



Indigenous children: the role of games, amusement and imitation in learning and development

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ABSTRACT. Current text, the result of research conducted by the project Observatório da Educação Escolar Indígena/UEM-PR, funded by CAPES / SECADI / INEP, deals with topics on indigenous childhood and education with reference to historical aspects. Games, their importance and their roles in family and community experiences as learning and development topics are underscored. Reports by ethnographers who had contact with indigenous groups in southern Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and their records on indigenous childhood among families groups are provided. Recent studies on indigenous childhood, especially among the Kaingang, Guaraní and Xetá ethnic groups, are also registered.

Keywords: indigenous people, culture, childhood, learning.

Crianças indígenas: o papel dos jogos, das brincadeiras e da imitação na aprendizagem e no desenvolvimento

RESUMO. Este texto, resulta de pesquisas realizadas pelo projeto Observatório da Educação Escolar Indígena/UEM-PR, financiado pela CAPES/SECADI/INEP, trata de alguns elementos que compõem a infância e a educação indígena, evidenciando aspectos históricos e destacando as brincadeiras, os jogos, sua importância e suas funções nas vivências familiares e na comunidade como elementos de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento. Reflete acerca de relatos produzidos por etnógrafos que tiveram contato com grupos indígenas do sul do Brasil, em meados do século XIX e início do século XX, e seus registros relativos à infância indígena junto aos grupos familiares, bem como apresenta alguns estudos recentes sobre a infância indígena, especialmente entre as etnias Kaingang, Guaraní e Xetá.

Palavras-chave: povos indígenas, cultura, infância, aprendizagem.

Niños indígenas: el papel de los juegos, de los pasatiempos y de la imitación en el aprendizaje y en el desarrollo

RESUMEN. Este texto, proveniente de las investigaciones realizadas por el proyecto Observatorio de la Educación Escolar Indígena/UEM-PR, financiado por la CAPES/SECADI/INEP, trata de algunos elementos que componen la infancia y la educación indígena, evidenciando aspectos históricos y destacando los juegos, los pasatiempos, su importancia y sus funciones en las vivencias familiares y en la comunidad, como elementos de aprendizaje y desarrollo. Discute relatos producidos por etnógrafos que tuvieron contacto con grupos indígenas del sur de Brasil, a mediados del siglo XIX y comienzo del siglo XX, y sus registros relativos a la infancia indígena junto a los grupos familiares, así como presenta algunos estudios recientes sobre la niñez indígena, especialmente entre las etnias Kaingang, Guaraní y Xetá.

Palabras clave: pueblos indígenas, cultura, infancia, aprendizaje.

Introduction

Scholars who have developed researches with indigenous people in South and Southeastern Brazil observed important aspects of indigenous childhood and education, demonstrating that, traditionally, children have autonomy, freedom, responsibilities, interest in learning and are cared for, interacting in

different spaces through varied languages and participating in family group activities in their communities.

Currently, the indigenous ethnicities in the State of Paraná are composed of groups that speak the language family Tupi-Guarani, such as the Guaraní (*Nhandewa*, *Kayowa* and *Mbya*) and the Xetá, and

groups that speak the language family Jê, as the Kaingang and the *Xokleng*. Data of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE in Portuguese) from a census performed in 2010 account for 26,559 people self-proclaimed indigenous living in the State. Of these, 14,625 live in urban centers and 11,934 in demarcated indigenous lands, or lands in the process of demarcation.

These groups have differentiated cultures, and it is necessary to understand that the processes of deterritorialization of indigenous populations that have occurred since the 16th century affected their traditional way of life. Prior to this process, indigenous people based their sustainability on hunting, gathering, fishing, farming in small scales and on activities of defense of large territories, which allowed them to appropriately perform ecological management through deep and complex knowledge related to environmental and geographic issues.

The historical process of loss of territories, the disputes, resistances, confinement and socio-cultural relations with the conquerors had significant impact in their cultural and social organization, in addition to modifying their traditional forms of education: how they educate and train new generations refers to new processes of teaching and learning in their communities, requiring an assertive performance in order to preserve traditions and, at the same time, to adapt to the completely modified environment of the restricted marked territories.

In this text, we discuss elements of this process, considering reports of classic ethnographers who lived in or had contact with indigenous groups in the mid-19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, and observed and recorded important issues related to indigenous children and education in that period, in South and Southeastern Brazil.

