.*

Therefore, while paying attention to current studies, public policies and legal documents concerning Early Childhood Education in Brazil and (improvement in its quality in the nursery segment, these reflections, which I have rethought and deepened, are structured by a certain emphasis. Namely, the philosophical principles and the fundamental curriculum (course of study) of this level of education is the principle of CARING. However, this principle, until a not very remote time, was considered in an assistentialist perspective, i.e. caring in the nursery was synonymous with only guaranteeing to young children and infants attention to their essential necessities. These needs included feeding, bathing and guaranteeing that an adult (not always an educator/professor) watched over their sleep and activities. Substituting this assistentialist vision here is the view that caring is an ethical and affectionate mode to manage the nursery. It is a guarantee of watching over, of a *locus* of protection, gathering together and education which is expressed in the qualitative actions of nurturing protecting, guaranteeing the safety of and educating the young child who only recently left the womb; that the nursery is the first human *locus* of the infant's existence. The uterine environment will be used therefore as a metaphor when reflecting on the nursery's environment. The nursery, like the womb, ought to maintain certain basic functions and embrace the child not only in its human dimension but in the sense of the quality of its physical organization in order to guarantee meaningful development and learning.

4 the focus group is a qualitative research method that takes advantage of the creation of a more natural and interactive environment in order to undertake interviews. It takes in account the comments and opinions of the members of the group in the formulation of the researcher's ideas

5 which for Santos (2018, p.19) is understood as a methodological path which attempts to approach, interpret and understand phenomena in a contextual, relational and complex form, or that being, give value of the world of life of the subjects in their contexts and considering them through comprehensions and interpretations derived from various fields and perspectives.

2. Early Childhood Education and the Agenda of Nations

Early Childhood Education, not only Brazilian (ages 0 to 5), but also around the world (ages 0 to 6) is receiving more and more attention from educational professionals and public administrators. This includes particular attention to the education of children aged 0 to 3 years (nursery) with the view of guaranteeing the right of access for both boys and girls to full and quality development focused on childcare and education. This worldwide movement on behalf of early childhood education has been strengthened especially by Goal 4 of the 2030 agenda of the United Nations Organization for Sustainable Development⁶. Brazil is one of the signers of this agreement, while realizing that there is a great deal to be done in this field. The healthy and dignified development and growth of children is directly related to a nation's development.

James Heckman, [2], winner of the 2000 Nobel prize, and other contemporary researchers in Early Childhood Education suggest that nations ought to invest in early childhood, particularly nurseries, considering that such investments in the education of children aged 0 to 3 years old contribute to the national development from both a social and fiscal standpoint. Economically this includes a reduction in the problems of adult life which affect the personal and social dimensions and guarantees the formation of persons who are more productive and integrated into society in the broadest sense.

[...] children that had the opportunity to attend the equivalent of nurseries and pre-schools have as adults higher incomes and lower probabilities of prison, precose pregnancy and dependence on state-funded welfare programs in the future. [1].

Heckman [2] considers that there is much work and investment to be made by the responsible nations and that there are opportunities related to children aged 0 to 3 years given that the child's foundations and abilities begin to be developed even before beginning school. A country that invests in its young children, especially its poorest, shows to the world its concern for maintaining the present and future social quality of life not only for themselves and their families, but for society as a whole.

The greatest rate of return on early childhood development occurs when the investment is made as early as possible, from birth to five years old in needy families. [...]. The efforts should be concentrated on the first years. [...]. The best investment is in the quality of the early childhood development from birth to five years old for needy children and their families. [2]

Heckman continues by affirming that the world's future depends on providing the tools for social ascension and development led by a highly educated and qualified

6 See document International Curricular Bases for Early Childhood Education. CIPPEC.
https://issuu.com/fmcsv/docs/cippec_portugues/2?ff=true&e=3034920/56380689.

population, and that this will depend on an efficient form of investment in early childhood education. Therefore it is important to define children as having rights with a corresponding position of absolute priority in the political agendas of nations.

