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PUPILS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a research inserted in the European project "New European Settings for Teachers and Teaching - NESTT", with the objective of knowing the perspectives of children/students on their learning experiences, informal (school) and non-formal education contexts, seeking to question from this angle matters on teaching and teacher training. A survey was applied in Portuguese, Polish and Romanian schools to 546 students aged between 10 and 16. Three blocks of questions - what I like most to learn; where I learn more and better; how I learn more and better – Three blocks of questions structured the questionnaire and also the data analysis based on descriptive statistics. The interpretation and discussion of the results were based on theoretical perspectives of the Sociology of Childhood, conceiving the child as a subject of rights and social actor competent and with voice, in order to evidence questions and contributions to a critical and transformative reflection around teacher education.

Keywords: Pupils' perspectives. Learning experiences. Sociology of Childhood. Teacher education.

PERSPETIVAS DOS ALUNOS SOBRE AS SUAS EXPERIÊNCIAS DE APRENDIZAGEM: IMPLICAÇÕES PARA A FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta resultados de uma pesquisa inserida no projeto Europeu "New European Settings for Teachers and Teaching – NESTT", que teve como principal objetivo conhecer as perspectivas das crianças/alunos sobre as suas experiências de aprendizagem, em contextos de educação formal (escolar) e não formal, procurando interrogar, desse ângulo, o ensino e a formação de professores. Foi aplicado um inquérito por questionário em escolas portuguesas, polacas e romenas, junto de 546 alunos com idades entre 10 e 16 anos. Três blocos de questões – o que gosto mais de aprender; onde aprendo mais e melhor; e como aprendo mais e melhor – estruturaram o questionário e também a análise dos dados, com base numa estatística descritiva. A interpretação e discussão dos resultados basearam-se em perspectivas teóricas da Sociologia da Infância, concebendo a criança como sujeito de direitos e ator social competente e com voz, a fim de evidenciar questionamentos e contribuições para uma reflexão crítica e transformadora em torno da formação docente.

Palavras-chaves: Perspetivas dos alunos. Experiências de aprendizagem. Sociologia da Infância.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of a research developed under the European Project "New European Settings for Teachers and Teaching - NESTT" with the aim to know and interpret students' perspectives on their learning experiences in formal (school) and non-formal education contexts. Teaching and teacher education are questioned from this angle. A questionnaire survey was conducted in Portuguese, Polish and Romanian schools, with 546 students aged between 10 and 16, which included three blocks of questions - which I like to learn most; where I learn more and better; and how I learn more and better. In line with the broader objectives of the NESTT project, the results of the survey contributed to the report entitled "Teachers Make a Difference: European Benchmark in Teacher Training" (FERREIRA, 2019) in which it was claimed that studies in the field of teacher training have highlighted teachers' perspectives, including their beliefs, attitudes, practices, views, training needs, etc., children/pupils being rarely heard about education and learning and, inherently, teacher education and training.

The Project aimed to transform a very widespread perspective in research in the area of teacher training that - changes in teaching imply "more" teacher training - without proceeding, however, a thorough questioning about what to change and how to change, what kind of training to undertake, etc. For this reason, we sought to question and contribute to the overcoming of the dominant school model in teacher training (FERREIRA, 2009), whose own lexicon is revealing - trainers, trainees, classes, etc. In addition, training is often based on policies and programmes imposed on teachers, not even taking into account their own working contexts and situations. In contrast, the NESTT project chose to investigate the perspectives of students - children and adolescents - on their learning, not only at school, under the aegis of the formal curriculum, but also in other contexts and experiences of non-formal and informal learning.

The methodological strategy of "listening" to students was considered potentially fruitful within the NESTT project, so that they could express their "voice", which has not been taken into account regarding these and other issues that directly concern them, has generated relevant data on its views on teacher education and training. The analysis and interpretation of the data as well as the discussion of the results have benefited from contributions from the Sociology of Childhood, in particular as regards the conception of a child as a subject of rights and a competent and voice social actor, having generated questions for a critical and transformative reflection of the teacher's action and training.