We present and discuss some contemporary studies concerning indigenous childhood and experiences registered through actions developed with the Kaingang, Guaraní and Xetá in the State of Paraná from 2012 to 2014, through the Center for Indigenous School Education, with the goal of thinking the traditions, the dynamics and the cultural revitalization undertaken by these people for maintaining their ways of understanding the world, and living in it in contemporary times.

Indigenous people and childhood – traditional aspects

When they were settled in small parcels of land, indigenous people lost their traditional sustainability,

thus being forced to adapt to sedentary life, to submit to or to create new habits of work, food, clothing, entertainment, beliefs and education. In Brazil, the term settlement came into use to rename the old indigenous villages that were named according to their ethnicity. Guaraní groups called these villages *Tekoha*, the Xetá called them *Tapuy*, and the Kaingang, *Emã*; every ethnicity had a name for their places of residence, which the European settlers generalized, calling them 'villages'.

Being village (*aldeia* in Portuguese) defined as a place of residence of indigenous people in contact with the surrounding society, from it derived the term 'settlement' (*aldeamento* in Portuguese). In this way, the 'settlements' are composed of a policy, whose 'objective intention' is the nucleation of indigenous populations for social, economic, religious and legal purposes. In this reality that was consolidated in different regions of Brazil in the early 20th century, life in the settlements must be seen as an interweaving of internal relations, permeated by internal and external policies, in which alliances are made with public authorities and other surrounding entities. (Mota, 2009)

In these contexts, the childhood and the processes of teaching and learning are not the same as those that occurred in the old organizations, as, for example, the traditional Guaraní *Tekoha*, Xetá *Tapuy* and Kaingang *Emãs*.

To understand childhood among these indigenous people and think about the teaching and learning processes, in-depth studies are needed on culture, history and ethnology, noting, however, that on childhood itself there are few records in the State of Paraná with detailed information about these processes.

Some classic authors and ethnographers observed the indigenous children, their relation with family groups, their games and experiences, and took relevant notes about them, showing a tradition that dates back a few centuries, records relating to indigenous childhood, which were obviously limited to the objectives of the observations of the period and their own opinion about children.

The engineer Pierre François Alphonse Mabilde (1983), who lived among the Kaingang in the State of Rio Grande do Sul in the first half of the 19th century, described the life of these Indians with annotations that report elements of their social organization, such as procedures during pregnancy, childbirth, naming, food and the role of women in the care and education of children.

In 1873, the English engineer Thomas Bigg-Whitter, while demarcating the route of a railway in

the Ivaí River valley, in the middle of the State of Paraná, found a Xetá group and took them to his camp, in the rapids of the Ariranha River, and there he observed and described the activities of two Xetá children, a boy and a girl of approximately nine years old:

The two children were skilled imitators. They imitated any known sound of bird or animal of the forest behind the campsite. They imitated them and then said their names to anyone who paid attention to what they were doing. They liked to imitate the various melancholic notes of doves. Evidently, they learned these sounds since early childhood, when they started to talk. Listening to the children imitate the sounds and pronouncing the names of the animals that produced them, I learned a number of words in botocudo. The boy, especially, was not only a good student, but also an able and persevering teacher, since he did not rest while the person who listened to him have not dominated the exact pronunciation of the word that he was teaching. Both were extremely smart and bright (Bigg-Wither, 1878 apud Mota & Bonnici, 2013, p. 113).

Telêmaco Borba was the administrator of Indigenous Settlements in the State of Paraná in the second half of the 19th century. During this period, he observed and recorded the habits and history of the Kaingang from the Tibagi River valley, and later published them, which are important sources about the life of this group in those territories. Concerning the children, their surroundings and family organization, he made the following record:

When is time to give birth, if it is daytime, the women go to the woods with a woman companion; soon after delivery, they enter the water of a stream, wash themselves and the newborn, and return to their ranches, where they continue to deal with their tasks, as if nothing had happened. Husbands treat women with a lot of tenderness, consult them in their business, they, and their children, are almost always together, to whom they are loving to the point of never punishing them or even lecturing them with harshness; they, in turn, have little respect for their parents, coming to the point of, when grown up, mistreating and even beating them, as we have seen. Mothers are always with their young children on their backs, wrapped in curús and with a wide band of imbirá passed by their head to carry them; they breastfeed them for two to four years, usually until they have another child (Borba, 1908, p. 12).