In that respect the document “Roundtable on Early Childhood Education”, a cooperation of UNESCO and fruit of a partnership with GERDAU and the Mauricio Sirotsky Sobrinho Foundation, [3], argued that:

Science has proved the relevance of education and the care of its quality during the first years on the life of a child, as well as having a positive impact on the child’s performance in school and life. The period that goes from birth until the sixth year of life, particularly ages 0 to 3, is the most important in the preparation of the future foundations, competences and emotional and cognitive abilities. It is during this period that the child most intensely learns to learn, to do, to interrelate, to be and to develop important values based on its relations with the family, the school and the community. There are also studies that provide evidence that proposals and programs devoted to the promotion of the integral development of children have impact on human and social development as well as the quality of life and future perspectives. Without forgetting the principle of the birthright of every child to access to quality education [...]

In this sense Brazil is strengthening this perspective. Both in legal documents such as the Statute of Children and Adolescents and the Legal Mark of Early Childhood, as well as through cultural, educational and social practices linked to educators and institutions concerned with guaranteeing children’s rights. The Directive on Curriculums for Early Childhood Education in Brazil, MEC/SEB, [4], also stands out. This document defines the child as an historic subject and with rights who builds his personal and collective identity through daily interactions, relations and practices, as a subject who plays, imagines, fantasizes, desires, learns, observes, experiments, narrates, questions and constructs meanings about nature and society and therefore needs to be in physical and human environment favorable to his broadest development.

In this sense, and considering the importance of guaranteeing the child’s fundamental right to quality formation in the nurseries through the right to full development and learning, what stands out as the basic principle of the curriculum (course of study) and epistemology of early childhood education is the principle of caring. This principle which is beginning to be the subject of studies by Scientists of Education and formulators of public policies for early childhood in Brazil and the World will be an important feature of this text.

3. The Principle of Caring in the Crèche and the Metaphor of the Uterine Environment

In Brazil the Education directed at Early Childhood in its

Nursery phase looks to the child’s global development in its cognitive/intellectual, social, physical and emotional levels in order to guarantee the preparation of interesting and meaningful bases that ought to extend throughout life. As such and looking at the guaranty of the rights to quality education of young children and infants⁷, our principle research focus is caring in the nursery. This caring, in addition to being valid as the basic principle of this segment of teaching in Brazil is articulated with the principle of educating. The principle of caring will be defended in the course of this text as the ethical, human and affectionate mode of education directed at young children. Therefore Caring is similar to the human mode of habitat, the shelter, the place of protection, welcome, safety and education. This also is expressed in the form that we build and organize the physical space devoted to these children.

As a reflexive path, since the publication in the magazine *Humanidades e Inovação* we have used what we resolved to call the womb as a metaphor. I presented the defense that for a significant number of children the nursery would be the extension of the uterine environment it being the first environment (outside the family) concerned with guaranteeing protection, care, feeding, safety and education of infants and young children. Therefore the nursery can be understood as a post-uterine environment and for this reason it keeps the responsibility to continue guaranteeing not only the basic functions (assistentialist) but also ought to principally promote meaningful development and learning by actions of ethical care.

According to Abbagnano,[13], metaphors are transfers of meaning and for Aristotle “[...] consist in giving a name to something that belongs to something else: transference can be done from a genus to a species, from a species to a genus, from one species to another or on the basis of an analogy.” In this text the metaphor is used because it is an efficient resource that

[...] provides a base for a reflection about reality. They help to better understand and enter into the universe of things because they depart from a known case, permitting the establishment of models of thinking and reflecting thereby being given as examples of assistance in the formulation and consolidation of ideas. They are useful analogies in communication about enlargement and deepening of facts of reality. They support the arguments establishing a relationship between distinct realities, however easily comparable. [5].

Therefore the metaphor of the uterine environment establishes a relationship with the environment of the nursery, a segment of Early Childhood Education that is built on the principle of caring. Given that the child in early childhood, just recently separated from the womb, is now in the nursery this should be seen as an “educational shelter”. This leads us to defend it as an environment that should maintain the “temperature”, the welcome, the “hydration, the

⁷ infants and young children are in the age group between 0 and 3 years old. In general infants are defined as up to 2 years old.

protection, Santos (5) the care, still so necessary so that the infant/child develops and achieves meaningful learning.