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR (RE)THINKING TEACHER EDUCATION

Educational literature in the field of teacher education has devoted much attention to the issues of teacher education and training, but little to students' perspectives on their learning experiences. Investigations closer to students' perspectives have used concepts such as "school experience" (ROCHEX, 1995) and "relationship with knowledge", in the light of a "sociology of the subject" (CHARLOT, 2000, 2005). On the other hand, the idea that "teachers make a difference" and that "teacher training makes a difference", which already in the 1970s gave title to some publications (MOOD, 1970; GOOD, BIDDLE, BROPHY, 1975) points to the fundamental role and influence that teachers have (or may have) in teaching and also in students' lives. The thesis that teachers make a difference has remained to this day and will certainly continue to be highlighted in educational research (HATTIE, 2004; WILKINSON, HAMILTON, 2003; BROUWER, KORTHAGEN, 2005; KORTHAGEN, 2010; TANISLI, 2016).

Especially in the last two decades, several international organisations, such as the European Union, the European Council, the OECD, among others, have shown great interest in the subject of learning, although focusing on "skills" and "learning outcomes" (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2007; CEDEFOP, 2009; OECD, 2018, 2019, 2020; EUROPEAN COUNCIL, 2018; EUROPEAN UNION, 2019) and not in the social and school "experience" of children and young people (DUBET, 1994, DUBET, MARTUCCELLI, 1996, ROCHEX, 2000, DURU-BELLAT, 2003, LAHIRE, 2015). A learning concept dominated by the "outcomes" and the corresponding measuring and comparison instruments, such as PISA, which continuously disseminate numbers, statistics, rankings, etc., has generated a "rush of change" (FERREIRA, 2008, 2011), that inhibits the reflective and critical dimension of teaching action. In addition, instead of counteracting this understanding of change, teachers' training institutions can accentuate it, not promoting reflective, critical thinking and committed to concrete action contexts" (FERREIRA, 2008). Such tendencies have moved students away from education and learning, ignoring them or seeing them only as secondary actors, voiceless, on stages and scenarios increasingly more technocratic and less democratic. Moreover, these trends have been pushing children away from what is essential in their lives: play. (SILVA, 2011, WHITEBREAD, 2012, NETO, 2020).

The increasing devaluation of play, and even its eradication of children's worlds of life, represents an attack on children's human rights and a step backwards in civilization. While widely recognized in the literature as fundamental to children, especially free play and play, both in nature and in parks and other public spaces, the length of time spent in school has increased and the time that children have actually free to play and become active is increasingly reduced (NETO, 2020). In this sense, the question of play currently assumes special importance, being pointed out by several authors the need for a greater recognition at the level of educational policies, teacher education, and pedagogy. The question of play is currently of special importance, being pointed out by several authors the need for greater recognition at the level of education policies, teacher training and pedagogy. It assumes special significance as a "pedagogy of play", not only in the school context but also in the context of non-school education, as a social pedagogy of play (WHITEBREAD, 2012, WOOD, 2014, RAYAN, NORTHEY-PARKS, 2014, TOMÁS, FERREIRA, 2019).

The perspective endorsed in this article is that, the participating students and protagonists of multiple learning experiences, calls for a more fruitful articulation between the field of teacher education and the "Social Studies of Childhood" (CORSARO, 1987, JAMES, JENKS, PROUT, 1998; SIROTA, 1998, PROUT, 2005, QVORTRUP, HONIG, 2009, MAYALL, 2010, SARMENTO, MARCHI, TREVISAN, 2018, ABRAMOWICZ, TEBET, RODRIGUES, 2019). By recognizing the rights, power, and competence of children, this field of study can help to question and transform pedagogy, this being a potentially transformative way of teaching action and training (FERREIRA, ANJOS, 2015; LÚCIO, FERREIRA, 2016). One of the pillars of the NESTT project is precisely the recognition of the importance of listening to children, not only on issues related to "le métier d'élève", but also about their daily life, at school and outside, in "le métier d'enfant ". (CHAMBOREDON, PREVOT, 1973; SIROTA, 1993; PERRENOUD, 1995; AMIGUES, ZERBATO-POUDOU, 2000; FERREIRA, OLIVEIRA, 2007; MARCHI, 2010).