The author minutely describes the *caindire*, a game practiced among the Kaingang, demonstrating significant topics about their sociocultural relationships and body education. In the description, it is explained the function of the game to the group,

the relationship with other groups of the same ethnicity and other important details that clarify elements of the Kaingang tradition in this region.

The agent of the Indian Protection Service, inspector Luiz Bueno Horta Barbosa, in a conference held in the 'Ateneo de Montevideo', in 1913, in describing family relationships and the education of Kaingang children, according to his records, reported that

[...] husbands are very affectionate with women, who accompany them everywhere, even in war expeditions. Mothers and fathers have seemingly limitless patience with their children, never beating them, and grieving with anything that makes them suffer. Mothers extend excessively the period of breast-feeding and, while it lasts, they do not leave their children alone, even for a moment, taking them everywhere they go, on their back, maintained by a brace of imbé vine, supported on their forehead, or taking them by the hand, when they are able to walk. Parental authority do not cease with the coming of age of their children, and extends even after their wedding (Barbosa, 1947, p. 52).

In relation to childbirth, he reports that women, when sensing the approximation of delivery time, performed the following procedures:

[...] they seek refuge in the woods, fleeing the sight of all. Then, alone, give birth to their children; however, it only takes some man or woman to hear the child's groan to go to them and, suspending the newborn in the arms, give him or her the first name. [...] at seven years of age, more or less, if the child is a boy, the mother rubs, in certain periods, his whole body with the leaf of a certain tree, pouring water on his head, thereby hoping to give him fortress of spirit and willing to work; in this occasion, the boy receives a second name. On other occasions, he can still receive or take a few more nicknames, which bind the notable events of his life. After the ceremony of friction abovementioned, the boy starts to learn, from the father, the wielding of the *cá*, or club, commonly called *guarantam* by the men of the Northwestern; this learning comes together with the wielding of bow and arrow and, afterwards, hunting (Barbosa, 1947, p. 54, emphasis added by the author).

In these records of Horta Barbosa, we observe a traditional education permeated by rites of passage in which the role of parents and older indians, grandparents, uncles and aunties, is of extreme importance in learning and in the development of Kaingang children.

Recent reports collected in Kaingang lands of the State of Paraná, in campaigns of Continued Training of Indigenous Teachers in the state, demonstrate a wide variety of indigenous practices and knowledge

aimed at the care, education, guidance and preparation of children for life in the group.

The Kaingang teacher Alcides *Run Ja Nor*, reporting the facts of his childhood in the Indigenous Land (IL) Mangueirinha, describes:

My mother had no medicine to cure my navel, so she took the top of the porungo, from the cord she took off the upper portion and put it into the fire to make coal. She passed it with *fên ju fat* (palm tree coró) on my navel to heal it. Then she named me *run ja nor*, which means punctured porungo. In our tradition we usually find a hard wood, it can be angico, cut it open and put the navel inside it. With time, the wood will 'heal' and cover the navel so the child becomes a strong person, attached to his/her place of origin [...] (Paraná, 2012, p. 35, emphasis added by the author).

Concerning the naming rituals of the Kaingang, where the baptism is performed by the *kuiã*, teacher Florêncio ReKayg reports that:

We have a habit of passing the names of some old relative, because the names are chosen among the grandparents, who gather on the day of baptism. This should be done when the child is more or less a month old. On the day of the meeting, they discuss the names of relatives, dead or alive, by checking which names have not been used yet. My name is *ReKayg*, my grandfather's name, which had not yet been used. They call me *ReKayg si*, which means little, to distinguish me from my grandfather. If I have a male child, I must pass my name to him, or other relative's name that was not often used (Paraná, 2012, p. 35, emphasis added by the author).

Valfride Cipriano, Kaingang language teacher in the IL Mangueirinha, reports that, for all things, 'there was always a beautiful ritual'.

To become a wild-pig hunter in the future, since when he had begun to eat and walk, the boy was prepared to be a hunter. When the parent or relative killed a wild-pig, the child would ingest the *grã fy* or baked testicles, to acquire the smell of the animal. During the hunt, this huntsman must remain besides the worker because, if he remains in the front, the wild-pig will attack straight on his *grã fy*. The dogs were also prepared for the hunt in the same manner. Being prepared like this, they only go for the wild-pig, only hunt wild-pig (Paraná, 2012, p. 53, emphasis added by the author).

