







THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILIES TOWARDS REMOTE ACTIVITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19

A perspectiva das famílias sobre atividades remotas na educação infantil em tempos de covid-19

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated Brazilian families' perspective about the relationship with daycare/preschools in the COVID-19 pandemic context, more specifically concerning the adoption of remote activities, and its impacts on the family environment and child's experiences. 880 guardians of children aged 0 to 6 years enrolled in daycare/preschools participated in the study conducted in 2020 through an online questionnaire. The data was quali-quantitatively analyzed. Most early childhood education institutions proposed play based remote activities. Due to reconfigurations of domestic environment, meaningful educational experiences for children coexisted with challenges and sorrow in families. Having in mind the full development of children, the relationship between families and early childhood education institutions must consider these new domestic dynamics.

KEYWORDS: Early Childhood Education. Child. Remote learning. Family environment. Pandemic.

RESUMO

A pesquisa investigou a perspectiva das famílias brasileiras sobre a relação com creches/pré-escolas no contexto da Pandemia de COVID-19, mais especificamente frente à adoção de atividades remotas, e seus impactos no ambiente familiar e na vivência da criança. Participaram do estudo, realizado em 2020 por meio de questionário online, 880 responsáveis por crianças de 0 a 6 anos de creches/pré-escolas. Os dados foram analisados quali-quantitativamente. A maioria das instituições de educação infantil propunha atividades remotas lúdicas. Em virtude das reconfigurações do ambiente doméstico, experiências educacionais significadas como relevantes para crianças coexistiam com desafios e sofrimentos nas famílias para atenderem demandas das instituições. Evidencia-se a necessidade de considerar a nova dinâmica doméstica, na relação educação infantil e família, em prol do desenvolvimento infantil integral.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Infantil. Criança. Atividade remota. Ambiente familiar. Pandemia.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 occurred in February 2020. In March, with the verification of community transmission of the virus in almost all of the country, the states and municipalities implemented actions to reduce the infection, such as the non-operation of considered non-essential on-site activities. Throughout 2020 and until now – June 2021 – the country has experienced different phases of restriction of face-to-face contacts and movements for the temporary opening of spaces and services.

The schools and early childhood education institutions remained closed for practically the entire year of 2020, and debates are still intense today about the health and educational implications of opening up their facilities. As a result, there were legal disputes with teachers, families, and educational managers in sometimes antagonistic positions regarding reopening schools and early childhood education institutions for on-site assistance. At the same time, discussions about remote Education, its role in intensifying inequalities in educational access in a country already quite unequal socioeconomically, and its impacts considering the specificities of children's development were also heated.

Early childhood education, which serves the age group from four months to five years and eleven months, presented and still does particular challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic due to the characteristics of the care provided to children in this age group. From the point of view of meeting the right of education for young children during the pandemic, Anjos and Francisco (2021) discuss how the proposition of remote learning in early childhood education and the use of digital information and communication technologies (DICTs) have generated different opinions between specialists in the field of Education and sectors of society.

One of the main concerns is that many Brazilian families do not have access to resources and equipment that support remote learning. According to data from the study "Home Internet access and remote learning during the pandemic" (NASCIMENTO *et al.*, 2020), developed by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), about 6 million Brazilian students, from preschool to postgraduation, would not have access to broadband internet or 3G/4G at home, which means 12% of the students. In preschool, the research sample indicates that 14% to 15% of families did not have such a service.

Another set of debates is limited to the use and effects of DICTs and virtual practices on children's development and mediating relationships with the world and people. As in other countries such as Greece (FOTI, 2020), Palestine (AHMAD; ZABADI, 2020), and China (XIA, 2020), in Brazil, the use of DICTs during the COVID-19 pandemic period gained ground in the practices of institutions of early childhood education (GONÇALVES; BRITTO, 2020). The use of screens by babies and young children to carry out school activities that aim to replace on-site activities is the target of much criticism, for possible damage they may cause, as well as for not allowing experiences that are viable only in and through face-to-face human interactions (GONÇALVES; BRITTO, 2020). In this sense, the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics has a set of recommendations, including avoiding the use of screens for children under 2 years old and the exposure of a maximum of one hour per day for children aged from 2 to 5 years, always under the supervision of an adult (SOCIEDADE BRASILEIRA DE PEDIATRIA, 2019).