Children voice and "listening to them" were considered, in the design of this project, a potentially fruitful starting point to challenge the issues of teacher education and training, seeking to linker more intimately with the profound changes that have taken place in recent decades and have transformed the way children see the school, the world and its relationship to learning and knowledge. Therefore, the research sought to address the issues of teacher work and training from a different angle, that is, from the perspective of the students, referred to the school, but, more broadly, about what they like most to learn and also where and how they think they learn more and better.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data collection

The main instrument of data collection was the online questionnaire, and Google Forms was used for its elaboration. Previously, an exploratory survey was conducted that included informal conversations with teachers and students, namely 12 individual interviews and 4 focus groups. This preliminary work was carried out in two Portuguese schools and in other schools selected by the two partner associations, in Poland and Romania. At one of the first project meetings, it was decided that the minimum number of respondents in each country would be 100. In Poland and Romania, 100 students answered and in Portugal, the number was higher (176 at the Maximinos School and 170 at the Francisco Sanches School, in total 376). Therefore, in total, 546 students aged between 10 and 16 answered from schools in the three countries.

Before the generalized application of the questionnaire, a pre-test was performed at the Francisco Sanches School, in two classes: a 5th grade (10 years) and a 9th grade (15 years), with students, verbalized their difficulties, opinions, and suggestions. The partner institutions, Polish and Romanian, also commented and made suggestions, leading to some adjustments to the particularities of their contexts. This has resulted in the exclusion or reformulation of some issues. After this validation procedure, the questionnaire, initially written in Portuguese, was translated into English and later into Polish and Romanian by the respective project partners.

Table 1 lists the set of items that made up the questionnaire, organized into three blocks of questions: i) WHAT? (What I like most to learn; ii) WHERE? (Where I learn more and better"; and iii) HOW? (How I learn more and better).

A Likert scale was used (0: I don't know; 1: It's not important; 2: It's not important; 3: It's important; 4: It's very important) and each question block added a comprehensive and diverse set of items, respectively, 32, 18 and 32. It was intended to capture aspects not only related to school-curricular learning, but also with contexts and non-formal learning experiences. Thus, the questionnaire included items such as cooking, doing field work, visiting museums, camping, etc., although we were aware that many students would not have enough information - and also experiences and concrete experiences - to pronounce on them. Given the objectives of the research, we still chose to insert them.

Table 1: Block of questions and survey items

WHAT? <i>What I like most to learn</i>	WHERE? <i>Where I learn more and better</i>	HOW? <i>How I learn more and better</i>
About animals	At Home	As an actor, in plays
About games (video, computer, etc.)	At my friends' home	Doing worksheets and other exercises in the manual
About nature	In the café	Making evaluation forms
About the world	In the school labs	Doing experiments
Art	In the school library	Doing field work
Chemistry	In the computer room	Doing homework at home
Cinema	At the church	Doing field trips
Cooking	At the public library	Practicing sports
Crafts	At school clubs (badminton, chess...)	Doing volunteer work
Dance	In local associations and NGOs	Drawing/painting
Drawing	In public parks and gardens	Camping with family and friends
Electronics	In the study support centres	Dancing
Foreign languages	In the classroom	Hanging out with friends
Gardening	In nature	Going to concerts
Geography	At the school cafeteria	Going to the cinema
History	In the school playground	Going to the theater
ICT	In the Boy Scouts	Helping my parents at home
Mathematics	On the streets of my city	Listening to music
Mother Tongue		Playing video games
Multimedia		Presenting my work to the class
Music		Reading books (novels, short stories,...)
Painting		Traveling
Photography		Using social networks (FB, Twitter, Instagram, ...)
Physical Education and Sports		Visiting museums
Physics		Watching documentaries
Radio		Watching TV- soap operas, movies...
Religion		Doing group/class work
Science		Working in small groups
Theater		Working in pairs
Video		In project work
Philosophy		Working individually
Chemistry		Viewing and manipulating objects

Source: own preparation.

