

Does the school have a future? Young children's narratives about the future of school education

A escola tem futuro? Narrativas de crianças pequenas sobre o futuro da educação escolar

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Abstract

Does the school have a future? Children aged 5 and 6 from a public school in Rio Grande do Norte answer this question. Their narratives, produced using the methodological strategies of Machines and Time Capsules, are considered legitimate for a cultural analysis based on the fields of Cultural Studies in Education and Research with Children. The analysis revealed two central categories: "What schools are for," examining the functions attributed to schools, and "The future of the school," with narratives about a school full of technological, cultural, and aesthetically beautiful artifacts and, to a lesser extent, narratives about a future without schools, in which learning would take place at home or not at all. In general, children legitimize school as essential for the transmission of knowledge and socialization.

Keywords: School in the Future; Children and Narratives; Cultural Studies and Education.

Resumo

A escola tem futuro? Crianças de 5 e 6 anos da Educação Infantil de uma escola pública do Rio Grande do Norte respondem essa questão. Suas narrativas — produzidas por meio das estratégias metodológicas Máquina e Cápsula do Tempo — são consideradas legítimas para a realização de uma análise cultural a partir dos campos dos Estudos Culturais em Educação e das Pesquisas com Crianças. A análise revelou duas categorias centrais: “Para que servem as escolas”, examinando as funções atribuídas à escola, e “O futuro da escola”, com narrativas sobre uma escola repleta de artefatos tecnológicos, culturais e esteticamente bonitos e, em menor número, narrativas sobre um futuro sem escolas, no qual a aprendizagem ocorreria em casa ou não aconteceria. Em geral, as crianças legitimam a escola como essencial para a transmissão de saberes e a formação social.

Palavras-chave: Escola no Futuro; Crianças e Narrativas; Estudos Culturais e Educação.

Initial considerations

When we received the invitation to write an article for the dossier (Re)launching the question: "Does school have a future?", we were overcome by a paradoxical feeling, a mixture of joy and fear. Joy at the opportunity to think, study, and investigate in order to answer the proposed question on a topic that dialogues in a relevant way with the research we are currently carrying out. Fear in the face of the responsibility that this question implies, especially when we consider the legacy left by renowned education researchers such as Marisa Vorraber Costa, Alfredo Veiga-Neto, Antônio Flávio B. Moreira, José Carlos Libâneo, Miguel Arroyo, Nilda Alves and Selma Garrido Pimenta, in *A escola tem futuro?* (Costa, 2003). For over two decades, these scholars have provided reflections that continue to resonate intensely in the field of education. The task of continuing these discussions is undoubtedly a significant challenge.

To deal with this challenge, we pondered which of the many paths we could choose. In 2024, we started researching *School Subjects in Postmodernity*ⁱ (Ignácio; Momo, 2024), linked to the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, which led us to consider a promising approach: turning to the subjects participating in the study themselves to help us answer this instigating question.

In the first stage of the research, we paid special attention to children, particularly those in Early Childhood Education. Thus, among the axes that comprise the study, we focused on what children aged 5 and 6 could tell us about the question: "Does school have a future?" It should be noted that listening attentively and sensitively to the subjects who inhabit the school institution, regarding their understanding of the school in the present time, is an investigative path already explored by other researchers (Cruz, 2008; Passeggi, Nascimento; Rodrigues, 2018; Souza; Lopes, 2002). These studies have considered the narratives of subjects, including children, about their current experiences in school. The following question then arose: What about us? How would we listen to children about school with an eye to the future? We were thus faced with methodological challenges on how to listen to the children, which dialogic triggering strategies to mobilize, and how to approach perspectives on the future of the school, given the implications of the concept of time in research with young children.

Before detailing the investigative methods used to conduct the research and answering the question of "how" it was carried out, we believe it is essential to discuss why we listened to the children. In view of this, we outline below some of the possible answers to this question.

The first key reason is that the school, especially in the context of primary education, is an institution created for children, and children are one of the reasons for its existence. Therefore, we consider children to be legitimate subjects to think, say, and give their opinion on whether the institution they inhabit has a future. It is also essential to listen to them in order to challenge and mitigate our adult-centric perspective on the question to be answered. However, we recognize, as proposed by Larrosa (1998), that childhood represents the other, which, beyond any attempt to capture it, always escapes us. What is more, we consider listening to children because we recognize them as agents who create culture, capable of constructing their meanings about the world to the extent that they interpret and produce the culture in which they are inserted. In this process, they use various media, such as games and drawings, among others, and share cultural experiences, even creating peer cultures (Corsaro, 2009). Therefore, not only are they affected by the institutions in which they live, but they also affect them.

