

**Luiza de Paula Cortezzi**



Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)  
[cortezziluiza@gmail.com](mailto:cortezziluiza@gmail.com)

**Vanessa Ferraz Almeida Neves**



Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)  
[vfaneves@ufmg.br](mailto:vfaneves@ufmg.br)

**Shirlei Rezende Sales**



Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)  
[shirlei.sales@gmail.com](mailto:shirlei.sales@gmail.com)

## “COME ON, GUYS! LET’S DISCOVER NEW HORIZONS”: LIVED EXPERIENCES IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the lived experiences (*perizhivanya*) of a childcare school curriculum, focusing on the construction of meaning and the significance produced by infants and teachers for curricular practices. The research took place at a Municipal School of Early Childhood Education in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais state, Brazil), with video recordings, field notes, and interviews. The theoretical-methodological perspective is based on curricular theories, cultural-historical psychology, and ethnography in education. The concept of experience is understood as the person/environment unit while the curriculum is analyzed as a cultural practice. In this study it is argued that the experiences of children and teachers were marked by some tension expressed in the [autonomy/protection] unit. The aforementioned unit constitutes the nursery school curriculum through practices that enable the infants to carry out various activities, based on their own initiatives and without the direct supervision of an adult. At the same time, those practices provide protection and care for the children.

**Keywords:** Infants; Early Childhood Education; Curriculum; Cultural-historical Psychology; Ethnography in Education.

## “VEM, PESSOAL, DESCOBRIR NOVOS HORIZONTES”: AS VIVÊNCIAS DE UM CURRÍCULO DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

### RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar as vivências de um currículo do berçário, focalizando a construção dos sentidos e significados produzidos pelos/as bebês e professoras para as práticas curriculares. A pesquisa aconteceu em uma Escola Municipal de Educação Infantil de Belo Horizonte com a produção de videograções, notas de campo e entrevistas. A perspectiva teórico-metodológica está baseada nas teorias curriculares, na Psicologia histórico-cultural e na Etnografia em Educação. O conceito de vivência é entendido como a unidade pessoa/meio; e o currículo é analisado como uma prática cultural. Argumentamos que as vivências dos/as bebês e professoras foram marcadas por tensões expressas na unidade [autonomia/proteção]. Essa unidade constitui o currículo do berçário por meio de práticas que possibilitam aos/às bebês a realização de várias atividades, com base em suas próprias iniciativas e sem a tutela direta de um adulto. Ao mesmo tempo, essas práticas propiciam a proteção e o cuidado desses/as bebês.

**Palavras-chave:** Bebês. Educação Infantil. Currículo. Psicologia histórico-cultural. Etnografia em Educação.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

How important is the problematization of the curriculum used in a nursery school class? The relevance of this issue can be gauged when we refer to the struggle of feminist movements that, since the 70s, defended that an Early Childhood Education should become a right for all children (TELES, 2015), a right that was only consolidated with the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution. It should be noted that, currently, approximately 3.8 million Brazilian children up to three years old attend Early Childhood Education institutions, which allows us to better understand how babies experience the curriculum practiced in care and education contexts.

Complementary to babies' rights of education, the Brazilian National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDBEN/1996, in Portuguese) sanctions, in article 30, that this service must take place in day care centers<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the Brazilian National Education Guideline and Framework law stipulates that Early Childhood Education is part of Basic Education, which implies in legislative terms the elaboration of a curriculum for Early Childhood Education that is articulated to a common national basis<sup>2</sup>. Composing a dispute scenario, still in 2014, the elaboration of a common national base becomes a strategy to fulfill four goals of the new Brazilian National Education Plan (PNE, in Portuguese), Law 13.005 of 2014. In that sense, the first goal, which intends to amplify the offer of nursery school services and make Early childhood education universal<sup>3</sup>, establishes the following strategy:

[...] to stimulate the articulation between postgraduate studies, research centers, and training courses for education professionals, in order to **guarantee the development of curricula and pedagogical proposals** that incorporate advances in research linked to the teaching-learning process and to educational theories in serving the population from 0 (zero) to 5 (five) years old (PNE, 2014. Emphasis added).

Thus, the elaboration of an official curriculum for Early Childhood Education, including infants and toddlers, becomes a legislative imperative and it guides the need to broaden the

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<sup>1</sup> Law No. 9,394, of December 20th, 1996, article 30: "Early childhood education will be offered in: I - nursery schools, or equivalent entities, for children up to three years old."

<sup>2</sup> Law No. 12796, of April 4, 2013, article 26, defines that "the curricula of early childhood education, elementary school education and high school education must have a common national basis, being complemented in each educational system and in each school establishment by a diversified part, demanded by the regional and local characteristics of society, culture, economy, and students."

<sup>3</sup> Goal 1: To universalize, by the year 2016, early childhood education in preschool for children from 4 (four) to 5 (five) years old and expand the offer of early childhood education in day care centers in order to meet at least 50% (fifty percent) of children up to 3 (three) years old by the end of the term of this national education plan (PNE, in Portuguese).

debate on the Early Childhood Education curriculum. After all, we agree with Tomaz Silva (2001, page 11) regarding the fact that “the curriculum policy, [...] transformed into a curriculum, has effects in the classroom.” There are many dilemmas and struggles around curriculum definitions. There are countless questions about the content selection processes to compose the planning of a curriculum. Between the curricula written and registered in official documents and the curricula actually experienced in kindergarten and nursery schools there are infinite possibilities that need to be investigated for a better understanding.