Despite being an online questionnaire, it was answered in person, on school computers and using the school's Internet. Appropriate spaces have been chosen either in terms of physical and technical conditions or on the basis of ethical and methodological criteria, such as free and informed participation by pupils, who may withdraw at any time; ensuring anonymity, the privacy and individuality of the responses, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of the data and the results of the survey.

3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis was structured around the three structuring axes of the questionnaire and was performed using descriptive statistics. Since it was not the purpose of the project to make a systematic comparison of the data collected in the three countries, it was decided to mark and interpret some differences when they were considered relevant to the objectives of the research. For example, significant differences were observed in relation to the percentage of respondents, by age and by country (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents, by age and country

Age(years)	PT (%)	PL (%)	RO (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
10	3,4	----	4,0	15	02,75
11	10,7	8,0	5,0	49	08,97
12	19,5	3,0	4,0	75	13,74
13	14,2	17,0	2,0	69	12,64
14	31,5	22,0	13,0	144	26,37
15	11,8	33,0	44,0	118	21,61
16	9,0	17,0	28,0	76	13,92
Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	546	100 %

Legenda: PT – Portugal; PL – Polónia; RO – Roménia

Source: own preparation.

In Poland the age range of respondents is between 11 and 16 years of age and the percentages of responses of older students (15 and 16 years) who responded in Portugal and Romania are markedly different (20% and 72%). We could point out other examples but these differences are presented in the table. The differences will have been due to factors such as: voluntary adherence of students; the type of school, despite all belonging to the public system; the type of entity – partner entities of the project – that applied the questionnaire (in Portugal, the partners were schools while in Poland and Romania were associations). Despite the differences, in all cases the questionnaire was answered in the school itself, with the necessary authorizations and consents.

It was not intended to carry out a research of the statistical-experimental type, which would imply the constitution of a representative and stratified sample, but by a research inscribed in the interpretative paradigm, in order to know the perspectives of pupils – children and adolescents – on their learning experiences, in various contexts and everyday situations (school and non-school), also with a view to interpreting trends in the answers, relating them to the teaching action and drawing from them some implications for teacher training.

As an analysis tool, a "matrix" composed of four main categories was elaborated (Table 3).

Table 3: analyses Matrix (4 main categories)

<p>Classroom content and subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom activities • National Curriculum • Subjects and Content classes, Schedules • Textbooks, etc. 	<p>The two possibilities (in and/or out of school)</p>	<p>Outside (outside the school)</p>
<p>Activities in school and outside spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library, resource center, ... • Outdoor activities for educational purposes • School work at home, • Study support centers, ... 		

Source: own preparation.

The first column, with two shades of blue, corresponds to the set of activities performed at the school or directly related to the school. The two shades of blue represent, visually, two categories. The middle column, with an orange background, represents the third category, comprising several items that can be understood as part of learning experiences both in formal and non-formal and informal education contexts. The green column symbolizes the fourth category, covering the items that refer to activities outside the school and apparently without a subordination of learning to the curriculum and the didactic. A brief description of the four categories of analysis follows.

More specifically, the *first category of analysis* (dark blue) corresponds to what we can designate the "hardcore" of the curriculum (the centrality of the classroom; subordination to the national curriculum, emphasis on disciplines and contents, the

prevalence of lectures, the organization in classes, schedules, etc., use of pre-programmed materials, such as school textbooks and "booklets").