Alcides *Run Ja Nor* explains another ritual that begins in childhood to train the children according to the talents of each one.

Formerly, the person who would become a pine climber, since when he was small, he had a whole ritual. First, he had to strengthen the wrists and feet, and then he had to wash the feet and the hands with

water of boiled pine nut. During this period, he could not eat boiled pine nut harvested from the tree. He only ate the pine nut picked from the ground, only baked, peeled, so he would not break the secret. If the pine nut was baked with the husk, the branch might break and he might fall. From the seed inside the pine nut, we obtained a resin that was applied to the feet to prevent slipping. Nowadays we use the *cerigola*, a circular band made of bamboo or vine used as safety belt and a spur made of construction iron (Paraná, 2012, p. 59).

These and other rituals and knowledge of the Kaingang that circulate orally among communities in the State of Paraná have been reported by the teachers, discussed by the group and recorded in form of texts in an activity of the Continued Teacher Training in the State of Paraná, in the years 2007 and 2008. Subsequently, they were published by the State Government as didactic support material to the activities of literacy in indigenous schools. In addition to the didactic issue, the reports show not only the traditional education of Kaingang children, but they help to understand that the practices of indigenous groups are full of meanings and traditions, and that the cultures are dynamic, in constant transformation, adaptation and ressignification.

Curt Nimuendaju, German-born Brazilian ethnologist, lived and worked with the Guarani in the Cinzas River, Northern State of Paraná, in the first decade of the 20th century, and took detailed notes on the social and cultural organization of the Nhandewa groups, allowing us to verify that in the founding myth of this ethnicity, which he minutely documented with the name 'The circle of the twins', the children play a vital role in their culture, because in the narrative of the twins, newborns, they become the main protagonists of the Guarani story of the creation of the world, after the departure of the father, *Nhanderu*, and the death of the mother, *Nhandecy*.

In the narrative documented by Nimuendaju (1987), the siblings *Kuaray* and *Jacy* grow, learning with the experiences, with the animals, in the exchanges, through curiosity, mutual help, dialogs and decision-making. In their experiences and actions, they discover life, acquiring practice and creating a new world.

In the most recent anthropological tradition, we can also find some reflections concerning indigenous childhood and education. We highlight anthropologists as Egon Schaden (1976), who studied the subject of childhood among the Guarani, and reported the respect this society has for the

child's personality. The author noted that the deep knowledge of the socio-cultural process in which is inserted the educational process of an indigenous ethnicity is critical to understanding their relevant ethnic elements.

Florestam Fernandes (1975), assessing the educational process among the Tupinambá, points out that indigenous education aims to prepare the subjects, the children, to adapt to others, though without losing the ability to realize themselves as persons and to be useful to the collective as a whole. This means that the individual was directed both to 'do' certain things and to 'be' a man or a woman, according to the ideals of humanity experienced by the groups.

Fernandes (1975), debating with theorists of his time, ponders that it is wrong to separate this model of education from that taught in schools of western societies as if we were faced with irreconcilable and antagonistic worlds, since, besides the fundamental common purpose of converting an individual in a social being – ideal of schools –, the compelling incentive to the formation of skills oriented to the same directions should be clear. Fernandes (1975) declares that in this way human societies try to guide the personality of their members, using education as a social technique of development of their individuals' consciousness, will and actions.

For the sociologist, native education is characterized by the sense of community, once the knowledge produced were/are accessible to everyone (in accordance with the requirements resulting from the principles of sex and age, and, therefore, the broadly shared social heritage) by the lack of specialization and by equal access to participation in culture. The author shows that in the Tupinambá society everyone had the responsibility to accumulate a broad variety of knowledge, educating their minds to store memories and teachings that would be perpetuated by oral tradition, educating the capacity to act according to the standards, prescribed or exemplary.

This involved, in turn, complex skills, which demanded a thorough education of the emotions, the feelings and the will, to the point of promoting the permanent sacrifice of selfish individual dispositions and a more complete identification of individuals with their relatives, the alliances they kept and the interests they considered the most important (Fernandes, 1975, p. 52).