The word uterus in its etymology comes from the Greek *hystera* and from the Sanscrit *Udara* that means stomach, terms that are related to anatomical notions or objects in the form of a bag. It would be a bag made of goat skin. However, for Santos, [5], in the commonly used Greek medical language the uterus received different meanings. One corresponds above all to what today we understand as the uterus. For LIMA, [9], in his dictionary of medical terms uterus would be the word *metra* which designates the place where a new being is formed! This word is derived from the indo-european that means mother, source and origin of life. *Metra* would be the word easily found in various classical authors of antiquity such as Herodotus and Plato. Hippocrates also used it. Lima continues asserting that in spite of Greek medicine willing this use to the Latinos for the name of such an important organ, the Romans created *uterus*. This word initially was used only to designate the pregnant uterus which would be reminiscent of a full pot given the presence of amniotic liquid. Later it came to name the organ independent of its condition.

Therefore in our text, Santos, 2017, we assume the meaning of uterus as a pregnant environment where the being develops. For us this is the most appropriate term. The uterus is the largest organ in the female reproductive system in the majority of mammals. It performs the function of hosting the fertilized ovary and afterwards providing it the conditions for full development (good temperature, nutrition, hydration, protection...). Therefore the utilization of the uterine environment metaphor related to the nursery environment ought to provide all the conditions for protection, nutrition, feeding, safety, care, education and full development of the young child. The uterus is the first home of the infant and the nursery would be its extension (outside the family environment). Given the current context it is more and more frequent and necessary for mothers and fathers to seek this space for the development and learning of their children.

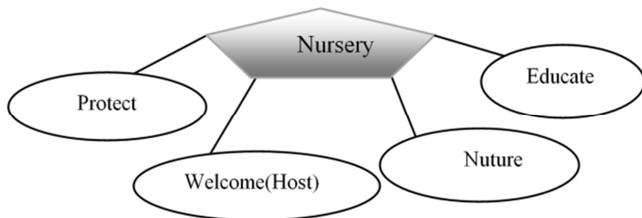


Figure 1. Ideal Nursery Environment Figure produced by the author (in Santos, 2017).

As a contribution to the condition of the child leaving the uterus for the nursery, this environment should be hospitable and professionally committed to the infant’s general human formation. In addition to the basic actions, the caring in its ethical-affectionate, educational and human dimensions it should compose the environment of institutions for early childhood reception. In the focus group, 2018, qualitative research method for reflection about the subject which had as

its topic, “What is Caring”, the professor in training named Rocha considered that:

Caring goes well beyond the assistentialist practice to provide the basic necessities. It includes welcoming, understanding and educating the being to which we direct our care. It is to guard, protect, teach or educate and orient.

Then the professor Gabriela defends that “[...] to care is linked to protection, paying attention to the environment where the child is, to the material that will be worked and handled... I see caring also as guarding, thinking about the feeding, the bathing, the hydration of the child among others. It is to treat another with respect and care, guaranteeing rights.”

Another professor named Luana said that “Caring is to give importance to another; it is to put yourself in the place of another and attend to his/her general well being.

These comments reinforce the defense that caring in early childhood education in the nursery goes beyond the assistentialist vision as we have already argued. It includes protection, the defense of rights, the guaranty of quality education which incorporates developments and various learnings. Therefore the nursery should be that environment pregnant with the ethics of reception, nutrition, safety and protection, just like the womb, that which cares for the fetus while it grows, develops and evolves to become an infant. Santos, [5], considers that infantile institutions should guarantee care of the infant and young child in a process to “become human in the broadest sense” in order to guarantee development through affectionate and intentional teaching practices and a humanly habitable environment. About that aspect professor Rocha states that:

In the nurseries there should be an understanding that those young children that arrive are subjects that should be respected, that construct preferences and tastes and should be cared for. This care is inseparable from educating since during this period of life the children learn a lot by the way in which they are treated.

The principle of caring as related to Early Childhood Education is foreseen in the legal documents that form the base of Brazilian Infantile Education. National Curriculum Directives for Infantile Education-DCNEI(NCDIE/), Brazil, 2010, p.19, stands out as an expression of the affirmation that the institutions of Infantile Education in order to achieve their pedagogic objectives and proposals should foresee conditions for the guaranty of collective work and for organization of materials, spaces and times that assure education in its integrity, understanding caring as something inseparable from the educational process.

According to Kramer, [6], cited by Santos, [5],

[...] caring is the concept that relates to the necessity of one to return to the other. The caregiver cannot be directed at him/herself, who to the contrary would be the receiver and most be open, attentive and sensitive to the demands of the other person. Caring requires knowledge about who needs care and that requires closeness, time and submission.

The values on which the care of another are based, such as the welcome in the nursery, have their genesis in the very

elaboration of the concept and the act of caring which can assume various facets.