The *second category* (light blue) aggregates a set of items that relate to the school and the curriculum, but without the academic inclination and rigidity that characterizes the first. It includes several spaces that exist in the schools the activities that can be carried out in them (for example, the computer room, the library, the bar, the recreation space, etc.). It also covers activities carried out outside the school, but with the intention of teaching and learning curricular content, for example, activities of curricular enrichment that can take place both at school and outside, but at the service of formal learning-curricular.

The *third category* (orange column) incorporates a set of learning experiences that can be developed either in school, integrated or not in the curriculum, or out of school, i.e., activities are not determined by teachers, textbooks, school hours, etc. This is a dedicated effort of categorization and interpretation made by the researcher, based on the interpretations made by the students themselves, that is, the meaning they attribute to the questions listed in the questionnaire. In short, this category of analysis covers the set of learning experiences that can occur in school, outside school, and beyond school such as gardening, cooking, camping, use of social networks, Internet search, photography, radio, music, multimedia, etc.

The *fourth category* (green column) seeks to highlight the set of non-formal learning experiences that occur outside of school. It corresponds to what has been designated in the literature as non-formal education and non-formal learning. It includes a wide range of activities that can be initiated by children, adolescents, young people, family members, and friends, but also by local institutions and associations, organized youth groups, etc. The activities can be carried out at different times (late afternoon and evening, weekend, school holidays, etc.) and spaces, including nature, the streets, and parks of the city; the public library, the house itself and the house of friends, among others.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of research data and results, using tables that organize the data and help you read it. The first point concerns the answers "I do not know", seeking to interpret their meaning, to make the following sections more intelligible.

4.1 Interpreting the results of the answers "I don't know"

The age differences had significant repercussions on the "I don't know" responses, as the percentages are higher in contexts where students are younger. In short, there are items where "I don't know" may be due to lack of information to comment on, but there are others where "I don't know" may mean that neither schools nor families provide learning experiences such as video, multimedia or even camping.

Table 4: "Don't know" answers with percentages higher than 25%.

What I like to learn most	%	Where I learn more and better	%	How I learn more and better	%
Philosophy	52	Scouts	38	Camping	37
Handicraft	36	Local Associations	33	Actor/Theater Parts	35
Electronics	33	School Clubs	31	Volunteering	33
Radio	30			Fieldwork	30
Multimedia	27			Playing video games	27
Theater	27				
Gardening	26				

Source: own preparation.

For example, concerning the question "What you like most to learn", the fact that some items correspond to curricular areas or disciplines that are not part of the curriculum for the ages covered (10 to 16 years), led to a high percentage of "I don't know" responses. However, this reinforced the perception of reliability of the questionnaire responses in general. In the answers "I do not know", the items in which the differences are most evident correspond, mainly, to disciplines, themes, or contents that are not part of the curricular plans of these ages, such as Philosophy (52%) and Electronics (33%). However, if concerning curricular learning these motives seem clear, it is no longer certain items such as "camping with family members and/or friends" (37%), "manual work" (36%), school clubs (31%), "fieldwork" (30% or even video games and multimedia, both with 27%.

Note that it is mainly younger students who mark the option "I don't know", which may have to do with a lack of information or, more deeply, with their representations of what is learning and what is not, that is, they may consider that the place of learning is the school and the source are the disciplines that make up the curriculum. In light of this

representation, we understand the high percentage of responses "I don't know", in relation to the items mentioned and still others, such as "being an actor in plays (35%), "like to learn theater" (27%), "gardening" (26%), among others.

4.2 The first axis of analysis: "what I like most to learn"

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned analysis matrix and the different colors used to represent the fourth category, Table 5 shows a clear predominance of dark blue and orange and, in particular the second color in the right column. The only item that falls into the second category (light blue) is ICT, being the least valued among the "most important". Our expectation on this item was that it would be considered more important than it was, given the interest that children and young people show today in digital technology. The interpretative hypothesis that we advanced is that the fact that certain activities - in this case, the use of ICT - are part of the curriculum, although in some cases they are called "Syllabus Enrichment Activity", students tend not to associate them to a free-time, leisure and play activity.