In this sense, Fernandes (1975) concludes that education in indigenous societies is permanent. Only the elders can consider themselves wise, bearers of vast, deep and complete knowledge about the questions that surround them, possessing certain

requirements to participate in all activities able to revive this knowledge and to mediate issues concerning the community.

Bartomeu Meliá (1979), Jesuit anthropologist scholar of Guaraní culture, describing the categories of traditional teaching and learning of the Guaranis, asserts that:

The second infancy or childhood has two steps: imitation of adult life through games and imitation through participated word. The Indian children do, in small scale, what an adult does. They live the lives of adults in their games. They learn routine social activities, participate in the social division of work and acquire the skills to use and make tools and utensils of their work, in accordance with gender divisions (Meliá, 1979, p. 14).

The Guaraní baptism ceremony, the *Nimongarai*, according to the reports of teachers, studies and field observations witnessed in the performance of one of these rituals (Faustino, 2012), is very important to the Guaraní, because the children receive their second name, which is given by the *Txamói*, religious authority, to the family.

After being baptized, the child acquires the strength to deal with eventual diseases. During the first year of life, it is up to the parents the task of ensuring the growth of the child's soul. In this period, the father should refrain from heavy work and avoid violent behavior. The development of the soul will be complete when he/she starts speaking the first words (Meliá, 1979, p. 27).

Meliá registers that, through familiar conviviality, games, different forms of communication and examples, the Guaraní child learns to know and distinguish the behaviors considered adequate and those disapproved by the group.

A three-year-old child already knows how to share with the companions, without ever being forced or pressured by the environment. From three to five years old, the children constitute a mini-society, where adulthood is imitated in all daily activities, even the religious ones. The independence of movements in this society of children is notable. Parents are starting to require some small tasks of them, but excuses as tiredness, cold or simply unwillingness are, however, accepted without causing major problems (Meliá, 1979, p. 28).

Among Guaraní groups, the practices for the good education begin very early, while the child is still in gestation, through procedures that the mother must adopt to ensure the child is born healthy and strong to face life on earth. According to Meliá,

She is closer to the notion of education as a comprehensive process. The coexistence and the researches show that, for Indians, education is a global process. Indigenous culture is taught and learned in terms of integrating socialization. The fact that this education is not performed by professionals does not mean it is performed by an abstract collectivity. [...] the education of each individual is the interest of the entire community. Education is the process by which culture acts on members of the society to create individuals or people who can maintain this culture. Educating is thus forming the kind of man or woman who, according to the ideal valid to the community, corresponds to the true expression of human nature (Meliá, 1979, p. 36).

Narratives collected in Nhandewa groups of Indigenous Lands of the Northern State of Paraná between 2009 and 2011 also highlight the importance of childhood permeating the traditions. In the history of Tupã told by João Mario da Silva, resident in the IL Ywyporã during this period, the marked presence of childhood is observed:

Because Tupã up in the sky is also for the group, Tupã up there is for the whole group. There is the angrier Tupã. The owner of the rain, is angrier. The other is calmer, and another even calmer. And there are Tupã Mirim, the small ones. They are the *Txeru* angels, we say angels, little angels, who are little ones (Silva, 2012, p. 2).

In the years 2012 and 2013, during a field study with indigenous teachers, reports about games played by Guaraní children were collected. The teachers, of the partialities Nhandewa, Kaiowa and Mbyá, who work in schools of the State of Paraná, in the meeting performed by the project Observatory of Indigenous School Education /UEM-PR in the IL Verá Tupã'i, talked about children's culture, education and games. Among the games described, they emphasized Shuttlecock, Racing, Swing, Spinning Top, Mundé, Tangará, Hide-and-Seek, the Warrior's Game and the Mask Game, the later described as follows:

An adult, the responsible, coordinator of the game, calls the children of the group and starts painting all of them, head to toe. The inks used are annatto, jenipapo, clay and coal. Each painted child must walk, as if in a parade, and participating adults must choose which is the ugliest painting or mask (Tupã, 2012, p. 4).

There are also the games played by Kaingang children, registered in the IL Faxinal, city of Cândido de Abreu, reported by indigenous teachers:

There is a game children played, and still play. First, the children race each other. Who arrives first at the tree is monkey. Who arrives last is jaguar. Jaguar

must catch the monkeys by chasing them, climbing the trees. The child who is caught climbs down the tree and observes the game. It only ends when the jaguar catches the last monkey. In the next round, the first monkey becomes the jaguar and the game starts all over again (Farias, 2009, p. 1).