The philology of the word care indicate the concept of cure according to Leonardo Boff, [10]. Cure is synonymous with care in the erudite meaning. In ancient meaning it was written *coera* in Latin and was used to indicate the human relations of love and friendship. It would be to understand another and be concerned about him. Therefore cure would be:

[...] care, concern and worry about loved person or object. Care also derives from *cogitare-cogitatus* and its alteration for (coyedar, coidar, cuidar). Cogitate is to think about another, give him attention, reveal an attitude of concern about someone that has importance for me. It is to participate in his destiny and his process of life. It is to contribute! It is concern, solicitude, diligence, attention, good treatment. It is a way-to-be-in-the-world with another. Therefore it is said that the child in infantile education should have all our care and concern in its process to educate itself beyond the actions traditionally understood as care: feed, bathe and put to bed. [5]

Therefore caring is a way of being and a way of habitating the environment or space of infantile education with views to achieve the learning process and qualitative development of the children. About these two terms environment and space we consider the defense of Bestetti [8] who refers to the first as “*ambiencia*” which he defines as the process of humanization by means of the equilibrium of elements that compose the physical space which is the scene of social relations which include cultures and values. Therefore environment is about the totality of space and how these are humanly utilized:

“*Ambiencia*” has its origin in French and can be translated as environment. It is composed by the material state(?), but also by the moral state(?) which induces behavior. The environment guarantees the physical and emotional conditions for the subjective wellbeing which is why it should be cared for. It should not attend only to the election of thermic acoustical and visual criteria, but also to the increase in emotion, becoming a shelter for the body and the mind. In [8] cited by [5].

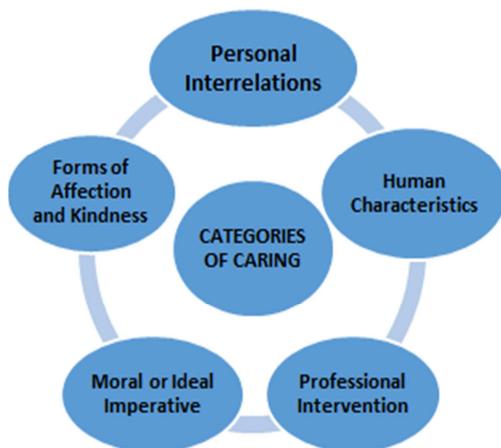


Figure 2. Categories of Caring Figure created by the author (Santos, 2017).

Careful environment (and spaces)⁸ is related to human existence with another. It is to aid educators in preparing a child to know and become a person in the world, looking to comprehend his/her own sense of existence and inhabiting the environment with others.

With respect to human environment there are five categories for caring - Sena et. al., 1999, cited by [5].

These five categories communicate that caring in infantile education, in addition to being an ethical imperative for every early childhood education professional, is a fundamental human characteristic. This is expressed by the way in which affection is made viable by the interpersonal relations that should occur in the educational spaces. In addition to this, early childhood caring indicate the degree of civility transmitted by each society looking at its moral, historical, political, social and economic development.

In early childhood education the care is also revealed by the quality and attention which the caregivers (be they the professor or local and national administrator) give to the planning and organization of the physical environment which they design, implant, organize and make available to the infants/children. Every child has the right to inhabit and develop in an environment intentionally prepared for its dignity, safety and autonomy, liberty of movement and sociability. It also should have a fun and playful esthetic and in itself is a space for diverse and qualitative learnings. The physical environment of an institution that embraces early children should be in itself caring, interactive and educational.

4. The Physical Environment as a Dimension of Caring in the Nursery

The comments of professor Amanda (2018) open our reflection about the caring which is also expressed by the planning, structuring and organization of the physical environment devoted to early children:

The nurseries ought to have a welcoming environment in which the child does not feel unprotected which for him/her is a new place since before he/she only related to the family environment. It should also be a space which awakens the child's curiosity and provides teaching and treats the child as a subject in the world full of knowledge and specificities.