A last block of reflections leads to questions about the roles of families and early childhood education institutions regarding children and the overload of work in the domestic environment (ALVES, 2020). In the Brazilian educational structure, daycare centers and preschools are characterized as non-domestic institutional spaces, which aim to promote the integral development of children through pedagogical practices whose axes are interactions and games (BRASIL, 2017; BRASIL, 1988; BRASIL, 1996; BRASIL, 2009). Legally, the complementarity between family and daycare/preschool is very important to make sure that young children are assisted in the fullness of their demands and rights, without fragmentation or ruptures. In the history of assistance for children aged 0 to 6 years in Brazil, there was a transition, in the late 1980s, from social assistance to Education, constituting early childhood education as a stage with its own identity, which requires distinctions between the role of school and family. Thus, the restructuring of the role of each of these two institutions in a pandemic educational context is not a topic of little relevance, especially if we place the promotion of child development as a point of interest in this debate.

These specificities of early childhood education meant that, in the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (BRASIL, 1996), the possibility of remote Education in this educational stage was not established, even in an emergency. With the advance of the pandemic, in April 2020, the national body that outlines minimum guidelines for the organization of federal, state, and municipal Education systems

(National Council of Education) suggested, to minimize losses to children, that institutions create play based materials and guidelines for the development of systematic educational activities, to be with a playful and recreational nature, mediated by family members and using the internet, cell phone or sending printed activities (BRASIL, 2020). Since then, several institutions have started to adopt remote learning with the family as the main link between the daycare center/preschool and the child.

If the family's participation and involvement in the young child's educational process are crucial for the smooth functioning and success of activities in the on-site moment, they are essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which activities started to take place remotely (LEE *et al.*, 2020; SANTOS, 2020; XIA, 2020), making this process completely dependent on the family. However, for the family, this condition and the rearrangements resulting from social distancing measures that had to be adopted by its members present additional challenges for those with young children.

The research carried out by Santos (2020), with teachers who work in early childhood education (from 4 months to 4 years old) in Mato Grosso do Sul/Brazil, pointed out the little participation of parents in the activities proposed by the school and recognized that they "are not trained and were not consulted, let alone prepared to deal with this situation" (SANTOS, 2020, p. 14). Lee *et al.* (2020) reports the experience with the family in a nursery class (3 years old) at a university's daycare center in the hinterland of São Paulo/Brazil in carrying out remote activities. The activities proposed by the early childhood education institution were evaluated positively, considered as a moment of dialogue, interaction, and contact between parents and children. The main difficulties found concern family organization, lack of experience and patience on the part of parents, lack of suitable materials, and lack of interaction between children and educators (LEE *et al.*, 2020).

In order to raise elements about this difficult moment, this research aimed to investigate the perspective of families on the relationship with daycare centers/preschools in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically concerning the adoption of remote activities, and its impacts on the family environment and the child's experiences. Understanding these experiences can contribute to debates in family, daycare centers, preschools, and social contexts about the roles of these institutions and family in this uncommon scenario and the best ways to organize activities and spaces for childhood in times of COVID-19 pandemic.

2. METHOD

2.1. Theoretical-methodological considerations

In the articulation between propositions of Environmental Psychology and the Vygotskian Historical-cultural approach adopted in the research, family, and early childhood education institutions are conceived as socio-cultural environments that structure the child's development possibilities.

From the cultural-historical perspective, mainly from Lev Vygotsky's assumptions (2001, 2004), it is understood that human development and educational practices occur in culturally mediated interactions between subjects. Subjects, their subjectivities, meanings, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world are considered historically, socially, and culturally situated, interacting with other subjects and circumscribed by their spaces and medium.