It is hoped, here, to contribute to this debate by analyzing how babies and toddlers experienced the nursery curriculum in a Municipal School of Early Childhood Education, in Belo Horizonte (Escola Municipal de Educação Infantil Tupi, or EMEI Tupi). This analysis was based on part of the results of a research based on the dialogue among curriculum theories, Cultural-historical psychology, and Ethnography in Education.

This article has been organized into four sections. In the first, the curriculum is analyzed as a cultural practice that produces senses and meanings and is also produced by senses and meanings in certain contexts, providing different experiences for infants, toddlers, and teachers. In the second section, the theoretical-methodological approach is presented. Next, the focus is on the experiences of babies and teachers with the “foam tunnel”, an artifact that was present in the second semester of observation. Finally, we draw some conclusions. It is argued throughout this article that the experiences of the toddlers and teachers involved were marked by tensions expressed in the [autonomy/protection] unit. This unit constitutes the curriculum through the selection of practices that aim to enable babies to carry out diverse activities based on their own initiatives and without the direct supervision of adults and, at the same time, the practices provide protection and care for those toddlers. Such dimensions composed the investigated curriculum.

## **2 PERIZHIVANYA<sup>4</sup> AND CURRICULUM AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE**

The concept of *perezhivanie* allows us to establish a relationship between what a person lives and their cultural development process. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the transformations that take place in the cultural environment and in the person, because a *perezhivanie* is

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<sup>4</sup> Usually the term Russian term ‘*perezhivanie*’ has been translated into English as ‘experience’, which does not capture the complexity of this Vygotskian notion. Thus, we have kept the term ‘*perzhivanie*’, singular, or ‘*perzhivanya*’, plural.

[...] a unit in which, on the one hand, the environment and what is experienced is represented, indivisibly - the *perezhivanie* is always linked to what is located outside the person - and, on the other hand, it is represented on how I experience that, hence, all the particularities of the personality and all the particularities of the environment are presented in the *perezhivanie* (VIGOTSKI, 2010, page 686).

In such manner, a *perezhivanie* is an “indivisible union of the particularities of the personality and the particularities of the situation represented in the experience” (VIGOTSKI, 2010, page 686), giving rise to the comprehension that the action of the environment on a subject will depend on the way they understand the world and things, which will be different for each person. Thus, even if the curriculum practiced in the institution is the same for all infants and toddlers, different *perezhivanya* will be constituted by each of them in a continuous flow of meaning production. There is a cyclical movement between the process of meaning and the creation of something new, which boosts zones of imminent development and, consequently, the course of cultural development for everyone involved, i.e., children and teachers.

Human productions are constructed by meaning practices related to the “imposition of meanings about the social world” (SILVA, Tomaz, 2001, page 14). Such practices are cultural. From this perspective, the understanding of a culture “designates the performance of power relations in establishing even its own meaning” (VEIGA-NETO, 2004, page 53). Cultural practices are multiple in their meanings, neither fixed nor definitive. They change throughout history and are processed in different ways according to different cultural groups. In this way, culture is not understood here as a superstructure or hegemony, but as meaning microprocesses that change and modify themselves all the time, not randomly, but organized by relationships, plots, and meaning networks. Analyzing them is to understand the social and cultural conditions that produced particular meanings, as well as the effect of these meaning practices. As Tomaz Silva (2001, p. 10) argues, “the curriculum is the space where struggles around different meanings of social and political issues are concentrated and unfolded”. And it is in this perspective that a school curriculum is constituted: meaning practices of an environment that materializes itself not only in the curriculum documents but also in the *perezhivanya* within a collective education institution. In this theoretical framework, the curriculum is understood as a “ground where culture will be actively created and produced” (MOREIRA; SILVA, 1994, page 28). To this extent, the nursery school is understood as a terrain, or an environment, that creates and produces culture, constituting the *perezhivanya* of babies and teachers who are sharing social and cultural practices there. Thus, a school curriculum is the place of “symbolic and cultural production and creation” (MOREIRA; SILVA, 1994, page 26) within an educational institution. Due to this character

of production, it is possible to consider that the curriculum is a cultural artifact that produces culture and is also produced by it (MOREIRA, 2001). That is, being produced by culture and, simultaneously, producing culture as well, implies to be in a constant process of “making meaning”, marked by social relations of power.

Thereupon, a curriculum is not just a selection of some knowledge to be taught to children, but it is also practices of meaning that provide production, circulation, and consumption of meanings in a social space (SILVA, Tomaz, 2001). On that account, the babies' *perezhivanya* are composed in the process of sense and “making meaning” construction in a curriculum practiced in the day care center. Such curriculum implies choices related to the organization of times and spaces, as well as to the materiality in the nursery, including the “foam tunnel”, an artifact that is part of the curriculum of the observed nursery school.

Throughout the research, it was possible to observe different meanings being produced for the curricular practices experienced in the nursery. Here, we pay particular attention to the meanings attributed to the [autonomy/protection] unit. It is discussed, next, how the autonomy and protection concepts are understood in the most relevant curriculum documents for the first stage of Brazilian Basic Education, as well as in other researches of the same field.

The Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI - in Portuguese - BRASIL, 2009), and the Brazilian National Core Curriculum (BRASIL, 2017) are the main current curricular references for the Early Childhood Education. These documents were created aiming to establish an Early Childhood Education identity as children's right and, at the same time, marking a difference in relation to the Elementary School curricula. Thus, on the one hand, the school format of Kindergarten, or *schoolification* (MOSS, 2008), is questioned. On the other hand, its formalization in the field of rights is demanded. In this context, the Early Childhood Education curriculum has the child as the center of its planning and it is defined

[...] a set of practices that seek to articulate the children's experiences and knowledge with the knowledge that is part of the cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific, and technological heritage, in order to promote the integral development of children from 0 to 5 years old (DCNEI, Article 3, 2009).

All through the year 2010, the Brazilian General Coordination of Early Childhood Education (In Portuguese, COEDI/MEC) prepared a set of ten texts for the Curriculum in Movement Program, with the objective of discussing specific aspects of the guidelines. “The specifics

of pedagogical actions with babies” (BARBOSA, 2010) is one of these texts, which explains an understanding of babies (age range between zero to eighteen months)

[...] powerful people in the field of social relations and cognition. They are endowed with a body in which affection, intellect, and motricity are deeply connected, and it is the particular way these elements are articulated that defines the singularities of each individual throughout their history. Each baby has a personal rhythm, a way of being themselves, and communicating (BARBOSA, 2010, p. 2).

In agreement with this concept of a powerful baby, the nursery school space should encourage them to explore the area, to be curious, to look for toys and for their peers, detecting new experiences to be lived. The environment must also provide comfort, safety, and be consistent with the needs of infants and toddlers (BARBOSA, 2010). Likewise, the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), supported by that concept of a powerful baby, proposes an expansion of their experiences in the collective context of the nursery school through the establishment of six learning rights articulated in five fields of experience<sup>5</sup>.

It is necessary to emphasize here the numerous criticisms and issues already expressed in relation to the Brazilian National Core Curriculum. The curricular field has systematized and denounced serious problems arising from the process of its elaboration regarding the institution of a single mandatory curriculum for a country as diverse as Brazil, which ends up excluding differences in favor of a supposed “universal human” (ABRAMOWICZ; CRUZ; MORUZZI, 2016). It is imperative to consider that a “national curriculum” is always conflictual and constitutes a gradual process of teaching/learning processes homogenization. In this sense, there is a considerable accumulation of scientific research demonstrating the disastrous effects of such a curriculum policy (AGUIAR; DOURADO, 2018; MACEDO, 2014, 2015; SILVA, Mônica, 2018).

The main arguments against the Brazilian National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education relates to the “loss of teacher autonomy and the fact that the guidelines assist the preparation of materials and assessment” (VITÓRIA, 2016, p. 7). Besides that, the document is criticized for silencing the work with children with disabilities, disorders, and syndromes; it aims to unify differences; and seek to produce equal experiences for all babies and children at national level (PEREIRA, 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> The learning rights are: to live together, to play, to participate, to explore, to express and know yourself. The fields of experience are: 1) The ‘self’, the ‘other’ and the ‘we’; 2) Body, gesture, and movement; 3) Traces, sounds, colors and shapes; 4) Listening, speaking, thinking and imagining; 5) Spaces, times, quantities, relationships and transformations. The five fields of experience are: 1) The Self, the Other and the We; 2) Body, gestures, movements; 3) Lines, sounds, colors, and shapes; 4) Listening, speaking, thinking, and imagining. 5) Space, time, quantities, relationships, and transformations.

On the other hand, it is necessary to consider that the initial process of discussion and elaboration of the Brazilian National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education took place through a broad debate with teachers and researchers in the field (VITÓRIA, 2016). Such debate happened before the 2016 Parliamentary Coup<sup>6</sup> and resulted in a document that chose to discuss fields of experience based on the thinking of John Dewey (2002), and not lists of contents to be “taught” to children (FOCHI, 2020), which would have respected the diversity culture of the different Early Childhood Education schools in the country.

Thus, it is worth reaffirming that “the notion of curriculum in Early Childhood Education is directly associated with the search and construction of meanings” (FOCHI, 2020, page 59). Therefore, curricular experiences have the potential to expand the cultural development possibilities for babies, teachers, and assistants in relation to a vast set of cultural meanings.

That being said, it is possible to see a sum of fundamental characteristics of nursery schools in the official curriculum documents mentioned previously. It is argued here that it is necessary to think that these different possibilities for organizing the school environment imply some tension that can be expressed in the dialectical pair [autonomy/protection], that is, autonomy must be promoted in the babies' initiatives while simultaneously protecting them. In this regard, it defends a concept of a baby that is powerful and vulnerable, hence, his/her abilities cannot or should not disregard care as the foundation of human beings (SILVA; NEVES, 2020), with care being inseparable from education.

Parallel to the official curriculum documents for Early Childhood Education and somehow giving them subsidies, pedagogical approaches and academic research emphasize the construction of autonomy as an essential aspect in Early Childhood Education. Then, Falk (2011), when discussing the pedagogy proposed by Emmi Pikler at the Lóczy Institute (Hungary), highlights the autonomy in the construction of educational practices for babies. According to the author, giving autonomy to a baby allows him/her to follow his/her own rhythm and desires, thus, being able to develop (FALK, 2011). Falk (2011) also presents interrelated arguments that legitimize pedagogical work in nursery schools, including: (i) careful observation of babies' needs and desires; (ii) autonomy in their movements; (iii) physical well-being; (iv) stable and regular relationships; (v) awareness of oneself and one's surroundings. Thus, autonomy is presented in its positivity, providing

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<sup>6</sup> Impeachment process that removed President Dilma Rousseff from the Brazilian presidency through joint actions by the legislature and the judiciary powers and the traditional media, serving the interests of the country's financial elite (DIAS; SEGURADO, 2018; KRAWCZYK; LOMBARDI, 2018).

babies with the joy of achievement and also something to be learned and taught by the nursery curriculum.