In this context, we understand that children have knowledge and practices of the world and of themselves (Friedmann, 2010), which allows us, in scientific research, to "conceive the child by what they 'already understand' and not by what they 'do not yet understand'" (Passeggi; Nascimento; Rodrigues; 2018, p. 157). One way to gain insight into what children understand is through their narratives, which enable us to understand their repertoire of meanings and perspectives.

Larrosa (1994) states that who we are or, more precisely, the meaning of who we are is intrinsically linked to the stories we share and those we tell ourselves. These stories are forged from the narratives we hear and read, which, in a way, affect us, as we are driven to construct our own history in dialogue with them. In other words, our understanding of who we are in the present is constructed through the active operations of recollection and projection, of memory and anticipation, which trigger a narrative collection situated in a specific time and space. Therefore, the act of narrating is not an objective description of the facts. The description of the present — in this article, also of the future — occurs amid

narrative constructions and interpretations, loaded with marks that mark out the conditions of their emergence (Larrosa, 2003).

With these understandings, when we take the school as an expression of the human — a cultural institution, "[...] a place in culture, a place where culture circulates, where cultures meet and negotiate, where culture is produced and consumed [...]" (Costa; Momo, 2009, p. 524) — we consider that it can be understood and interpreted, in the past, present and future, through narratives. In this narrative process, subjects not only tell stories but also reveal aspects about themselves, others, and the world around them, based on the stories they have had access to. Based on these assumptions, we chose to listen to and analyze the narratives of children aged 5 and 6 at a kindergarten in the city of Parnamirim, Rio Grande do Norte, as a strategy to answer the question we received: "Does the school have a future?".

This article is structured in five sections. In addition to the Introduction, we present the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted, the children's understanding of what school is for, and their answers to the question: Does school have a future? Finally, we conclude with some brief considerations. In this regard, given the vast amount of material produced and the editorial limitations, we chose to integrate the theoretical framework into the analysis, with the aim of enhancing the visibility of the children's narratives.

Listening to children about school in the future and the future of school - Theoretical and methodological paths

How can we discuss the future with young children, who generally don't think or operate within this concept yet? With this uncertainty in mind, our first concern was to find, among the schools participating in the research, one where this concept had been explored with the children. Among the schools participating in the research, we sought those that had already explored this concept with the children. We found an institution in Parnamirim (RN) where, in 2024, all the Kindergarten classes (2 to 5 years and 11 months) took part in a project with time capsules, proposed by the Municipal Department of Education as part of the "Green August" initiative.

Each class made entries (drawings or texts) with wishes about the school for the following year, placed in time capsules and buried with a tree seedling in the schoolyard. This initiative motivated our choice of the institution, which caters for 154 full-time children from

low-income families.

During the research, we took part in various activities, such as a cultural exhibition and conversations with two teachers (named Teacher A and Teacher B), who are responsible for the 5 and 6-year-old classes (Classes A and B). During the activities, we took field diary notes, photographs, and film footage. The teachers shared the children's drawings, the books used in the project, and reflections on the construction of the concept of time based on the literary work "Khaos" by Fábio Monteiro (2023).

Our aim, when talking to the teachers, was to understand the projects - whether or not they were linked to working with the "Time Capsule" - that related to the concept of time and, based on them, to build methodological strategies to listen to the children, respecting some of the characteristics present in children's culture (Corsaro, 2009), such as imagination, playfulness, and interaction. In addition, we used dialogicity and spontaneity, principles discussed by Silva and Momo (2023) as relevant in research with children.

In an interview with the teachers, we learned that the literary work "Khaos" by Fábio Monteiro (2023) had been instrumental in shaping their conceptions of the past, present, and future. One of the teachers explained that the story was told and retold several times to the children and that the idea of time was one of the important themes of the work, "because the book has a lot of these artifacts, with things from the past. Then comes the question of memories" (Teacher A). It can be seen that the concept of the future was developed in the two Level 6 classes through the relationship with the concept of the past, introduced in the book Khaos (Teachers A and B). In this process, the children imagined the school in the future, making connections with the present and the past. They recorded their ideas on cards, which were placed inside a "Time Capsule" — one PET bottle per class, sealed with adhesive tape and then buried in the schoolyard.