Among the Xetá, the field records of Rodrigues (2013) show that children are initiated very early in the learning of some activities. The boys learn from their parents, through games, activities considered masculine, especially the handling of bow and arrow, training daily to aim at butterflies, cicadas and beetles, as well as building small huts and traps similar to those their parents make. Playful activities, of each all children participated, were the free games in the village or at rivers, or with the pets they used to breed, such as hawks, owls, bats, birds, butterflies, cicadas, beetles, or even the *mows* – small sculptures of animals made with beeswax.

It is important that we understand, in line with the studies of Rocha Ferreira, Vinha, Fassheber, Tagliari e Ugarte (2005, p. 35), that

The traditional indigenous games are body activities, with playful features, which permeate the myths, cultural values and thus bring together the tangible and intangible world of each ethnicity. They require the learning of specific motor and strategic skills. The games occur in certain determined places and periods, the rules are dynamically established and generally there is no age limit for players. There are no winners/losers necessarily, and an award is not required, except the prestige; the participation itself is laden with meanings and promotes experiences that are incorporated by the group and by the individual.

According to Faustino (2012), besides the games, the playing and the daily tasks, the indian child is stimulated to listen carefully to the stories told by the adults. They must think about them, ask, because learning is essential in the Guaraní culture.

The indigenous teacher Teodoro Tupã reports that the stories are told gradually, to stimulate the children's curiosity and interest. They must ask to learn more; they must remain with the adults, participate of the chatting 'circles', listening in silence.

Reports of indigenous teachers and ethnologists from previous periods are of extreme relevance to understand schoolwork in a humanizing and liberator perspective.

Within the meaning of the formulators of the Historical-Cultural Theory, Vigotski (1998, 2001, 2009) and Leontiev (1978), whose studies began in Soviet socialist society in the 1920s, culture is a determining factor in the process of child learning

and development. Based on historical-dialectic materialism, these theorists developed researches, punctuating that education takes place in the different interactions with the environment and with others. At birth, the child is inserted in the culturally organized environment and begins a long process of appropriation of the knowledge required as he/she takes part in the activities developed by the social group to each he/she belongs.

Therefore, each generation begins its life in a world of objects and phenomena created by the previous generations. They appropriate the richness of this world, taking part in the work, the production and in the varied forms of social activities, thus developing specifically human skills, crystallized, incarnated in this world (Leontiev, 1978, p. 265).

In the Nhandewa Guarani culture, the wise ones (*txamói*, *ivyráidja*) emphasize the role of the mediation of adults in children's learning, and the importance of playing, the *nhemboarai*.

In their report of traditional games of the Guarani, the teachers Teodoro Tupã and Carlos Cabreira state that many of them were and are planned, organized and coordinated by adults. Many of the toys were made by the elders, while the child carefully watched the process. In the reports, the 'corn straw shuttlecock' was a girl game; 'archery' was a boy game, of those older than eight; 'hide and seek' was a traditional game with variations, in which an adult hides a piece of stick or makes a sign at a given place, tree or ground, and the children must find it. In this game, there are several rules that must be followed, as the division by age and gender. To the teacher Teodoro Tupã, "[...] every game is related to culture. Through the game, the child learns the rules of the culture" (Tupã, 2012, p. 3).

About the Kaingang children, the teacher Charles Marcos Luiz, in his final project carried out at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, reports that "In the indigenous Kaingang culture, the toys and games, besides being inherent to childhood, are important sources of transmission of knowledge" (Luiz, 2015, p. 20).

Similarly, the Historical-Cultural Theory attributes great value to playing and toys. Vigotski was the first modern theoretician to affirm, in the years 1920, that playing has an important role in the development of children and in learning the culture, and imitation is a dynamic process that outstandingly contributes to the process of learning.

Everyone knows the considerable role of imitation in children's games. These games are often just an echo of what the child has seen and heard from adults. However, these elements from previous experience are never reproduced, in the game,

exactly as they occurred in reality. Children's games are not simply the remembrance of what we live, but a creative reworking of experienced impressions. They are a combination of these impressions and, based on them, a construction of a new reality that responds to the aspirations and wishes of the child (Vigotski, 2009, p. 16).