In the context of the nursery school chosen to be investigated, the act of taking care of babies is also an *perezhivanie* that enables the child to be transformed into a person capable of taking care of themselves and conquering their autonomy. According to Guimarães (2008, p. 4), "not guiding the children, but encouraging them to guide themselves, developing autonomy, choice, and initiative is a way of taking care of the child's care for themselves." This way of understanding the *perezhivanya* in the act of caring for them, linked to the development of autonomy in the studied curriculum is articulated with the act of protecting babies. Therefore, the transformations that occurred in the curricular choices of the investigated nursery school, as well as in the *perezhivanya* with the foam tunnel, produced the [autonomy/protection] unit at the same time they were produced by it.

When a literature review regarding babies and the curriculum was carried out, it was observed that autonomy and protection are themes present in research on the education of babies, however, they are not always developed in a consistent way<sup>7</sup>. Emmi Pikler's approach is one of the main theoretical references to work on the concept of autonomy. Likewise, the aforementioned Brazilian National Guidelines (BRASIL, 2009), in addition to the work of Barbosa and Horn (2001) and Barbosa and Richter (2009), support the discussion of autonomy and protection in the mapped theses and dissertations (MACÁRIO, 2017; SILVA, Viviane, 2018, for instance).

There is a distinct tension related to the concept that working with a curriculum is to define and prepare lists of contents, which provokes the defensive argument that there should not be a curriculum for nursery schools (PONCE; DURLI, 2015, for example). In addition, there is little research that addresses the specifics of pedagogical work with babies, placing them on a level of equality with children at very different age in the day care center (CARNEIRO, 2017).

In summary, it is understood that the unit formed by [autonomy/protection] enables the initiative of babies to move, interact with others and with available artifacts. In the process of "making meaning", this initiative is materialized in the relationships with teachers and in the way they put into practice their own conceptions regarding the curriculum for that age group. Autonomy, therefore, is related to self-regulation – producing meanings for one's own actions (and those of the other) permits the regulation of one's own conduct (VYGOTSKI, 1995). However, allowing or not allowing the babies' autonomy to take place

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<sup>7</sup> Only 2 out of 38 mapped researches did not mention these themes.



in the context of the nursery school is intrinsically connected to their protection. It is understood here in its physical, affective, and cognitive dimensions – offering assistance, encouragement, and comfort so that the babies’ actions happen safely. Thus, the [autonomy/protection] unit represents these dimensions, which are dialectically related.

The next section deals with the production of empirical material from the research and then the analysis on how [autonomy/protection] is understood and negotiated in the curricular practices observed in the nursery sector at EMEI Tupi (Municipal School analyzed in this article).

### 3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Understanding the *perezhivanya* of babies in a day care curriculum is a theoretical-methodological operation, since “method is, at the same time, premise and product, tool and result of the investigation (...) and it needs to adapt itself to the object of study” (VIGOTSKI, 1995, p. 47). In this sense, this investigation is part of a broader research program called Childhood and Schooling. The general objective in that program is to understand the babies’ cultural development in a collective context of care and education. In order to do so, we observed, through notes in a field diary and video recordings, the same group of children from 2017, when babies entered the institution, until 2019<sup>8</sup>.

The data production followed the principles of Ethnography in Education in agreement with cultural-historical psychology. Such principles have already been widely discussed (e.g. SPRADLEY, 1980; CORSARO, 1985; GREEN; BLOOME, 1997; GREEN; DIXON; ZAHARLICK, 2005; ZANELLA et al., 2007; HEATH; STREET; MILLS, 2008) and they will only be briefly mentioned here. They are: (i) the continuous and also committed long stay in the field; (ii) the relationships between the parts and the whole; (iii) the relationships between local and global; (iv) the search for the perspective of the people surveyed; (v) microgenetic analysis; (vi) the abductive investigation logic. It must be noted that ethics in the research process was based on an unconditional respect for the otherness and wholeness of babies and their teachers (NEVES; MÜLLER, 2021).

The researched school, EMEI Tupi, is located in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) and has the capacity to care for up to 440 children. The institution is located on a wide land, allowing the construction of a two-story building with activity rooms, director's and teachers' room, coordination room, a kitchen and a cafeteria, a library, and bathrooms. Outside the building,

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<sup>8</sup> The intention was to follow that group until the end of 2022, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused the interruption of school activities at EMEI Tupi in March 2020.

there are four playgrounds and the amphitheater. Some rooms also have solariums, such as the nursery, as if they were an extension of the room, or a balcony, which has a large glass door allowing easy access for children and teachers. The nursery room is organized into the following spaces: (i) the activity room; (ii) the sleeping room, and (iii) the solarium (Picture 1), in addition to the bathroom, where bathing and diaper changes are performed.

Figure 1: Nursery spaces.