The medium, and more precisely the meanings built on them, play an important role in the process of constitution of subjects and higher psychological functions. The subject-mean relationship is expressed by what Vygotski (2012) called experience, understood as unity between personality and environment and as a unit for the inseparable study of these elements. According to the author, "the environment determines the child's development through the experience of this environment" (VYGOTSKI, 2012, p. 383). That is, it is through experience that "the forces of the environment acquire a guiding meaning" rather than through "the medium in absolute terms" (VYGOTSKI, 2012, p. 383).

This way of understanding the person-environment unity (built or natural) unity dialogues with the propositions of Environmental Psychology, which advocates the person-space co-constitution. For Moser (2009), Environmental Psychology is interested in understanding the logic of the interrelationships between the individual and their social-physical environment. As Fischer (1994) points out, space, as a matrix of social existence, becomes an organizer of human interactions, relationships, and individuals' concrete experience, also resulting from social, cultural, and institutional factors.

The family environment profoundly changed with measures to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences. These transformations and the meanings that families construct about the material and structuring conditions of educational opportunities offered to children during the pandemic also become mediators of

children and families' experiences. In this scenario, listening to families about the relationships with their children's education institutions, specifically with the proposition of remote learning, allows us to know about how they experienced this process in this unprecedented and challenging time. Listening to the families allows us to interpret their own significance within this new reality, and to learn about the life context where those significances are produced.

2.2. Procedures

The instrument used was a questionnaire published on social networks (WhatsApp groups, Instagram, Facebook) and made available for completion via Google Forms from July 14 to August 1, 2020. The research takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil had more than 92,000 deaths, and we were facing measures to restrict and close non-essential services.

In line with ethical precepts, the research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Uberlândia/Brazil. The Informed Consent Form was presented in the introductory part of the questionnaire, with the invitation to participate in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of 45 questions (3 open-ended, 12 closed-ended, and 30 mixed). The questions were organized into thematic blocks: Initial information (7 questions); Characterization of the family context (8 questions); Family routine in the pandemic (4 questions); Characterization of the daycare centers and preschools and remote activities (16 questions); School, family, and child relationship (6 questions); Return to on-site activities at early childhood education institutions (4 questions).

This paper will present and discuss quantitative and qualitative data related to remote learning and its impacts on the family environment. For the quantitative analysis of data related to remote activities, the variables of interest were submitted to descriptive analysis, as they were all categorical variables. Next, the participants' responses to the variables of interest were focused, considering different grouping variables (Family income, Child Age, Type of school). According to the grouping variable, the occurrences observed for each response category were calculated using the chi-square test crosstab (χ^2). This procedure allowed obtaining evidence of an association between the grouping variable and the variables of interest through the calculated p-value. Analyzes were performed using RStudio 1.3.959 software. To

compare the observed and expected occurrences with each other, the chi-square value (χ^2) was calculated, as well as the adjusted residuals. For the qualitative analysis, we built categories for the information entered in the questionnaire by the participants, grouped according to the similarity of meanings and the field of meanings to which they referred. The categories created were evaluated by the three researchers.

2.3. Research participants and characterization of daycare centers and preschools

Eight hundred eighty family members and/or guardians of children aged 0 to 6 years old enrolled in daycare centers or preschools participated in the research. The participants were from different regions of Brazil, as follows: 1.9% from the North, 9.1% from the Northeast, 10.9% from the Central West, 12.6% from the South, and 65.5% from the Southeast. Families lived in urban areas (96.4%) and rural areas (3.6%). Concerning social class, considering the classification used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE, there were families from class A (6.7%), class B (19.2%), class C (33.1 %), class D (18.0%), and class E (23.0%)¹.