The field researches among indigenous people in the State of Paraná demonstrate that freedom and child participation in the life of the group are relevant components of their education; in this way, the children gradually acquire the knowledge, the rules of coexistence and the behavior patterns necessary for life in society.

With the indigenous higher education policy (Novak, 2007; Paladino, 2012), the number of researchers from different ethnic groups has been increasing in universities and study groups. Tonico Benites, in a research performed in the Graduate Program in Anthropology of the National Museum, describing the traditional education of the Kaiowa, states:

The main concern of religious leaders, along with the child's mother and father, is basically demonstrating to new generations, in practice, the way of being, living and thinking of the kaiowá family. This teaching process is developed through daily practical examples, dialogue and advices, and the places in which such teachings occurs are basically: 1) at home, besides the fire (*tata ypy-pe*), where, in the morning, dreams are interpreted and considered, and from which the daily tasks are planned; 2) at the house's courtyard (*oka-pe*), where the behaviors and styles demonstrated freely by the children are monitored and reprimanded. Thus, the children learn by doing, seeing, listening, both inside and outside (Benites, 2009, p. 68).

Studies from different authors corroborated the first ethnographic researches on childhood and learning. Mura and Silva (2011) state that, for the Kaiowa,

[...] the deities are their own relatives and present themselves as an extended family of three generations. Reference to them is made generically as Nanderykey kuera (our older siblings). With this procedure, the Kaiowa remark two facts. On the one hand, the obligation of following and respecting the advices of older siblings, imitating their actions; on the other hand, their own condition of imperfection and of being permanently subjected to make mistakes [...] causing transformations in the cosmos. In these terms, the Kaiowa morally seek perfection (*aguije*), trying to surpass the negativities of the present; to do that, they should imitate the behavior of the gods in the present time (Mura & Silva, 2011, p. 105).

In the traditional indigenous narratives, songs,

texts, ceremonies, gestures and praying, repetition is common. In addition to being a feature of orality and conferring beauty and harmony to the indigenous arts, the repetition also has the function to highlight, emphasize and strengthen things and important messages, fixing on them the attention of the participants in an atmosphere full of cultural content. In this sense, repetition has a strong didactic character, permeating the procedures in which the older, wise and experienced share with the youngsters and children what they know of the experiences and traditions of their ancestors, so that new generations learn the right way to live well.

Regarding school education, about children and the work of indigenous teachers in a Guarani school in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, the researcher of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) reveals that

Imitation is perhaps one of the most important aspects in the formation of the Guarani individual and enables each one to build their particular behaviors, inspired in what surrounds them. [...] the children start to mimic everything around them: animals, older siblings. [...] after they are three years old, community actions become the main focus of children's curiosity, where they look for models to their actions. At school, imitation is privileged and almost all activities are based on a model presented to students (Bergamaschi, 2011, p. 146).

The studies by Vigotski, (2001, p. 331) concluded "[...] imitation, if conceived in a broad sense, is the main way in which the influence of learning on the development is applied". In the vision of the theoretician, learning through speech and learning at school are broadly organized based on imitation, because at school the children do not learn what they already know how to do by their own, but what they still do not know, which becomes accessible in collaboration with the teacher and under his/her guidance.

This element is approached by the concept of 'development area', the real and the potential developments, elaborated by Vigotski to explain the path covered between what the child has already learned and what is able to perform alone – the child's ability to solve certain problems without help – and those problems for which the child will need guidance or collaboration of a more experienced person: older siblings, colleagues, parents, grandparents, relatives and teachers, in social and cultural interactions.

According to Vigotski, the fundamental in learning is precisely the fact that the child learns the new. Therefore, the immediate development zone, which determines this field of transitions accessible

to the child, represents the decisive moment in the relationship of learning and development.

Faustino (2006) states that, when they lived in forests, indigenous peoples maintained a vast knowledge of geography (inhabited space), biology – botany and zoology – of natural cycles, mountains, rivers, fish, animals, climate. They possessed medical knowledge, identified diseases through the symptoms observed and knew treatments, natural techniques and medicines capable of fighting several illnesses. They also possessed knowledge of agriculture, knew the times for planting and harvesting, the management/conservation of seeds and stewardship of land.