Source: Research Database.

In this class, there were 12 babies enrolled, between 7 and 10 months old, at the beginning of the 2017 school year. The staff consisted of seven teachers and an assistant, who took turns in the routine to accompany the class throughout the day. The assistant was full-time with the class, while the teachers were divided in shifts. Four teachers would stay in the room during the morning; the other three in the afternoon, with at least two teachers at all times during the routine. All of them had one hour a day dedicated to planning pedagogical activities, meetings for coordination or with family members.

The data consisted of field notes, video recordings, photographs, and interviews, being built by four researchers in our research group. Eighty days of observation were carried out (40% of school days) during the group's daily routine from 7:00 am to 5:20 pm, between February and December 2017, with participation in parents' meetings, school events, and educational meetings. In addition, two cycles of studies were performed with the teachers, and interviews were conducted with the families.

The field notes were taken in notebooks; these notes were then expanded and recorded in the digital research database. The expansion of the notes was made, most of the times, right after we arrived from the institution, being shared with the research group via DropBox.

The video recordings were made at first without using a tripod stand, so that the filming would not bother the teachers. When we realized that they were comfortable with the presence of the researchers and with the equipment, we started to use a tripod stand to give the camera more stability, and also to facilitate the recording of field notes. However, as well as the notebook and the cell phone, the camera with the tripod stand also caught the babies'

attention. It was necessary to find ways to deal with their interest and, at times, allow the babies to touch and handle those artifacts.

The collective production of data by the research group marked the first moment of the investigation. A second moment was marked by videos and field notes analyses with the focus on understanding the ways babies experienced the curriculum in the nursery classes. While watching all the recordings from the year 2017, the importance of the foam tunnel was highlighted. Thus, we built an organized record of questions and concerns that emerged from the observed scenes and some other additional information (Table 1).

**Table 1: Research Database Organization**

Video Recording	Field Notes	Participants	Space Used	Artifacts	Initial Questions
2017-08-03	2017-08-03	Teachers: Veronica and Telma  8 babies	Sleeping Room	Tunnel built with foam tunnels in sequence	What does the foam tunnel offer to babies and their teachers? How was crossing the tunnel experienced by babies? What is the meaning of this activity in the nursery class curriculum?

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The record of the table above refers to the first day when it was observed how the babies experienced the foam tunnels set in sequence forming a long tunnel; and, based on the elaborated questions, we searched for answers in the actions and speeches of the babies and teachers in this record and in the following ones. In this way, we registered questions and, at other times, events that could possibly answer the questions elaborated. Thus, in this recursive movement of question-and-answer elaboration, there were eight days in which the foam tunnels were in the nursery classroom. Then, we selected key events and built the process of microgenetic analysis of the empirical material. These events were organized in a descriptive and narrative way, in addition to being transcribed into tables.

The foam tunnels were recorded for the first time on August 3, 2017. In an interview with one of the teachers after that date, in the observed class, it was learned that those foam tunnels were in the school library as part of a tunnel circuit set. Over time, many pieces of this material were gone and the rest was placed in the nursery classroom. The teacher confirmed that August 3 was, in fact, the first day the babies had access to the artifact.

It was understood that the foam tunnels, as well as other artifacts in that context, were included in a curriculum marked by experiences of “free” games and plays. In other words, the artifacts and the way they were available for the babies’ use allowed the constitution of their autonomy, as those little ones always had several options of objects at their disposal, and could choose [autonomously/safely] the object they would interact with, or how they would manipulate it, and for how long they would play with it.

In the next section, we will focus on the first time the foam tunnels were available to the class, as this moment helps us understand the experiences of babies in the curriculum practiced at EMEI Tupi, marked by the [autonomy/protection] unit.

## 4 THE [AUTONOMY/PROTECTION] UNIT IN THE NURSERY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

### *Discovering new horizons (part 1)*

The babies are in the activity room with teachers Veronica and Telma. There are different toys throughout the classroom. Larissa (14m 10d<sup>9</sup>), Henrique (15m 6d) and Carlos (14m) manipulate some objects; Valeria (16m 1d) walks around the classroom with a bag; Yara (13m 17d) tries to fit under a cabinet; Maria (15m 27d) tries to grab the classroom door handle; Simone (14m 30d) approaches the researcher and tries to take the camera. The researcher tells the baby “No, you can’t...”, and Ms Veronica comments “you found it / right?”. Then, Ms Veronica, when observing the babies, gets up, picks up some toys, and says: “Let’s play a little now? / Who’s going to play? / Are we going to take a walk? / Shall we?”. Henrique, Valeria, Carlos, and Maria observe that Ms Veronica is walking across the room towards the sleeping room and begin to go after her. [...] Ms Veronica opens the door to the sleeping room and invites the babies to enter it: “Come on, guys! Discover new horizons! Come! Come and see how nice: Yeah! Come and see!”. The babies start walking towards the sleeping room. Maria walks with a smile on her face, clapping her hands towards the ball pit, Yara also goes straight to the ball pit (Duration: 3 minutes and 46 seconds. Date: March 8, 2017).

This excerpt precedes the first moment when the babies, the teachers, and the researcher experienced the foam tunnels together. It is a noticeable *perezhivanie* in which the babies walked around the room and explored artifacts on their own initiative, regulating their own movements and, at the same time, being protected from getting hurt by risks in the environment organization and the available artifacts.