Regarding education, 21.2% of the participants held a postgraduate degree (Master's or Doctoral); 55.9% held an undergraduate degree; 6.7% did not finish undergraduate studies; 10.1% finished secondary Education, and the others had lower levels of Education (6.1%). Regarding to ethnicity, 64.4% declared themselves Caucasian; 25.3% Brown; 6.9% African Brazilian; 1.5% Asian Brazilian; 0.5% Brazilian indigenous; and 1.4% preferred not to respond. About the age of the participants, 5.7% were between 18 and 25 years old; 26.1% from 26 to 33 years old; 51.1% from 34 to 41 years old; 13.3% over 42 years old; and 3.8% did not answer the age. The research participants were: mothers (88.8%), fathers (5.9%), aunts (2.8%), grandparents (1.8%), and other family members and/or guardians of the children (0.7%).

¹ Considering the value of the minimum wage in Brazil in 2020 (BRL 1045.00), we have: Class A – more than 20 minimum wages; Class B – from 10 to 20 minimum wages; Class C – from 4 to 10 minimum wages; Class D - 2 to 4 minimum wages; Class E – Up to 2 minimum wages.

Most of the participants lived in an urban area in the Southeast of Brazil, belonged to the middle class, held an undergraduate degree, declared themselves white, were between 34 and 41 years old, and were mothers.

If the respondent was taking care of more than one child enrolled in a daycare center or preschool, to complete the questionnaire, he/she indicated one child for reference. The children chosen were of different ages, grouped into the following categories: 0 to 6 months (2.0%); 7 to 11 months (1.5%); 1 year (8.8%); 2 years (17.7%), 3 years (19.8%), 4 years (21.7%), 5 years (23.5%), 6 years old (4.8%). Moreover, 0.2% of responses presented no information on children's ages. Thus, considering the ages of children who attend daycare centers and preschools in Brazil, respectively, the percentages of family members with children aged 0 to 3 years was 49.8% and, for those aged 4 to 6 years, 50%.

The children's daycare centers and preschools were: 96.4% from urban areas and 3.6% from rural areas. Daycare centers and preschools were 54.9% private, 38.1% public, and 6.9% associated/community/philanthropic. Furthermore, in 0.1% of the cases, the participant did not know the type of daycare center and preschool. Of the institutions, 57.4% were municipal, 6.6% state, 1.1% federal. In 34.9% of cases, the participant was unable to inform. The schools were mostly urban, private, and municipal.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Remote activities with children: characterizations from the perspective of families

Most daycare centers and preschools proposed remote learning to children and/or families (80.9%) and, of these, 1.1% proposed interspersed activities at the institutions and remotely. Additionally, 18.8% of early childhood education institutions were not proposing activities with children and/or families, and 0.3% carried out on-site activities.

Regarding resources and equipment, most had cell phones with internet access (91.8%), notebooks with internet (73.2%), and television with internet access (72.8%). For remote learning, 66.7% of the respondents stated that there was no consultation with families about their conditions of access to the internet and digital media (computer, cell phone, tablet, etc.). However, in the case of families with lower

income, there was a greater mobilization of daycare centers and preschools for such a consultation to be carried out (65.5% of families with up to 1 minimum wage of monthly income against 17.9% of families with higher income).

Regarding the ways to send remote activities, the families mentioned the following resources: WhatsApp (59.1%), online platform (40.4%), the family gets the activities at daycare centers and preschools (31.9%), email (18.5%), Facebook (6.7%), website (3.1%), daycare centers and preschools's professionals take the activities to the children's homes (2.7%), television (2.5%) and others (4.2%). The DICTs were constituted as the main mediating instruments of the school-family-child relationship.

Lack of access to materials and technologies was a difficulty reported by 8.6% of the families who indicated that they were facing problems in carrying out remote activities. Although access to the internet and DICTs was not an obstacle for most families participating in the study, who belonged to the middle class, this is a relevant issue for some families in the research. On this topic, participants stated: "Sometimes I have difficulty because *my cell phone is not good*" (Mother 1); "We *only have one laptop* with access [to the internet], which is usually being used, so he [son] does not participate in all [activities]" (Mother 2); "*Mobile data is not enough*, not every family has an internet plan. Another thing is that no school supplies were offered. We don't have any chalk to draw a hopscotch. The little ones are being neglected (...) It's complicated!" (Grandmother 1 - our emphasis).