Based on these elements and information, we developed methodological strategies to listen to the children. We created the story "Time Machine" and set up a kind of time machine with an interactive tent, where various artifacts were displayed. After listening to the story, the children entered the tent/time machine and, when they came out, answered: "What will there be in the future? Does the school have a future?

At another point, we opened the time capsules, with each class participating in the research (Classes A and B), and held a roundtable discussion about the records found. The

children were also invited to draw pictures and reflect on the future of the school.

Studies dedicated to research with children and the analysis of their narratives have found that children between the ages of 5 and 6 generally narrate their experiences in short, concise sentences (they summarize information intensely and directly) and with a great density of meanings. Of course, in our research with children (Ignácio; Momo, 2024), we have also come to this realization, which represents one of the theoretical-methodological challenges we face when conducting research with children rather than about them.

After systematizing the information produced in the field — including transcribing the audios with the children's and teachers' narratives, as well as organizing the images (photographs and film footage) — we decided to carry out a cultural analysis, considering the marks left on us by the experience of being with, living with and listening to the children and teachers.

According to Wortmann (2007, p. 74), cultural analysis is characterized within Cultural Studies "by operating in the convergence of methods and concepts from different branches of the humanities and the arts." This approach allows us to understand that, in different texts — whether scientific, literary or children's narratives — "there are representations produced from meanings that circulate in culture, and this is the justification that invites us to examine them" (Wortmann, 2007, p. 75) in this article. Thus, from the cultural analysis, two main categories emerged: *what schools are for* and *the future of schools as perceived through children's narratives*.

But, after all, what are schools for, according to children's narratives?

In the process of narrating the school, we noticed that the narratives produced by the children emerged based on the meanings attributed to them in the present. This is because the descriptions of the school institution's future were repeatedly woven into the plots of the present, based on the axis of "what schools are for".

The school institution, often perceived as universal and eternal, emerged in the 18th century as one of the socio-political pillars, with the specific function of civilizing the population towards a certain rationality. In this regard, Varela and Alvarez-Uría (1991), in their work *Arqueología de la escuela*, point out that the status of childhood, the creation of a specific space for the education of children, the emergence of a body of specialists with their own technologies and theoretical codes, the suppression of other modes of education and

compulsory schooling were determining factors in the emergence and maintenance of the modern school. Despite its relative youth, over time the school acquired the status of a "natural" space of life, imbued with an aura of civilization and justified by the significant social preparation it provided for its subjects. However, just like the meanings, the functions and social roles of the school are unstable and changeable.

The school, as Raymond Williams (1992) describes it, is a basic space for the transmission and perpetuation of human experience - consequently, it is a space for the transmission of culture. For the author, culture is the living memory to be transmitted, and education is the *locus* of power-knowledge of cultural reproduction.

Michael Young, in his famous article "What are schools for?" (2007), points out that without school institutions, each generation would have to start from scratch, due to the lack of transmission of human experience. To compose his arguments, Young presents different understandings of the school's role in the acquisition of knowledge over time, highlighting the power relations that emerge from it and are present in the schooling process. Contrary to researchers who see schools in a negative light, he understands them as emancipatory institutions, capable of transmitting valuable knowledge, as long as they are committed to "enabling young people to acquire the knowledge that, for most of them, cannot be acquired at home or in their community, and for adults, in their workplaces" — the so-called "powerful knowledge" (Young, 2007, p. 1294). This type of knowledge is capable of "providing reliable explanations or new ways of thinking about the world" (Young, 2007, p. 1294).

The book *In Defense of School*, by Masschelein and Simons (2014), presents an emphatic defense of the value and preservation of school in a context in which it is widely criticized as inadequate in the face of the demands of modernity. The authors describe school as a place of "free time", a public space where knowledge and skills can be transformed into "common goods". In it, subjects, regardless of their origin, talent, or natural aptitude, have the opportunity to distance themselves from the known environment, overcome limitations, renew themselves, and actively participate, in an unpredictable way, in the transformation of the world. In this way, the school is presented as a crucial space for creating a new world or future, reaffirming its central role in building collective and emancipatory possibilities.