At the same time, Ms Veronica interpreted the babies’ movements and, in particular, Maria’s action of touching the door handle and Simone’s attempt to grab the camera, something potentially risky, as a sign of demanding other play possibilities – it seemed that the babies had already explored, on their own initiative, the available toys. Thus, the tension between [autonomy/protection] motivated the proposition of “new horizons” to be unveiled






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<sup>9</sup> Children’s age is presented in months (m) and days (d) according to the date of the event being analyzed.

and, consequently, a curricular practice emerges from the experiences with the babies in that space.

Next, there is the transcription of the moment Henrique (15m 6d), Ms Veronica and the researcher found the foam tunnels arranged as a long tunnel (Table 2). We tried to highlight the movements and meaning processes of those artifacts for the participants.

**Table 2: Discovering new horizons (part 2)**

Time	Henrique	Ms Verônica (the teacher)	Researcher
53min 21sec	Walks towards the tunnel set by Ms Veronica.	<i>“Here, check it out! / Let’s see who can go through the tunnel?”.</i> She positions the foam tunnel in front of the camera. Then, she looks at Valeria.	The footage goes blurry but soon it is stabilized.
53min 38sec	Goes inside the foam tunnel and smiles at the researcher. 	Observes what Henrique is doing and says: <i>“Are you going through it, Henrique?”</i> Next, she says: <i>“yippee!”</i>	Repeats Ms Veronica’s interjection ( <i>“Yippee!”</i> ) with a smile on her face.
53min 41sec	Gets out of the tunnel and observes the researcher. 	Says, beside the tunnel, <i>“Go! / Go through the tunnel!”</i> . She holds it from above, stabilizing it.	She makes a gesture with her hand to call Henrique to go back in the tunnel. <i>“Come, Henrique, come!”</i>
53min 49sec	Looks right at the researcher, gives her a smile, and goes inside the tunnel again. 		She bumps her hand against the camera and it changes its position, but she keeps calling Henrique: <i>“Come here!”</i> .
53min 53sec	Goes out of the tunnel again, looks at the researcher and keeps a smile on his face. 		Keeps calling Henrique with her hand, saying: <i>“Come here!”</i> . Then, claps twice.
54 min 02sec	Smiling at the researcher, he enters the tunnel again. After that, he looks down to see what she is doing. 	Organizes the room looking for another foam tunnel to build a longer one.	Starts to tap her leg quickly with her hands so that Henrique would go through the tunnel.

Time	Henrique	Ms Verônica (the teacher)	Researcher
54 min 07sec	With a smile on his face, he tries to imitate the researcher's gesture of tapping her hands in a synchronized way, but on the foam tunnel. 		Repeats the action of tapping her hands on the floor alternately.
54 min 10sec	Gets out of the foam tunnel again and hides behind it. 		
54 min 14sec	Soon after, with a smile, he puts the body back inside the tunnel, looking at the researcher. 		Saying nothing, she keeps tapping his hands on the floor.
54 min 22sec	He gets out of the tunnel and smiles at the researcher, babbling. 	Observes what Henrique does and says: <i>“Go Henrique /Go through it!/ Will you do it?”</i>	
54 min 27sec	Goes back in the tunnel and babbles again. 	Keeps observing the Henrique's and says: <i>“Yippee!”</i>	Taps her hands on the floor again.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the excerpt transcribed above, for over a minute and six seconds, Henrique smiles, babbles, observes, enters and gets out of the tunnel, imitates the researcher, and hides.

The format and material in which this artifact was made (flexible foam covered with a brightly colored synthetic fabric) allowed different actions to be carried out safely. In addition, the bond with the adults provided a feeling of confidence for the baby to participate in this proposal at his own pace, constituting a practice that provides [autonomy/protection].

It is important to highlight that the other babies were not immediately interested in the new artifact made available by the teacher. For example, Valeria and Maria, who are seen in images 5 to 9 of Table 2, chose to play with the yellow foam object in the shape of a dog.








This choice was respected and welcomed. The other teacher, Ms Telma, who was also with the group at that time, sat next to the babies and interacted with them.

Therefore, the teachers' gestures and verbalization potentiated the movements initiated by the babies, sharpening their willingness to experiment and move, making them safe, confident, and curious. The language employed by the teachers aims to make the children feel emotionally protected and willing to face new challenges with personal and social meanings in that context. Thus, in addition to the babies' curiosity, desire, and interest, the processes of meaning constitute [autonomy/protection] in the curricular practices observed.

While interacting with the babies, Ms Veronica adds a new piece to the tunnel, the moment is described in Table 3, below.