The offering of remote activities was not accompanied by the offer of conditions and guarantees that the children were, in fact, carrying them out. These concrete, material, and structural conditions in the lives of families emerged as essential elements in the configuration of the (im)possibilities in the remote early childhood education-family-child relationship and, consequently, in the experiences offered to and/or experienced by children.

Regarding the objectives of proposing remote activities to families, from the universe of daycare centers and preschools offering such activities, 52.5% aimed to maintain the bond between the child and teacher and/or classmates, and 47.5% to enable specific learning and/or replace classroom activities.

The activities for the maintenance of ties between the child and teacher and/or peers, for early childhood education in the pandemic, were defended as more interesting in academic discussions in the Brazilian context, to the detriment of the ones that substitute classroom activities (ANJOS; FRANCISCO, 2021). This defense is

justified by the historical construction in the country about the role of daycare centers and preschools and the developmental characteristics of young children. In the pandemic context, the pedagogical and sociopolitical function of early childhood education started to be questioned so that daycare centers and preschools were called to transform their practices to be more present in the lives of families and children in any circumstances. The academic debates argue that maintaining links between the school and family environments is extremely relevant for the child, as these contexts play different roles in promoting child development. This importance also appeared among the participants. In a situation where families and children are experiencing restrictions in social interactions with their peers and other adults, maintaining interactions with people from school communities was evaluated as extremely positive: "I don't worry about loss of content. [...] They learn it later. There's no rush! But I think it's cool to have activities so *as not to lose the bond*. I can tell he likes it..." (Mother 3 - Emphasis added).

Concerning the activities being carried out to enable specific learning and/or replace classroom activities, concerns emerge about the simple transposition from on-site to remote, the identity of the two institutions (family and daycare/preschool), and the quality of the young child's experience. The impossibility of remote teaching replacing in-person teaching, even though it may contribute to children having important experiences for their learning and development, discussed in the literature, appears as follows in one participant's response: "*I don't think it is valid that way of teaching for a 4-year-old. We do other activities!*" (Mother 4).

When asked about the types of activities proposed by daycare centers and preschools and teacher, the participants indicated the following: playing with sounds, songs, nursery rhymes, gestures, mimics (73.7%), telling and reading stories (71.9%), structured activities of drawing and painting (52.9%), making toys (52.8%). The use of handouts was mentioned by 25.7% of the families and online platforms, social networks, and online games by 18.4% of the participants.

The data indicated that the daycare centers and preschools' proposals were largely aligned with the idea of providing children with playful experiences. In the pandemic context, that restricts interactions, circulation through different spaces, and playing, such activities enable interesting experiences for the children and contribute to the strengthening of social relationships between adults and children in the daycare centers and preschools-family-child interactions. However, we also highlight the presence of other activities, such as those that involve handouts, and that may

distance themselves from the proposal to promote interaction and play, the foundation of early childhood education (CORREA; ADRIÃO, 2014).

Regarding the adequacy of the activities to the age of the child, the participants assessed: good (53.5%), very good (29.1%), very bad (5.7%), and poor (11.7%). Regarding the content covered, families made the following evaluations: good (61.8%), very good (25.1%), very bad (3.8%), bad (9.3%). About the materials used, families evaluated: good (60.9%), very good (22.5%), very bad (3.8%), bad (12.8%). Regarding the time it takes for the child to perform the activities, families evaluated as follows: good (63.6%), very good (17.6%), very bad (7%), and poor (11.8%). Therefore, most families considered that the activities were adequate to the ages of the children and positively evaluated the content approached, the materials used, and the duration of the activities.