Moreover, it was in this positive aura, filled with feelings of trust, hope, and optimism, that we saw the convergence of most of the children's narratives when they described what

schools were for. Many of the participants not only affirmed the permanence of school, but also showed how vital the institution is in their lives, as a place for their daily "experiencesⁱⁱ". "Experiences" that, in the future, will be waiting for the next generations in a welcoming and continually reinvented environment, as can be seen in the collective narrative below.

Researcherⁱⁱⁱ So, will there be a school in the future? Moreover, what will that school be like? Will it be the same as now, or will it be different?

L1^{iv} : The same.

L2: Different.

Researcher: Each one said something. Let's hear the one who said it would be different. What is going to be different?

L2: Some chairs. And a decoration of... And there'll be some chairs over there. Ah. Of roses.

Researcher: A different decoration.

L2: YES.

L1: Look, this decoration here.

Pollster: Hum, this decoration is very beautiful.

L1: There's that guitar I made.

Researcher: Oh, you made that guitar, did you? And what else is going to be different? Will there be a teacher?

L2: You will have a new teacher.

Researcher: There will be a new teacher in the future.

L2: I want to be a teacher (Time Machine - Classes A and B)

A different decor, different teachers, the teacher-self, among other concepts, reaffirm the desire for a school for/in the future. Furthermore, statements such as "Teacher, it's me in the future. My son is coming here" (C2, Interview with Teacher A) and "Women are going to get pregnant and, if there's no school, they won't have anywhere to put their children to study" (T1, Time Machine - Classes A and B)^v show the children's perception of school as an effective and fundamental space for the next generations. As Masschelein and Simons (2023, p. 23, emphasis added) state, "it is still worth dealing with the future of our world and future generations in this pedagogical mode we call school".

It is noteworthy that, throughout the dialogical experiences, the children identified school as a place to **study, learn to read and write, play, draw and acquire ethical and civilizing values of the society of which they are a part** — functions that are, to a certain extent, aligned with some of the perspectives on school brought up by the authors mentioned in this section. In this sense, as can be seen in the collective narrative below, school is understood as a space for learning.

Researcher: What is school for today?

M1: To learn to write and read.

[...]

Researcher: And why does there have to be a school?

J1: For us to study.

Researcher: What do you have to study for?

J1: For us to learn things.

[...]

L3: To study, to learn (Time Machine - Classes A and B)

From "an educational point of view," Masschelein and Simons (2014, p. 60) state that school learning involves changing someone "and therefore always consists of becoming someone different". Thus, the processes of learning to read and write, for example, occur through pedagogical forms that place the subject in "a position of being capable", while at the same time promoting "an exposure to something outside (and therefore an act of presenting and exposing the world)" (Masschelein; Simons, 2014, p. 55), mobilizing a process of change, notably recognized by the children.

School is also recognized by the study participants as a formative and civilizing social space, standing out as indispensable for promoting solidarity, preserving nature, and education focused on ethnic-racial issues. That's because without school,

P1: We're going to be selfish. We come to school to learn to share [...]. Because if we don't have school, we won't be able to learn. We'll be selfish, we won't learn to share, we won't learn anything that exists in the world. (Time capsule and drawing - Class B)

[...]

D1: I didn't learn to put the garbage in the garbage can. I didn't learn... (Time capsule and drawing - Class B)

It can be seen that, for young children, school is — and will remain — a locus of power-knowledge, capable of bringing about changes in subjects.

In the future, today's children will already be adults, and the children who will be born in the future will also be adults. And if there was no school in the future, there would be no nature. We wouldn't learn not to throw garbage on the ground. I didn't learn to share. I didn't learn anything (P1, Time Capsule and drawing - Class B)

As if echoing some assumptions "in defense of the school", the children's narratives above reaffirm the understanding that the school plays a central role — including in dealing with indigenous and black issues (C1, Time Capsule and drawing - Class B) — in the sharing, formation and production of collective knowledge and, consequently, in the (trans)formation

of social subjects.

Ultimately, these narratives reflect the importance of school not only in transmitting academic knowledge, but also in developing social skills and guaranteeing the fundamental rights of children and humanity. It should also be noted that the children legitimize the school as an institution that holds a body of social knowledge essential for collective coexistence and bestows upon it the power to train individuals for a given society. In the process, they hint at the urgency of this school of the future, in the future or without a future, as presented in the following sections.