**Quadro 3: Descobrimo novos horizontes (parte 3)**

Time	Henrique	Teachers and Researcher	Other babies
54 min 38sec		Ms Veronica adds another piece to the tunnel and says: <i>“Look. Henrique/ let's go through?”</i> .	
54 min 40sec	He projects his body onto the two foam tunnel pieces, looking at the researcher. He starts to crawl inside the tunnel, frowning. He looks scared. 	Veronica observes what Henrique does and says: <i>“That's it, sweetie/Go!/You too, Valeria! /You too, Maria”</i> .	Maria stands beside the tunnel watching what Henrique is doing. Valeria gets up from her foam dog piece and starts to watch what Henrique is doing.
54 min 51sec	He steps back and stares at Ms Veronica. 	Ms Veronica holds the two tunnel pieces together so they don't come apart, looks at Henrique and says: <i>“Will you guys go through it?”</i> .	Maria sits down on the floor and starts to make a move to push Henrique forward.
55 min 0sec	He moves his body into the tunnel again and smiles at the researcher. 		He moves his body into the tunnel again and smiles at the researcher

Time	Henrique	Teachers and Researcher	Other babies
55 min 02sec	Puts his arms out of the tunnel and starts to crawl out . 	Veronica celebrates the little boy's achievement: "Yippee!!!!".	Maria and Valeria watch Henrique. Yara raises her arms, watching Ms Telma, the teacher.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

At the moment transcribed above, after stepping back and frowning, Henrique is lovingly encouraged by his teacher (“*That’s it, sweetie! Go!*”), he manages to go through the tunnel and is watched by the other babies, Maria, Valeria, and Yara. Ms Veronica comments:

They get a little scared/[...] I’ve already set the three [foam pieces] together/ then you realize they get scared/ it’s like it’s too long for them to go through it/ then they get used to it, over time, and it gets normal/ but it is/ you introduce the game/ right?/ at first/ they get a little scared and I think/ and I think this is part of the baby thing/ right?  
 (Interview. Date: November 15, 2019).

The fear expressed by Henrique is related to the perception of the new artifact, as well as to the new movement proposed: crawling through a tunnel. When realizing this fear, the teacher offers support and protection by positioning herself next to the baby and encouraging him to perform that movement at his own pace – he takes 24 seconds to cross the tunnel. It is argued that sensory and motor processes must be understood in inseparable ways. The perception is “between the different sensory and motor systems, in a mutual specification of sensorimotor patterns that enable the action to be perceptually guided, a perception that depends on the structural combination with the environment” (AMORIM; ROSSETTI-FERREIRA, 2008, page 74).

Thus, the new artifact and the fear of the baby create more tension in the curricular practice in the nursery classroom. This is then resolved by the [autonomy/protection] provided by the teacher's affection.

From Emmi Pikler's perspective, it is essential that the adult shows confidence in the toddler’s ability and makes sure that they feel safe to explore and learn what interests them, while also developing an affectionate relationship with other people (FALK, 2011). As babies or toddlers create new experiences with the materiality, different meanings emerge from that practice and others are also constructed together with the adults there. At the same time that babies create new meanings for the set of foam tunnels, the teachers also recreate the



sense of that curricular practice as something that babies like. Showing this footage to Ms Veronica, the teacher, she told that:

**Veronica:** You can observe that everything is very quiet/ everyone's doing something different/ but I'm playing with some of them/ my eyes scan the whole room/ actually we get used to it, right?/ to/ to have/ to have this more clinical look in relation to the danger/ right?/ there was nothing dangerous there/ but there are strollers/ it's still some danger.

**Researcher:** So do you always have to keep an eye on them? Be alert?

**Veronica:** Yes/ then there were times that I needed to take everything and put everything out of the room/ to have a little more freedom in the room.

**Researcher:** So you arrive at the place and the first thing you notice...

**Veronica:** We can see that/ yes/ this little table for example (Ms Veronica points to a small plastic table) it was there in the nursery room/ because when we started to introduce their food/ they were too little and couldn't go to the cafeteria/ so I said/ we're going to buy a little table and leave it in the room and they'll get used to it/ but I couldn't leave it there [in the nursery room] because it's made of a light material, they'll arrive/ they'll carry it/ there [in the nursery room] there are a lot of foam stuff/ padded/ right?/ in that space/ because you know it won't hurt them. (Interview. Date: November 15, 2019).

Ms Veronica's comment allows us to think that any type of organization and planning that presupposes the autonomy and movement of babies, "each one doing something different" and with "a little more freedom", is also constituted by "an attentive look regarding the danger", which is a way of guaranteeing their protection/safety. The careful selection of objects available to babies/toddlers marks the curricular practices built around [autonomy/protection] throughout the year.

Those babies' first contact with the foam tunnels was the beginning of different proposals developed by the teachers. The 25 different ways of using the tunnels mapped by the researchers (Table 4) indicate that they are related to the babies' movement and allow different *perezhivanya* for toddlers and teachers, therefore, different possibilities for their development.

**Table 4: Foam tunnels usage in the nursery classroom.**


Date	Duration of the play with the tunnels in the classroom	Babies interaction with the foam tunnels	Foam tunnels usage
August 3	33'34"	Maria, Henrique, Yara, Larissa, and Carlos.	Sitting inside, sitting on their edge, giving support, getting in and out, looking through them, making a tunnel (with one, two and three pieces), throwing little balls into the tunnel set, throwing little balls into each piece, putting the mouth on it, using them as hula hoops, carrying them and changing places .