This argument makes us return to the metaphor of the uterine environment related to the nursery, but now not only with regard to the human caring but also the physical. Like the uterus, in its physical dimension and as the first mode of habitat for the fetus, the educational institution for early childhood should also be prepared as a mode of physical habitat for infants. Just as a mother should plan for the physical reception of an infant by making herself and her uterus a habitable environment. This means she must care for her general health, nutrition, emotions, hygiene, safe movement and also general aesthetics, considering that there

⁸ In this text we make use of both terms as synonymous although they possess a discrete difference between them.

are significant changes in the body. The physical environment of the nursery should also be planned so as to receive the child by guaranteeing a quality habitat for the duration of the child's stay and making possible meaningful and integral interactions, learnings and development.

In this sense the building's architecture and spacial organizations are essential aspects in the construction of a nursery. The construction and building of a good environment promotes interaction, stimulations, curiosity and discoveries that are fundament for the education of children. The physical environment of an institution devoted to early childhood beginning with its architecture and organization promotes new experiences and effective interactions between children and adults, given that the environment is a living system and in permanent transformation. In its physical structure it is also temporal. It indicates and forms the ways in which we feel, we think and we act in life. For Greenman [11] (cited by Edwards et.al. 1999) the way in which the physical space and the time are structured including the roles we play in them condition the way that we feel, think and behave and this dramatically affects the quality of our lives. According to this author the physical environment can function for or against us as we guide our lives. This is a way to defend and think about the physical space and its use especially in the education of children. Since the 20th century the physical space as a form of care has been contextualizing current reflections and debates, theories and practices in the field of children's education.

There are significant and inspiring defenses by Early Childhood Education professors and administrators concerned with the condition and presence of children in social environments and especially in the nursery. The aesthetic and humanly inhabitable environment of the infantile life, the materials and toys (playthings?), the right to play and use a dignified, organized and functional place for learning are themes considered to be fundamental for Early Childhood Education [5].

Around the world there are creative and careful experiences about the human condition beginning with infancy that try to defend and implant dignified, educational and playful environments for infants/children. The 'schools of the future' are according so called currently due to important elements in their structuration including creativity, playfulness, functionality and free and quality measures for infantile development and learning.

Once the environment in the institutions devoted to early childhood/nurseries was not given much thought. Now, however, it is a major point of interest including in current public policy proposals⁹.

In Brazil since 2007 the National Program for the Restructuration and Acquisition of Equipment for the Public School System for Infantile Education (ProInfancia) provides the possibility for municipalities in the country to construct

and to acquire equipment and furniture for their nurseries with federal funds. The project imposes five parameters to be considered in the implantation of the building: identification and knowledge of the soil, climate of the region, topography of the terrain, harmony with the surroundings and a good location for the providers of public systems of water, energy and sewerage. In addition the program foresaw the design of furniture and equipment for infantile interests. However, it is known that there is still along way to go to see the ample concretization of these projects with respect to the national coverage in Brazil. The number of public nurseries that meet this proposal is still very limited. [5]



Figure 3. Schematic and Floor Plans for a project the a school for infantile education with a capacity for 240 children aged zero to five years (ProInfancia).

Source: Brazil, MEC, <http://www.fn.de.gov.br/programas/proinfancia> Acesso, 02/01/2017 (SANTOS,2017, p.145).

According orientations in technical documents of MEC¹⁰, [12], each municipality should identify the physical spaces and furniture which it has. It should try to plan their use, select and organize the playthings and other materials. It should also think about the quality of the spaces devoted to infant and small children for sleep, feeding, hygiene, exploration of objects and interactions with adults and other children.



Source: Brazil, MEC [12].

Figure 4. Project suggestion for an environment for infants.

The early childhood institutions should be a "big playground" therefore happy, fun and appropriate to the

⁹ There is much to be done in this aspect. The journey for the structuration and implantation of dignified and educational spaces is long and should be considered as a priority in order to achieve quality education for early childhood in Brazil and the World.

¹⁰ Ministry of Education via Secretary of Basic Education entitled "Organization of the physical space, playthings and materials for infants and young children.

formation of infants and young children. The infantile school as a big playground is:

[...]a current topic in many countries which inspires their educational policies given [...]should walk the path to become the creative idealization, the conception, the functional, human and aesthetic elaboration and organization of the environment with the intention of it being, in itself, a measure in the process of development and learning of young children considering their developmental, psychological, social, affective and aesthetic characteristics and their modes to become active in the world [5].