The future of school according to children's narratives

It is understood that children, in their early stages of representational thinking, are in the process of constructing the notion of the future. The following collective narrative demonstrates how the theme of time has been consistently explored by the school's teachers.

Researcher: And what is the future that you explained?

J2: The future is yet to pass, the present is today, and the past is over.

[...]

Researcher: What do you think the future is?

E1: The future is to move somewhere else.

[...]

Researcher: For you?

R3: For me, it's moving to another country.

L1: For me, it's to go to another school.

P2: For me, being an adult means growing up a lot.

Researcher: Being an adult and growing up a lot?

P2: YES.

A1: The future is when a time has long since passed. (Time Machine - Classes A and B)

We can see that the concept of the future presented by the children is not unique; it is a polysemic concept. The oral narratives show individual elaborations, revealing that each child attributes different meanings to the future. However, a unity of meaning related to time permeates the collective narrative and underpins the children's understanding of the school of the future, whether in the present, the future, or without a future.

In general terms, the children's narratives on the question "Does school have a future?" were engendered by the children in three ways: 1) in articulation with the meanings about school that they would like to have in the future; 2) in the inseparability of meanings coming from the pedagogies of the present (especially from the technological and media

spheres); and 3) the meanings about not having school in the future.

1) Narratives about the school of the (desired) future

Among the narratives of children who followed the affirmative path, a significant number point out that the figure or role of the teacher and managers will continue to be central in the school of the future. The children show signs of understanding that experience can only be had at school with teachers, managers and their child peers.

Researcher: And what do you think this school of the future will have?

G1: You'll have a principal and a teacher.

[...]

G1: It's a very big school. (Story Time Machine - Classes A and B)

D2: They're going to paint more, they're going to sweep, they're going to make this school nicer. And they're going to have new teachers.

[...]

M2: Children and... jumper.

P3: In this school, in the school of the future, I want it to have lots of new friends. (Time capsule and drawing - Class B)

The children also highlight and give visibility to elements that refer to the school's new and extensive infrastructure and aesthetic features, suggesting that beauty and ugliness are not overlooked by them and are a cultural construction. As Umberto Eco (2004) argues in his work *The History of Beauty*, the concept of beauty, the object of multiple analyses and conceptual constructions, has never been absolute or unchanging throughout history. The text assumes that the concept of beauty is dynamic, evolving through different historical periods and continually constituted by contextual premises. Therefore, the school of the future is linked to the aesthetic principles of the present.

As for aesthetics, the children's narratives reveal that they occupy a prominent place in their perception, being one of the important dimensions for both the school of the future and for reflection on whether the school has a future (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Rainbow School



Source: Archive of the researchers/authors.

Researcher: What will this school have? Will it be the same as it is today, or will

it be different?

L2: Different.

Researcher: What's going to be different about this school?

L2: Rainbow.

Researcher: Will there be rainbows in this school, or will it be painted rainbows?

L2: Painted.

[...]

J2: Decorations.

[...]

J2: Christmas tree for Christmas.

Researcher: Christmas tree for Christmas. Anything else?

J2: Playground.

[...]

J2: Drinking fountain. Sandpit.

A2: I've already forgotten, but this school is going to have a jumper. They're going to touch up the walls, they're going to change the windows, they're going to change the doors.

S1: They can also change the drinking fountains.

A2: They're going to change the lights. They're going to change the walls.

Despite the efforts, including political ones, of the teachers and the management team to maintain the quality of the school's infrastructure^{vi} and make it an aesthetically pleasing institution; the children notice that the paint on the part of the building is ugly and faded, and that the cleaning, the playground, the sandpit, the lighting, and the drinking fountain could be improved. After all, the children want a beautiful school, with criteria based on present-day assumptions.

Another substantial set of narratives suggests a future school filled with art, sports, playfulness, sociability, friends, toys, parties, and joy. In fact, many of the children's drawings, gestures, body movements, and facial expressions made up their narratives with an ethos of happiness, not just for the school of the future but for their school of the present.

Researcher: What will this school have?

J3: There will be... There'll be a swimming pool.

M3: Bumper car.

[...]

M3: There will be children playing ballet on the playground and gymnastics.

Researcher: Ballet in the playground and gymnastics. What else?

M3: Yes, the ballet girls are going to bridge the gap, they're going to... And they're going to... (Time capsule and drawing - Class A)

A3: This school is going to become full of ballet and gymnastics stuff.