The knowledge produced was learned by new generations through experience, imitation, in verbal and non-verbal interaction, because indigenous children, in general, play freely, observe carefully, participate in the lives of adults, accompany parents and relatives in daily work and leisure activities, and thus develop an understanding of the elements that surround them.

With the settlements – process of gathering indigenous people in restricted and marked areas – much of the traditional knowledge and the ways to obtain it were lost or became useless in the new reality; others remained, and were reframed. Coming in direct contact with the literate society and the new work relationships that were established, the Indians felt the need to learn how to read and write, so they could better understand the surrounding reality, know the organization of work in the capitalist society (paid work), dominate the indigenous policy in which they are inserted, fight for human rights, expand alliances and interact in different social instances.

According to Benites (2009, p. 77),

[...] even before the introduction of formal schools in the villages, some Indians have sought to know the written word, such as the alphabet and the numbering system, and the measures (kúvika).

This assertive allows us to verify that human cultures are dynamic and change constantly.

Considering that, at present, schools are a reality among indigenous people, Faustino (2012), based on the Historical-Cultural Theory, assert that the school represents a socially organized space and significantly contributes to the elaboration of new knowledge, required to the indigenous life. Therefore,

[...] the indigenous culture, as all cultures, also suffers changes and transformations, and the Indians themselves have the right to change their culture as it receives interference able to give them choice

options (Silva, 2012, p. 53).

At school, the teachers' actions are crucial, because they plan and arrange forms of interaction that will determine the appropriation, transfer and construction of knowledge, expanding the areas of study, participation, learning and creativity of children. In this process, the teacher acts, as well as the older, more experienced people of the family, as mediator, helping children and young people to develop other knowledge through new discoveries.

Under this perspective, the school must constitute an opportunity for children to access the world of written culture and enjoy the cultural assets coded by this type of language. Corroborating Vigotski (2009, p. 67), it may be stated that:

[...] the real task of education is not to prematurely inflict adult language, but to help the children develop and form a literary language of their own.

In this sense, the school must commit to ethnoknowledge and with other knowledge produced by humanity.

Final considerations

As we study the classic ethnographers and ethnologists that worked with indigenous people or had contact with them, making records, we find that childhood was observed in the set of social and cultural indigenous relationships of different ethnicities since the mid-19th century. With the advances of the studies on culture, anthropology, ethno-history, education, linguistics and others, permeated by different theories, the investigations have expanded, and relevant elements have become available about childhood and various forms of indigenous learning.

The access to higher education in undergraduate and graduate courses by indigenous people, within the context of Brazilian policies of affirmative actions since the 1990s, has allowed the training of intellectuals from ethnic groups, who have evaluated both traditional, native education, and school education, their convergences and possibilities, and they started to write about this and other themes.

The Historical-Cultural Theory, elaborated by Russian researchers in search of the construction of a new form of education, opposed to traditional education, contributes to the understanding of the role of culture in human formation. The comprehension of the aspects related to history, culture and the different social-cultural organizations becomes extremely important so it might be possible to think of a participatory and emancipating education.

It is important that we understand that indigenous children learn from their elders in their families, learn from each other and also teach, as explained the report of Bigg-Whitter, dating from the 19th century, about Xetá children.

Through this understanding, the indigenous school becomes a space for multiple experiences, of experimentation between children from different families, communities and teachers, where the interactions are potentialized, where they can be rich cultural exchanges.

Classic and contemporary studies, articulated to field researches, create opportunities to gather a vast knowledge about indigenous cultures and may boost intercultural curricula and pedagogical proposals, thus contributing to a greater learning for indigenous children, and the advancement of their development processes.

Currently, indigenous people have guaranteed, in specific schools, the teaching of indigenous language and also their own processes of learning; however, indigenous children still have little involvement in school practices as subjects of knowledge. The way indigenous school education is conceptualized, planned and conducted in Brazil, in general, does not allow much consideration of knowledge and experiences of children, their games, their different ways of interacting and learning.

Although important factors on family organization, childhood and children, have been observed and described by classical studies on ethnology, for a comprehensive understanding about their experiences and learning, it is important that new studies be performed with different peoples and cultures. Studies on indigenous childhood could subsidize discussions about curriculum, teacher training, development of teaching materials, planning, differentiated pedagogical practices and specific assessments.

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