About the duration of the activities performed by the children, some families stated: "The school sends videos with suggested activities. They deliver a set of materials every month. Parents do it at home, in their own way, *at their own pace*" (Mother 5); "Actually, *we parents are the ones who determine this [time]*! They send the activities once a week, and we develop them with the child" (Mother 6); "My son's daycare proposed online activities, but since I can't stay with him to do them, *we are not attending classes.*" (Mother 7 - emphasis added). The dimensioning of the proposed activities' duration is, therefore, something that the family has to manage. Often, they reported difficulty in this management due to the several tasks and dynamics of the family environment during the pandemic. The adult's (un)availability to help in the activities and the possible rhythm of the family to carry out the proposals with the children emerged as elements that relativize the time the child will (not) be involved in such activities.

3.2. Remote learning for children: impacts on the family environment and the children's experiences

Among the families whose institutions were proposing remote learning to the children (n=712), 66.2% declared that they were managing to carry them out. The high percentage of families who claimed to be performing the proposed activities is in line with the study by Santos (2020).

From the families who reported not performing the activities (33.8%), the alleged reasons were: lack of interest, difficulty, refusal and/or negative feelings of

the child when performing the activities (39%); difficulties in organizing the family routine and overload of domestic activities (23.7%); overload of the guardian's paid work (18.7%); guardian's emotional or time difficulty, availability or tiredness that prevents him/her from helping the child in the proposed activities (17.4%); activities proposed by the daycare centers and preschools are not adequate to the interests, needs, specificities and/or demands of the child (12.5%); family does not understand and/or does not agree with the daycare centers and preschools proposal or with the Kind of the activities (3.7%); lack of materials, technologies and/or necessary structure (2.5%), guardians prioritize other activities with the child and the family (2.5%); priority of educational activities and learning of older siblings (2.1%); family is not prepared to help in early childhood education activities (2.1%).

On the issues related to family dynamics and their conceptions about daycare centers and preschools' proposals, participants reported: "The school is proposing 3 hours, but *I'm not getting it done*" (Mother 8); "*Too many activities*" (Mother 9); and:

The SCHOOL sends a schedule of activities from Monday to Friday, but to be honest, I am NOT doing the activities with my daughter because *I do NOT agree with the pedagogical proposal*. Because from my point of view, at this age, learning happens with the interaction with other classmates at daycare. And to be even more honest, they propose activities as if the parents mastered the didactics and we are NOT qualified for that, besides many parents ARE working (Mother 10 - emphasis added).

In these answers, the overload of work and the fact that the families do not have the pedagogical knowledge to help the children appear strongly. The participants' refusal and resistance positions to daycare centers and preschools' proposals, for not being interested or agreeing with them, are also indicated. Such resistances, sometimes, were articulated with concerns about the use of screens by young children that, in the families' perspective, could harm them and/or be ineffective in promoting their development: "the use of technologies by children is not healthy" (Aunt 1), "I don't see the online activity as a way that adequately supplies the educational and interaction needs of this age group" (Mother 11).

We evidenced, in this context, that several elements contributed to the non-participation of families in the proposal of remote activities, highlighting the difficulties related to family dynamics and conceptions, the format and characteristics of the proposed activities, and the way children experience these activities.

Also, the families that were managing to carry out activities reported challenges in this process. When asked if they had any difficulties in carrying out the remote

activities, 47.4% of the participants said yes, and these were: adults' lack of time to supervise the activities and assist the child (66.5%); the proposed activities do not arouse the child's interest and involvement (54.3%); difficulty in assisting/guiding the child in daycare centers and preschools' activities (24.9%); lack of access to materials and/or technologies (internet, computer, cell phone, toys, materials to glue, paint, draw, model...) (8.6%); lack of information on how and/or when to perform the activities at home (7.7%); not knowing how to use technologies (internet, computer, cell phone, etc.) (1.5%), and others (6.5%).

The most mentioned reasons were those that also influenced the non-acceptance of part of the families to the daycare centers and preschools' proposal, which are related to the children's experience and the family dynamics. About family dynamics, the adults' work overload and the problems in managing both professional and domestic work and the care and education of the children reappear: "We are having *difficulties organizing the routine* between mother and father's remote work, childcare, organizing household chores and keeping up with school demands" (Mother 12); "My impression is that at some point I will have to choose between having a job or a child" (Mother 13). Mothers point out the great maternal overload: "I take care of both alone, and I am working from home" (Mother 14); "Sometimes yes [the child performs the activities], but *the mother alone, working from home, can't handle it*" (Mother 15 - emphasis added).