[...]

P3: I want a gym that has judo.

[...]

V1: Jumping jacks, playing with dolls.

Researcher: Jumping jacks, playing with dolls... What else?

V1: A tree house (Time capsule and drawing - Class B)

R1: A school that has a lot of parties and food.

A4: It's going to be a different school.

Researcher: What's going to be different about this school?

A4: There will be cars, toys, a park... and... a clay house (Time Capsule and drawing - Class A)

The description of the school of the future is full of traces of the "experiences" of the present and the emotions, sensations and feelings they aroused. These elements produced a repertoire that was accessed and re-signified throughout the description of this school of the future.

2) Narratives of the school of the future: the inseparability of meanings from the pedagogies of the present

Various authors, such as Bauman (2001), Harvey (1993) and Jameson (2004), who have dedicated themselves to analyzing the transformations that have taken place in the world since the Second World War, especially those related to consumption, the media and technologies, contribute to understanding and reflecting on the implications of these changes for cultures, relationships and societies. On another occasion, in the presentation of the dossier Pedagogies of the Present: Implications for subjects, relationships and society (Momo; Ignácio, 2023), we reflected on how these changes have also impacted and redefined the conception and modes of operation of pedagogy(ies) in the present time, in which a diversity of pedagogical approaches, both inside and outside school (Camozzato; Ignácio, 2023), work to train subjects in line with the demands of a specific society.

In this context, we were surprised by the significant number of drawings in the Time Capsules that associated the school of the future with technological artifacts, such as cell phones, video games, robots, control cars, talking dolls, and microphones (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Time Capsule: Cell Phone, Video Game and Remote Control Robot



Source: Archive of the researchers/authors.

The imperative of digital technology in today's societies has shaped dynamics in various areas of life, becoming almost inescapable for most contemporary individuals, including young children. This technological universe is promoting a veritable cultural revolution, with an impact on "ways of living, the meaning people give to life and their aspirations for the future" (Hall, 1997, p. 2).

Children's narratives about the school of the future are full of technological aspirations, the most frequent of which is undoubtedly the cell phone. In this respect, studies carried out by Costa and Born (2009, p. 208) pointed out, back in the 2000s, that "most children say they can't do without it because it's the best way to have friends", "get information, play games, watch videos and listen to their favorite bands, completely protected from any interference (or influence) from adults". Cell phones, among other technological artifacts, have become part of childhood's way of being in contemporary times.

In addition, statements such as "I think there's going to be a more technological school" (**E2** - Time Machine Story - Classes A and B) and "Since the school is all closed, I parked a sunroof here" (**D2** - Time Capsule and drawing - Class B) reflect the way the children understand the school of the future from a technological perspective.

Researcher: What do you think there will be in the future?

E3: There will be more different computers. There will also be other things, a bit more different too.

Researcher: Do you think there will be a school in the future?

E3: It's going to be a more technological school.

Researcher: A more technological school?

E3: YES.

[...]

E3: I think there's going to be a notebook that... You say the letters, and it writes itself.

Researcher: A notebook that writes by itself?

E3: YES.

Researcher: And what else do you think?

E3: There will also be... There will be... A board that the teacher has to point to and what she imagines will appear. (Story Time Machine - Class A and B)

Children's "experiences" with the cultural pedagogies^{vii} Of the present, including digital games, online platforms, and films, features strongly in their narratives about the school of the future. These cultural patterns, especially those from the technological and

media spheres, have a direct impact on how children perceive whether school has a future and what the school of the future will look like.

3) Narratives about not having a school in the future

To analyze the narratives of the children who responded negatively to the question "Does the school have a future?", we returned to Larrosa's (2003) understanding that the description of the future occurs through narrative constructions and interpretations, infused with elements that define their conditions of emergence. So, we asked ourselves what the possible conditions were for the emergence of the three narratives that followed.

Researcher: What about the school? Will there be a school?

P4: I don't think so.

Researcher: Why? What is school for?

P4: To learn.

Researcher 5: So how are people going to learn? Won't they learn more at school then? Where will people learn then?

P4: Let's learn at home (Time Machine - Classes A and B)

Researcher: There will be a dentist's kit in the future. What about school? Do you think there will be a school in the future?

L3: I don't think so.

Researcher: Why? How will people learn in the future?