International institutions are outstanding promoters as a form of inspiration in this journey to guarantee more and more dignified and playful physical environments for children. They present various aspects that should be considered in the design and structuring of these spaces. For example, different environments should be provided for infants and young children emphasizing areas for cribs, playgrounds, rooms for diverse activities and experiences, space for sleeping, space for bathing, solariums, sensory gardens, plant nurseries, open spaces for free movements (running, jumping, tumbling...). All of these should be integrated and aesthetically well elaborated based on an aesthetic and also functional vision.

In our text, [5], we presented Sweden as an outstanding country in the sense of the structuration of its nurseries and schools at the present time. According to Gomes, [14] the Swedish school is amusing, playful because in general it has almost no walls not even a classroom. Instead of traditional chairs and tables there is a “cavern” for individual moments. It also possesses laboratories to explore colors, materials and forms and a stage for dramatic discoveries.



Figure 5. Swedish Nursery.

Source: <http://www.e-konomista.pt/artigo/creches-mais-bonitas-do-mundo/> [5]



Source: <http://www.thecoolhunter.net/kids>. Acesso 01/10/2013.

Figure 6. Pajol Maternal School, Paris.

There are also other interesting and careful proposals that think about the environment of infantile institutions, being standouts France, Italy, Portugal and Denmark.



Source: Fortunati in Spazio Arredo [5].

Figure 7. Italy, design of Nursery.

Also in Italy the environment in schools such as Reggio Emilia and of Modena we see as an inspiration.



Figure 8. Italian schools.

Source: <http://www.zpzpartners.com/nido-aziendale-tetrapak/http://mamaesabetudo.blogspot.com/2011/11/istituzione-nidi-e-scuole-dellinfanzia.html>

In Portugal, although it is not an institution devoted to Early Childhood, the Ponte school inspires administrators and educators around the world including Brazil because it defends the concept of the open school without many wall and partitions. It is like a warehouse/hanger where the doors are always open, [5], and where the interactions between the children and adults are intense and of quality.



Figure 9. School of Ponte, Portugal.

Source: <http://criandocondicoesaliberdade.blogspot.com.br/2012/07/escola-da-ponte.html>.

In Portugal we also point out a school in Faro: fun, playful, colorful, safe and functional.



Figure 10. School in Faro.

Source: <http://www.underline-concept.com/pt/ff-portfolio/bela-infancia-creche-jardim-infantil/>.

In Denmark the architecture of the nursery in the image below is innovative. It is defined as a village for children.



Figure 11. Nursery in Denmark.

Source: <https://constru360.com.br/a-creche-com-arquitetura-inovadora-na-dinamarca-que-foi-pensada-como-uma-vila-para-criancas/>

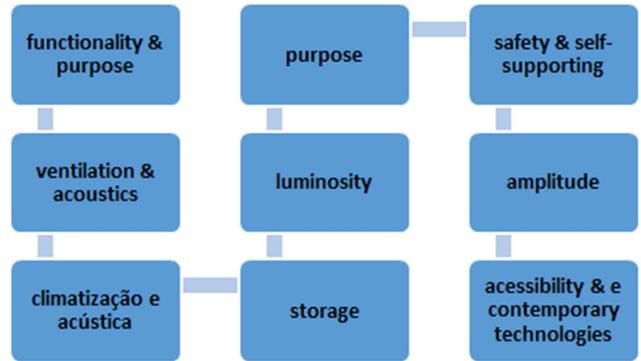
Finally we call attention to the fact that in the United States the schools/nurseries generally function in buildings adapted to working with young children and there is concern for guaranteeing the important conditions of infantile hosting. 13 the nurseries in the USA are private.



Figure 12. Nursery in USA.

Source: <://descobriaamerica.com/2016/06/gastos-com-creche-nos-estados-unidos/>.

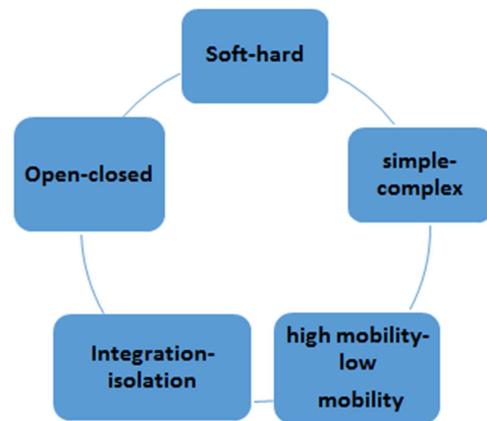
Considering that the institutions of Early Childhood Education are undergoing transformations, given the importance of this segment, as revealed in the above images, it is defended that it is necessary to continue guaranteeing that these be caring spaces in their human and physical dimensions. The physical environment has an aesthetic dimension; however, principally it should be attentive to other elements that contribute to the development, interactions and meaningful learning. We call attention to the following:



Source: Figure created by author.