Table 5: What I like most about learning (average = 2.5)

	>2,5		≤2,5
Physical Education and Sports	3,2	About Nature	2,5
About the World	3,1	Painting	2,5
Foreign Languages	2,9	Math	2,4
About Animals	2,8	Music	2,3
Science	2,8	Film	2,3
History	2,8	Geography	2,3
Draw	2,7	Physics	2,3
Mother tongue	2,7	Cooking	2,2
About games (video, computer)	2,7	Photography	2,2
ICT	2,6	Religion	2,2
		Art	2,2
		Video	2,1
		Chemistry	2,1
		Dance	1,9

Source: own preparation.

The orange column, which represents the third category of analysis, as previously mentioned, incorporates a set of learning experiences that can be developed either in school, integrated or not in the curriculum, or outside school. Learning about nature, painting, cooking, video, photography, art, cinema, dance, etc. are some examples of what students see as less important in terms of learning, which is quite surprising. Interestingly, also, the topics that are among the most important are those required in the curriculum, such as Physical Education and Sport; Foreign languages; Sciences; History and Mother Tongue. It should be noted, however, that the most valued item of the questionnaire was Physical Education and Sports, in contrast to other areas or disciplines, whose importance was considered much lower, namely Mathematics, Geography, Physics, and Chemistry.

Also noteworthy is the high importance attached to learning about the world and about animals and, on the contrary, the fact that "dance" appears last in the "least important" column.

4.3 The second axis of analysis: "Where I learn more and better"

In Table 6, which systematizes the results related to the question "Where I learn more and better", the predominance of green and light blue is very noticeable. Being items that fall into the fourth category of analysis - outside school - we find that there is a certain devaluation of public spaces, as well as public institutions and services. It is also noted the fact, also surprisingly, that the item that points to learning "in the house of friends" arise among those who are considered the least important.

Table 6: Where I learn more and better (mean = 2.0)

	> 2,0		≤ 2,0
In the classroom	2,7	In Study Support Centers	2,0
In nature	2,6	In cafes	1,9
At home	2,5	In public gardens or parks	1,8
In the school library	2,4	In the school playground or leisure park	1,8
In the computer room	2,3	In the streets of my city	1,6
In the school lab	2,2	At my friends' houses	1,8
In the public library	2,1	In the school cafeteria	1,5
		At church	1,4
		In public leisure parks	1,4

Source: own preparation.

Although the questionnaire included a great diversity of items related to contexts, spaces, and places of learning, the most valued was "the classroom". On the one hand, the importance attached to this item seems to reveal that the classroom is still considered the central and almost exclusive space of learning. On the other hand, to restrict the interpretation of the results only to this view would be contradictory, given the importance given (with values above the media) to items such as learning "in nature" and "at home", as well as in a "public library", although in this case with less emphasis.

With the second category of analysis (light blue), we observe the presence of six items in the table, three of them considered "most important", namely: in the school library; in a computer room; and in the school laboratories; and three other items considered less important, namely: learning in study centers, in the school bar, and in the school playground. What stands out most is the low importance attributed to the "recreation and leisure park of the school" as a source of learning, since, in general, it is seen as one of the favorite spaces of students. One explanation may lie in the fact that students associate this space with play, play, socializing, rather than seeing it as a space where one learns. Again, these results reveal your insights into *what is* and *what is not* learning.

It is notorious that spaces and times of greater freedom, informality, and friendliness are not seen by respondents as sources of learning, of learning experiences. Looking at the predominance of green color in the right column, where items related to the fourth category are inserted (outside school), a certain devaluation of public spaces is verified, including institutions, services, and other public places as sources of learning, including

learning in gardens or public parks, in the streets of their cities, in public leisure parks and in the local Church.