Date	Duration of the play with the tunnels in the classroom	Babies interaction with the foam tunnels	Foam tunnels usage
August 14	86'45"	Henrique, Danilo, Maria, Simone, Isaura, Valeria.	Using them as a support, a chair, and a bed, staying inside, tasting it, dragging.
September 18	63' 46"	Simone, Yara, Valeria, Carlos, Larissa, Simone.	Playing hide-and-seeK, staying inside, setting up a birthday "candle" to sing "happy birthday", rolling, clapping, dragging, moving from one tunnel to another, playing horseback riding, flipping, making a tunnel with a sheet, serving as a cabin, teaching /learning how to get out.
September 25	30'38"	Yara, Simone, Valeria.	Getting in and out, playing with another artifact inside the foam tunnel, leaning in, staying inside and looking around, changing the position of the artifact.
October 2	27'16"	Paulo, Henrique, Yara, Maria, Daniel, Isaura, Carlos.	Getting in and out, changing its position, putting it above the head, supporting, putting the head inside, rotating, sitting, tunnel with chairs.
October 4	35' 01"	Marcela, Lucia, Yara, Isaura, Carlos, Maria, Simone.	Staying inside, observing the space (from within the tunnel), getting in and out, supporting, placing something inside the tunnel (plastic bag, hula hoop), dragging, rotating.
October 19	48'53" (Morning)  55'15" (Afternoon)	Maria, Simone, Valeria, Henrique, Paulo, Carlos, Marcela, Isaura, Larissa, Yara, Lucia.	Making a tunnel with other materials, staying inside, carrying the foam tunnel pieces, hiding, piling the pieces of the tunnel, moving from one piece to another, supporting, making an inverted tunnel, standing inside the tunnel observing something, placing the pieces in the solarium, dragging, jumping, carrying the pieces, fighting for the foam tunnel, looking for objects inside the foam tunnel.
November 22	50' (Morning)  34' (Afternoon)	Sofia, Danilo, Paulo, Isaura, Henrique, Yara, Larissa, Carlos, Valeria, Lúcia.	Playing hide-and-seeK, walking inside the tunnel, making the tunnel an object of dispute between the babies, jumping inside, making a long tunnel, carrying/dragging the pieces, pretending it's a bed, staying inside, pretending it's a window, standing up inside the tunnel, putting the pieces on the back, and crawling.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Below, some representative images of the uses of the foam tunnel pieces in the nursery classroom at EMEI Tupi.

**Table 5: Foam Tunnels Uses**

		
<p>Date: August 3, 2017                  Henrique goes through one of the foam tunnel pieces.</p>	<p>Date: September 18, 2017                  Valeria, Simone, and Yara sing “Happy Birthday” inside the foam tunnel pieces with Ms Leticia, the teacher.</p>	<p>Date: 19/10/2017                  Valeria, Henrique, and Paulo play hide-and-seek.</p>

Source: Research database.

In this way, the toddlers could behave with [autonomy/protection] given the artifacts available in that context. Their actions demonstrate that different meanings were gradually being produced: the foam tunnel pieces can be crossed, they can serve as a hiding spot, they can serve as a chair, etc. (Table 5). In this process of meaning and creating zones of development, babies and toddlers expand their knowledge of themselves and about the other people around them.

## CONCLUSION

Studying the nursery curriculum is both fascinating and challenging. The task of observing the meanings produced and shared in the curricular practices experienced by such young people is very complex. The video recording of curricular scenes is a methodological resource of the greatest relevance, as it allows to carefully and repeatedly observe the researched practices. Thus, it was possible to question the meanings produced, establish connections, elucidate the events experienced, and build explanatory arguments.

The construction of human beings is intrinsically related to social relationships that are established throughout their lives inside and outside schools. For that reason, it is understood that it is in the relationship with others that a baby is constituted as a social person, that is, a person who recognizes himself/herself as unique in the action of recognizing himself/herself in the history and culture of a group.

From a cultural-historical approach (VIGOTSKI, 1997), human development is understood as shared constructions through the creation of zones of imminent development, in which both the child and his/her peers (children or adults) are formed on the interactions

they establish, while changes occur in people, in their development processes in the group, and in the environment. In this field of possibilities, experiencing the play with the foam tunnels, as well as other cultural objects, boosted the cultural development of those babies, each one of them at his/her own pace.

In the process of understanding each toddler in its uniqueness and, at the same time, inserted in a context of collective education, it was possible to understand how the caring and educating practices, so critical for the Early Childhood Education curriculum, are brought to life when constituted by the [autonomy/protection] unit.

Taking care of and educating babies is to create meanings that seek to awaken autonomous actions and, at the same time, to guarantee the protection of children through affection, environment, and communication. And it was in the dialectical movement [autonomy/protection] that this curriculum was experienced by those toddlers and their teachers.

With great enthusiasm, passion, and investigative curiosity, we were in awe of the scenes observed there and the people who experienced them. The entire research process led us in two different ways. It was very interesting to observe how the [autonomy/protection] unit operated dialectically in the curriculum selection process, while also illustrating the meanings produced for the practices under our analysis. It was equally exciting to experience teachers and babies in a permanent connection. It reminds, as Teixeira (2007) argues, that the relationship is the heart of teaching. In her words,

[...] teaching is established in the social relationship between teacher and student. One does not exist without the other. Teachers and students are mutually constituted, created, and recreated, in an invention of themselves that is also an invention of the other. In a creation of the self because there is the other, starting with the other (TEIXEIRA, 2007, page 429).

It is emphasized, therefore, that teachers, when experiencing the curricular practices with babies and toddlers, also create development opportunities for themselves. In this way, toddlers and babies experience curricular practices in the nursery classroom when playing in an [autonomous/protected] way with the care of teachers who are attentive and committed to the development of each child. Watching these scenes closely, analyzing them carefully, and disclosing them here are integral parts of the development process of a baby's education. We need to move forward, as a research community, in the investigation of curricular practices, sharing results, and reflecting on their possibilities.

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