L3: I don't know.

Researcher: There will be another way for people to learn things...
(The child nodded.)

Researcher: And what do you think school is for?

L3: To study, to learn. (Time machine - Classes A and B)

M1: I don't think there will be a school in the future.

Researcher: And where are they [the children] going to learn to read and write, then, without school? Where will it happen if there's no school?

[...]

M1: They won't learn because there won't be a school in the future.

Researcher: Got it.

M3: They won't learn to put garbage in the garbage can, they won't learn to share, they won't learn to put things away. (Time machine - Classes A and B)

In the 1970s, Ivan Illich (1985) already pointed to the de-schooling of society as a possible way forward, with education taking place in other institutions, beyond the walls of the school. Based on a detailed and forceful analysis of the uncomfortable problems in the school industry, as well as the obligation to attend school, the author proposes "Societies without Schools".

Not having a school in the future and studying at home is one of the meanings that

make up the narrative of a child who said that school has no future. The practice of homeschooling, which is prevalent in countries like the United States of America, has gained visibility in the media and party political discourse in our country, particularly during the 2020-2023 administration of the federal government. This proposal for education is strongly committed to neoliberal policies of reducing state intervention and investment in education (Laval, 2019), which, due to the limitations and objectives of this text, will not be analyzed. What interests us is highlighting the progress of the homeschooling idea in Brazil.

When asked by one of the researchers if there would be another way for people to learn in the future, one child nodded in agreement. However, she didn't continue the narrative, leaving it open as to what that way might be.

The other possibility contained in the third narrative is that school won't exist, and people won't learn. In this regard, Dussel (2023, p. 96) concludes that "the school, in order to sustain itself as an assembly, needs discursive conditions that affirm its importance and its centrality to the transmission of culture"; otherwise, "what it accomplishes has little chance of enduring". Consequently, the reflections in this section lead us to revisit the discussion about the social role of the school in the civilizing and formative processes it assumes according to contemporary regimes of truth.

The future will pass, the present is today, and the past is over

Listening to the children on the question "Does school have a future?" and analyzing their narratives proved to be a possible way of accessing the children's understandings of school (in the present and the future). In their narratives, they presented rich and creative perspectives on the future of the school, while simultaneously narrating a school form that we recognize in the present.

Listening to the children meant shifting away from exclusively adult-centered perspectives in the production of scientific knowledge about the school. In this process, we were guided by the children's narratives to consider the future of the school within the context of its present. In general terms, the narratives reaffirm the importance of school as a place for the social, cultural and ethical formation of children, a space whose permanence and reinvention are indispensable for building possible futures. At the same time, the narratives also lead us to imagine a future without school: a society without learning or with other ways of learning in a less humanized world.

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Notas

ⁱ In this research, we investigate how school subjects are produced in postmodernity through different pedagogies of the present (Ignácio & Momo, 2024) that operate in the production of particular subjectivities. This is a qualitative study whose corpus includes both the oral narratives of school subjects and the artifacts and discourses that reverberate in school spaces and times. The production of data has highlighted some of the social marks that operate and act on the subjects, as well as the identities and subjectivities that are activated and produced in the present.

ⁱⁱ Larrosa (2002) defines experience as what happens to us, affects us and touches us. Based on this understanding, we consider that the experiences pointed out by the children can be understood as "experiences" in this article because they not only happened to them but also significantly affected and touched them, influencing their subjective processes and integrating their narratives.

ⁱⁱⁱ Although both authors have actively participated in all stages of the research, we have chosen not to make distinctions, as the central focus of the work is on children's narratives.

^{iv} To preserve the anonymity of the children, we used the initials of their names followed by a number to differentiate between those who share the same initial letter.

^v In her book *Early Childhood Education: foundations and methods*, Zilma Ramos de Oliveira shows how, throughout the history of early childhood education institutions in Europe and Brazil, they have taken on different functions, including looking after children while their mothers worked outside the home, especially during the Industrial Revolution (Oliveira, 2002).

^{vi} Quality in infrastructure is understood here from the document "National Quality Parameters for Early Childhood Education" (Brazil, 2006).

^{vii} "Pedagogical areas are those places where power is organized and disseminated, including libraries, TV, cinemas, newspapers, magazines, toys, advertisements, video games, books, sports, etc." (Steinberg; Kincheloe, 2004, p. 14).

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