Regarding the professional activity at the residences, there were adults: working from home (63.1%); working outside domestic environment (43.9%); "housewives" (17%); unemployed, staying at home (16.4%); unemployed, performing odd jobs outside the house (8.8%); retired (8.1%), employees on leave/away from work (1.5%); and in other conditions (3.2%). The main people responsible for assisting the children in remote learning were the mother (90.6%) and the father (34.7%).

In this sense, Buss-Simão and Lessa (2020) also highlight the overload of the mother in the pandemic:

[...] families and especially mothers, upon whom domestic work historically falls, live a situation, also extremely challenging, they act in "essential" jobs, self-employed, informal, working from home, others lost their jobs or saw their income drop, adding to this, the work from home and the economic, health, and emotional challenges (BUSS-SIMÃO; LESSA, 2020, p. 1443).

In this time of exceptionality and pressure felt by family members, especially women, the proposals of remote activities take on a specific outline and are not

always compatible with what is expected from their propositions, that is, the development of children. The concerns of the participants about the physical and mental health of the adults regarding the several demands are countless: "I work and study, the father is *overloaded* with domestic chores. *Exhausted*" (Mother 16); "We already have many activities in our routine. The conditions are not adequate. It is an extra burden for the family. We are all *anxious and fragile...*" (Mother 17) and:

We are *overloaded* with our professional demands, without being able to count on the support network we have always relied on (housekeeper, daycare, grandparents, counselors). In addition, we are adapting to what society insists on calling the "new normal," having to perform online the early stimulation activities so necessary for our baby's development. And when we have free time, *we are exhausted, distressed*, wanting to enjoy it in a really "free" way, as mother and father and not as a "teacher" (Mother 18).

The presence of weariness and suffering of the adult caregivers appears along with the countless daily tasks, with the absence of different actors who helped in the domestic daily life and in the children's care and education. This problem is also identified in studies conducted in other countries, which indicate that such a situation can bring tensions to the family environment and relationships and cause short, medium, and long-term impacts on the mental health of children and adults (WAITE; CRESWELL, 2020; EVANS *et al.*, 2020).

The pandemic, by its very nature, brings challenges to be overcome by all. However, they are worsened for families with young children since the complementarity between family-childcare/preschool either cannot be fully achieved or requires new and unfamiliar ways of being carried out. As a result, the specificities that circumscribe the experiences of families and children in this period place the roles of family and early child education institutions at the center of the discussion.

Although the boundaries of the daycare centers and preschools-family relationship have been reconfigured, these institutions are responsible for the child's pedagogical orientation. If they are not well mediated, they end up strengthening families' feelings of insecurity, incompetence, and overload. Research conducted in Brazil has indicated that misunderstandings in the delimitation of the roles of early childhood education institutions and families produce distancing and/or conflicts in the relationship between them (Lima, 2012; Lima; Silva, 2015; Rodrigues Muanis, 2022). Participants in the study indicated and criticized a movement of simply assigning this pedagogical function to the families.

The families affirmed that they were experiencing several feelings when facing the demand for remote learning by the child, and 57.6% of the answers referred to

more negative experiences (stressed, worried, pressured, dissatisfied, incompetent, anguished). Even so, 78.4% of the families whose institutions were proposing remote learning to the children said that the school should maintain these activities against 21.6%. Among the families that said that remote learning should not be maintained, 41.6% justified that they already had too many activities in the routine; 53.2% believed that they did not promote learning and development of the child; 48.7% mentioned that the conditions are not adequate, and 10.4% considered that it is not the family's role.