Figure 13. Aspects of the physical environment of an infantil.

For Jones [15], there are five dimensions to describe the physical environment of institutions devoted to young children, especially relative to planning of installations, equipment and furniture:



Source: Image created by author.

Figure 14. Dimensions of the physical environment according to Jones.

For Jones the so-called soft areas should give the children a place for relaxation, playing, hearing stories and reading silently. This space can be constructed with carpets, cushions, stuffed animals, an upholstered or rocking chair and even with curtains. On the other hand the hard areas are characterized by floors and tabletops that facilitate and tolerate the “confusion/messes” of children. In the outdoor areas those that are grassed are also soft and those paved are hard. The classrooms should be open and with easy access

for diverse materials [5].

Authors such as Zabalza, [16], consider that all these elements contribute to augment the quality of life of the children given that the environment, or space as he prefers to call it, is a structure of opportunities for personal growth and should permit flexibility in the educational programs. "The environment of the school and the class (classroom?) is constituted by a system of spacial structures, languages, instruments and possibilities or limitations for the development of formative activities", [5]. On the other hand [17], defend the idea that the spaces should be differentiated and guarantee specific environments for various experiences and activities such as story-telling, games, play, rest, hygiene and eating. Also the spaces should be safe and guarantee as well free spaces so that young children can crawl, walk and run with autonomy and freedom. Rails and mirrors favor the construction of the child's self-image, which also reflects its history, culture and life in a meaningful and happy way.

Finally we consider the contributions of Abramowicz and Wajskop, [18]. Both affirm that adults can create environments in a manner to offer the maximum of choices for activities within a standard for safety, autonomy and cooperation. In addition they defend that the organization of the spaces affects everything that the child undertakes, interferes in its perception of reality, modifies its activities and way of using materials, influences its capacity to make choices and transforms its interaction with other children, with the professionals and with the parents.

The institutions of early childhood education should therefore be that environment which daily offers to young children and infants learnings and developments through effective interactions between the subject and the space that configures the dignified and quality school environment to which every child has the right.

5. Final Recommendations

Currently nations that look to the development and formation of their populations should pay attention to education in general and especially to early childhood education which today is "stealing the scene" as the comprehensive debate around the world. Children, especially those 0 to three years old, have the attention of education professionals and public administrators trying to guarantee the right of access of boys and girls to full development and quality learning.

In the course of our studies and reflections the results point to the necessity to focus on one of the basic principles of the nursery which is the principle of caring. It should be considered not through an assistentialist vision, but principally as a human and ethical mode (way) to educate, as an existential care as well as a way to physically inhabit the educational spaces. In this sense we consider the uterine environment metaphor to treat the nursery environment (and its physical spaces). These are spaces which should guarantee to the young child nutrition, welcoming, protection and safety as well the education necessary for its dignified and

full development, interactions and meaningful learnings. The caring in the nursery would synthesize the challenge of the professors and public administrators to guarantee the children's right to inhabit a school environment that is humanly and physically of high quality. In this sense many international initiatives are already a source of inspiration. It is now up to us in the 21st century to continue broadening the concept of caring through the effective structuration and implantation of physical and human spaces devoted to Early Childhood Education.

Returning to the defense of Heckman when he affirms that there is much work and investment to be undertaken by responsible nations in all the world and that there are opportunities related to children 0 to 3 years old. He also alerts us that a country that invests in its young children reveals to everyone its concern for maintaining the social quality of life, present and future, and the development which comes principally through quality education.