4.4 The third axis of analysis: "How I learn more and better"

We resorted again to the visual highlighting provided by the different colors used in the matrix of analysis (Table 7).

First, this last table includes several items related to the four categories of analysis, although the fourth (green) and the first (dark blue) predominate. It is worth recalling that the first category of analysis refers to the activities carried out at school and, more restrictively, to the space and time of class.

Table 7: how I learn more and better (average = 2.2)

	>2,2		≤2,2
Working on projects	2,9	Using objects to concretize the learning	2,2
Researching online	2,9	Visiting museums	2,2
Working in pairs	2,7	Going to concerts	2,2
Doing collective work	2,7	Watching TV (soap operas, movies, etc.)	2,1
Conducting experiments	2,7	Going out with friends	2,1
Doing small group work	2,6	Drawing/painting	2,0
Doing school work at home	2,6	Reading books	2,0
Listening to music	2,5	Working individually	1,8
Taking assessment tests	2,5	Helping parents at home	1,8
Presenting work to the class	2,5	Traveling	1,8
Watching documentaries on TV	2,4	Going on field trips	1,8
Using social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	2,3	Going to the Cinema/movies	1,8
Doing textbook exercises/worksheets	2,3	Sporting	1,8
		Going dancing	1,7
		Going to the theatre	1,6

Source: own preparation.

This category corresponds to the more academic curricular dimension composed of disciplinary areas and themes that integrate the national curriculum, as well as the activities essentially carried out in the classroom and that is predetermined by the standard

hours. In other words, this category emphasizes a still quite common perception of education that considers learning only as a result of a curriculum focused on disciplines and content, traditionally linked to lectures and the closed space of the classroom.

The results presented in the table help to understand that the meaning that students give to learning in the classroom does not coincide with the perception mentioned above. For example, "working individually" is part of the less important set of items, and "working as an entire class", although valued, is less than working on projects, researching online, and working in pairs. In addition, there are items like "doing experiments" and "working in groups", along with the mentioned "working with the whole class". In turn, the items considered most important include "taking evaluation tests" and "doing coursebook exercises/spreadsheets", with similar values to the item "present my work in class".

In general, students' responses to questions related to assessment methodologies are not surprising, given the pressure that students, schools, teachers, and students' families are facing, largely as result of PISA/OECD and other international programmes using a set of instruments to measure and compare students' academic outcomes. However, we were surprised that they attached significant importance to "doing homework" and attached less importance to study visits and fieldwork, for example. It is visible the importance attributed to items such as online search, listening to music, and using social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) and the lesser importance they attach, for example, to drawing and painting and reading books. Except for "watching documentaries on television" – which, although being held outside of school is not an outdoor activity – there is a wide range of items that refer to off-school and outdoor activities that are generally enjoyed by students of these ages, but they are considered by the respondents as less important, namely: visiting museums, going to concerts, going out with friends, traveling, going to the cinema, playing sports, dancing and going to the theatre.

Among other aspects, a discussion we can make about these results – and one that deserves a deeper understanding in future research – is that students are supposed to answer a question related to their learning: "how to learn more and better". Reflecting later on the questions formulated in the questionnaire, we are convinced that the results would have been significantly different if the question "what I like most to learn" had been put differently, accentuating the "do", i.e., "what I love most about doing...". In addition to this different formulation living up to the famous theory of Dewey - Learning by Doing (DEWEY, 2007, 1^a ed. 1916), it would refer more to the idea of activity and not so much to

a rather internalized perception that learning occurs only in school, through classes, subjects, contents, textbooks and other school-typical spaces, times, rules, and materials.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

The conduct of research focused on the perspectives of children and not on the perspectives of teachers and other adults, as is common, has been considered, within the framework of the NESTT Project, a challenging approach to getting an image about children's understanding of what learning *is* and what it *is not*. In fact, non-formal and informal learning experiences tend to be seen by students as activities, but not as learnings. Respondents tend to limit the notion of learning to the school context and subsume their role to the "métier d'élève"; on the other hand, they show a less internalized recognition of non-formal educational situations and contexts as learning sources. In other words, the interest in understanding students' perspectives on their learning experiences has contributed, on the one hand, to listen to them as social actors – their ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, expectations –, which have not been sufficiently taken into account in relation to these and other issues that directly concern them and, on the other hand, to provide theoretical and empirical knowledge capable of generating questions and transformations in teaching practices and teacher training.