The families who said that the remote activities should be maintained claimed benefits of the activities for the children in their relationships with the early childhood education environment, and the reasons cited were: maintaining the bond of the children with the daycare centers and preschools (85.3%); promoting learning and development of the child (60.4%); maintaining the bond with classmates (50.5%); maintaining a study routine (46.1%); keeping the child busy (17.7%); not to lose the school year (15.4%) and others (3%). On this question, one family reported: "For a mother who works at home, it is more of an overload, but for my son, it has been important having the school within the routine" (Mother 19).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The research, based on listening to Brazilian families about aspects of the early childhood education institution-family relationship in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically concerning the proposition of remote learning by daycare centers and preschools, evidenced forms of organization and interaction of these institutions and family environments that affect the experiences of adults and children in this historical moment.

We found that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote activities have been widely used with children and families, even though many have not been able to access this educational proposal due to the absence of internet and/or DICTs, reaffirming what some researchers have already pointed out about an early childhood education inclusion/exclusion scenario very dependent on the socio-economic conditions of families in the Brazilian context.

The early childhood education institutions proposed remote activities with different objectives. Sometimes they aimed to maintain links between institution-family-child, promote specific learning, and/or replace classroom activities. The types

of activities were largely aligned to the promotion of playing, which signals a movement to guarantee, even in a scenario of exceptionality, aspects of the proposal historically built in the country for daycare centers and preschools.

Despite the existence of criticism related to remote learning, most families said it was appropriate to the ages of the children and positively evaluated the content addressed, the materials used, and the proposed duration, pointing achievements, by a portion of the early childhood education institutions, in the development of activities and resulting in benefits for the children. However, most participants reported difficulties, and a portion of families could not keep up with the proposed activities. These difficulties were related, mainly, to the ways children were experiencing these activities and, also, to aspects related to the reconfigurations in the family environment. Thus, the families built the meanings about the remote activities in a tension between considering its importance for the children and the difficulties of managing and executing them in the new environment.

It was verified that there was a great overload of work and stress in the family environment, especially for the mothers, which generated concerns about the mental and physical health of the children and the adult caregivers of the children. The domestic space-time was sometimes not enough to sustain the space-time of the multiple urgencies and demands that arose for these families. In this scenario, the proposition and the performance of remote educational activities as an additional demand to the families emerged as a central aspect, along with work, in the (re)structuring of domestic dynamics, affecting the quality of the established relationships, and impacting the family considered a means of development of the child and its members during pandemic times.

Therefore, the adults' experiences regarding the demands of the remote activities were composed of several negative feelings. Attributing the early childhood education institutions' functions to families was one of the elements that contributed to the configuration of this scenario, indicating mistakes in the establishment of boundaries between the institutions and family. This data indicates the need to review how institutions relate to families and the types of activities that family members can carry out so that they themselves are not reasons for suffering and produce positive effects inside the home space and on the children's development.

Looking at these indications obtained by listening to the experience of the families, dialectically, requires the revision of the role of the institutions for early childhood education to include, in their work as a whole, the efficient communication

between these two environments, the assistance to the family in the construction of meaning about the proposals to be developed with the children, the training of families for the mediation of pleasant experiences that produce the children's development. All this requires a posture of commitment to listening and a deep desire to know the family environment's demands, needs, and difficulties in a pandemic context. In short, knowing the experience of families with young children in the pandemic provokes the necessary questioning about the expansion of the socio-political and pedagogical function of the institutions of early childhood education. It is necessary to really incorporate family members in the relationship with early childhood education institutions, making this relationship more radically triangular (institution-family-child) than the one exercised in non-pandemic moments.

For us to build deepened knowledge about the relationship between early childhood education institutions and families and the (re)configurations of family dynamics, new researches need to be carried out, using different research methodologies, with families from different social strata, such as the popular ones and about the impacts of the child's care and education environments in different moments of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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NOTAS


THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILIES TOWARDS REMOTE ACTIVITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19

A perspectiva das famílias sobre atividades remotas na Educação Infantil em tempos de COVID-19


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O conjunto de dados que dá suporte aos resultados deste estudo não está disponível publicamente.

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