Acknowledgements

Translator: Edward Myles Coe, Jr Princeton and Washington Universities

References

- [1] NERI, Marcelo. Early Childhood Education.. FGV, 2005. (NERI, Marcelo. FGV, 2005. Educação da Primeira Infância).
- [2] HECKMAN, James. Investing in the Development of Early Childhood Education: Reducing deficits and strengthening the economy. Acess September 20, 2018. (Investir no Desenvolvimento na Primeira Infância: Reduzir déficits, fortalecer a economia. 2017. Acesso 20 de setembro de 2018. https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/D_Heckman_FM_CSV_ReduceDeficit_012215.pdf).
- [3] BRASÍLIA: Educational Roundtable Program for Early Childhood: conceptions, methodology and implantation manual - Brasília : Gerdau, Fundação Maurício Sirotsky Sobrinho, 2011 (Programa Mesa Educadora para a Primeira Infância: concepções, metodologia e manual de implantação / série editada por Suzi Mesquita Vargas).
- [4] Brasil. National curricular directives for early childhood education/Secretariat of Basic Education (Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de Educação Básica. Diretrizes curriculares nacionais para a educação infantil / Secretaria de Educação Básica. – Brasília: MEC, SEB, 2010).
- [5] SANTOS, Ana Katia Alves dos. The principle of caring in the nursery and the uterine environment metaphor: the physical and human environment as an educational shelter for young children. (O princípio do cuidar na creche e a metáfora do ambiente uterino: ambiente físico e humano como guarida educativa para crianças pequenas. Revista Humanidades e Inovação. v.4, n.5, 2017. Brasil.)
- [6] KRAMER, Sonia. Professionals of Early Childhood Education: management and formation. (Profissionais de Educação Infantil: gestão e formação. São Paulo: Ática, 2005).

- [7] GANDINI, Lella. Educational spaces and of Personal involvement. (Espaços educacionais e desenvolvimento Pessoal. Apud EDWARDS, Carolyn et al. As cem linguagens da criança. A abordagem de Reggio Emilia na educação da Primeira Infância. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1999).
- [8] BESTETTI, Maria Luisa Trindade. Physical Space and Behavior (Ambiência: Espaço Físico e Comportamento. Revista Brasileira de Geriatr. Gerontol, Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, 2014).
- [9] LIMA, José Antonino. Etymological dictionary of medical terms (Dicionário etimológico termos médicos. Acesso 2016. <http://joseantonino.no.comunidades.net/dicionario-etimologico>).
- [10] BOFF, Leonardo. Saber Cuidar. To Know How to Take Care. Ethics of the human – compassion for the earth. (Ética do humano - compaixão pela terra. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1999. 199p.).
- [11] GREENMAN, 1988, p. 156 In The hundred languages of the child. The approach of Reggio Emilia in the education of Early Childhood (As cem linguagens da criança. A abordagem de Reggio Emilia na educação da Primeira Infância. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1999).
- [12] Brasil. Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de educação Básica. Organization of physical space, toys and materials for infants and young children: a pedagogical guidance manual (Organização do espaço físico, dos brinquedos e materiais para bebês e crianças pequenas: manual de orientação pedagógica: módulo 4, Brasília, 2012)
- [13] ABBAGNANO, Nicola. Dictionary of Philosophy (Dicionário de Filosofia. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000).
- [14] GOMES, Patricia. Swedish school approach pedagogy and design (Escolas suecas aproximam pedagogia e design. <http://porvir.org/porcriar/escola-sueca-aproxima-pedagogia-design/20120921>. Acesso 15/10/2013).
- [15] SPODEK, Bernard e SARACHO, Olivia. Teaching children from three to eight years old (Ensinando crianças de três a Oito Anos. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1998).
- [16] ZABALZA, Miguel A. Quality in early childhood education. (Qualidade na educação Infantil. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1998).
- [17] ZAMBERLAN, M. A. T., BASINI, I. S. & ARALDI, M. Origination of space and quality of life: Research about the spacial configuration in an institution for early childhood education. Educere et Educare. (Zamberlan, M. A. T., Basani, S. I. S., & Araldi, M. Organização do espaço e qualidade de vida: Pesquisa sobre configuração espacial em uma instituição de educação infantil. Educere et Educare) 2007, p. 245-260.
- [18] ABRAMOWICZ, A.; WAVSKOP, G. Nurseries: activities for children from zero to six years old (Creches: atividades para crianças de zero a seis anos. São Paulo: Moderna, 1995).

Biography



Ana Katia Alves Dos Santos, Doctor and Master of Education (UFBA); Associate Professor of the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Bahia/Brazil (UFBA). Pedagogue and Specialist in the Methodology of Teaching, Research, Educational Extension, with significant experience in the field of Education and Management of Schools for Early Childhood, Alphabetization and Basic Education in general. Coordinator of CRIETHUS – Center for the Investigation, Defense and Education of Infants.