The results emphasize students' critical views on teaching, especially about the predominance of lectures. Working in groups, in pairs, and in projects at school; studying and learning at home and with friends, and learning by traveling, visiting museums, listening to music, among other learning-related activities outside school, are considered by children as more meaningful and enjoyable forms of learning. In short, the results teach us a lot about students' perspectives, as well as how they express their ideas and opinions about teaching and learning. Although the items in the questionnaire referred to varied learning experiences in various contexts of formal and non-formal education, the results reveal a strong identification of many responses with school structure and culture, tending to limit the notion of learning to spaces and times of curricular scope.

Considering the research findings, a set of implications and recommendations are presented below, highlighting the importance of the same main aspects related to teacher and teacher education:

- a) School culture is deeply internalized in the perceptions and representations of children and adolescents about learning. In general, they do not see as learning what they do and experience in their daily lives, tending to consider only as learning what is inherent to the school, the curriculum, and above all to the classroom;
- b) However, they reveal a critical sense regarding some characteristics of the teaching practices they experience in their schools, such as lectures, predominance of individual work, excess of schoolwork to do at home, the pressure of exams, among others;
- c) The fact that the questionnaire was answered in the school space (and taking into account everything it represents, materially and symbolically) has influenced the students' answers, showing that they tend to restrict their status as citizens and social actors to the role of students;
- d) The distinction between formal, non-formal, and informal education has certainly an analytical pertinence, but it is necessary to produce empirical knowledge, with emphasis on the ethnography of the school, the classroom, and the daily lives of children, aiming to understand, in the perspective of children, the different educational settings, highlighting more their complementarity than their opposition.
- e) Therefore, it is increasingly necessary to question and overcome a restricted conception of the school curriculum, which tends to consider learning as a process only of the cognitive domain and related exclusively to the areas of literacy and numeracy evaluated by programs such as PISA, with emphasis on measurement, comparison, and standardization. It implies the strengthening of the public and community education space, promoting relationships between children and the city, enhancing the use of existing multiple resources, such as the school library and the public library, the museum, the theatre, leisure parks, nature, etc., all in the perspective of increasing the citizen participation of children and their social, political, economic, environmental and cultural rights;
- f) The research findings show the interest of the students in carrying out activities that allow them autonomous learning, through study visits, fieldwork, etc. associating these activities to the project work, in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. The integration of digital technologies in the school and e-learning do not dispense face-to-face interaction and communication but can create conditions for that autonomy, not only to occasionally search for

information on the Internet but to carry out a systematic work of a critical selection of information, in research-based activities aimed at the production of knowledge and not only its passive reproduction.

A transformative approach to education, and concomitantly to teacher work and training, implies promoting students' participation in decision-making processes and listening to them as members of learning communities of which they are co-builders. To this end, we argue that changing teacher training policies and practices also implies questioning a still dominant school design and teaching practices, but simultaneously a dominant conception of a child who considers that he/she is being prepared to be a citizen but is not yet. This devalued conception of children is still very deep-rooted, constituting an obstacle to changing educational policies and practices, especially those which concern teacher education. In order to remove this obstacle, the role of policymakers, higher education institutions and other bodies responsible for the initial and continuing training of teachers is crucial. Teacher Education cannot remain estranged from contemporary debates about the agency and children's rights in the ambit of Childhood Social Studies. Children and young people, who are citizens today and not in a remote future, cannot be denied the right to participate in matters that directly concern them, both at school and in the public space in general.

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