

BOLIVIAN CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN SAO PAULO: ADAPTATION, VULNERABILITIES AND TENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes tense and contradictory aspects witnessed in a study of the adaptation of Bolivian children to early childhood education in public schools in Sao Paulo city. Analysis focuses on the complexity that permeates the relationship of these children with their teachers. Interactions between Bolivian children and other children were observed. Observation lasted two years and the information collected was recorded in a field diary. The ethnographic fieldwork was complemented by open interviews. The observation allowed understanding the meaning of being a foreigner in early childhood education in Sao Paulo city and the construction of stigmas associated with the production of difference as a disadvantage for the newly arrived children.

IMMIGRATION • EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION • BOLIVIAN
CHILDREN • CHILD CARE

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES CONTRADICTIONARY AND TENSE ASPECTS WITNESSED IN A STUDY on the adaptation of Bolivian children to municipal early childhood education in Sao Paulo city.

Singular expression of a diaspora in progress (HALL, 2014), the presence of these children in the everyday life of the municipal system of a city the size of Sao Paulo enabled the authors of this text to report situations in which the foreigner's condition was produced in the details, by treating Bolivian children stressing disadvantageous differences. In the research routine, inspired by Michel de Certeau (2000), we inventoried gestures, and realized that some ways of acting and reacting produced alterities, reconstructed borders and drew the outline of a welcome that was deformed. Such deformation caused embarrassment every time a teacher recalled screaming: "Here we do not speak Spanish!"

We share the view of Erving Goffman (2011, 2012, 2013), according to whom a significant social fact is configured in the frames of social experience whenever a person organizes his or her self because s/he is involved in face-to-face interactions.

We closely observed interactions between Bolivian and non-Bolivian children and of all of them and their teachers. Although our focus was the relationship between children and teachers, we also interacted with their families.¹

¹ Everyone addressed in the research that originated this article - teachers, coordinators, managers, and family - were previously consulted and filled an Informed Consent Form for the use and publication of the information gathered. The research project was approved by Comitê de Ética e Pesquisa [Ethics and Research Committee] of UNIFESP /Plataforma Brasil. Approval process registration number: 250 152.

The school always has special scenarios. In face-to-face relationships, young Bolivian children are constantly reminded that they are foreigners, confirming what Bartra (2000), Geertz (2004), and Hall (2014) asserted: being a foreigner is much more a condition that is acquired before the others, in the spectrum of their look, in the tone of their words, than a geographical reference founded in a sometimes imaginary notion of nationality (ANDERSON, 1990). Many of these children were born in Brazil, but are perceived as foreigners all the time.

We identified scenarios in which disadvantages have accumulated, amalgamating the pejorative meanings that the words “foreigner”, “immigrant” and “Bolivian” acquired every time they were articulated to the implicit and explicit intentions to demonstrate to children and their families that no one expected the distance between “the established and outsiders”, using the emblematic binomial of Elias and Scotson (2000), to be reduced.

Therefore, this article addresses the complex situation of children who have become “the others arriving”, the ones who “must adapt”, also because, in the words of the protagonists of everyday school life, “those who arrive must reorganize themselves”.

THE RESEARCH AND ITS OBJECT

In Brazil, there is hardly any research on immigrant children in early childhood education. When addressed, this topic is part of sociological and anthropological repertoires which maintain connections with migration studies, and is associated with research on educational everyday life only secondarily. Since this subject is little investigated in Brazil, our first move was to understand in which category Bolivian children enrolled in municipal early childhood schools (Emeis) fall. This categorization has become necessary, because most children located in this research are children of foreign parents, but were born in Brazil.

Children of this universe gain greater visibility in dark moments. The large influx of Latin American immigrants, which has added new strata of diversity to the social landscape of the country, is often perceived only in situations of strong deterioration of work activities and regrettable confinements, in which human beings are subjected to working arrangements analogous to slavery.

This article derives from a two-year long observation and the information registered in a field diary quickly confirmed that the characters of the daily plot analyzed can in fact be approached using “the established and outsiders” categories (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000).

The use of these categories was not articulated *a priori*, but perceived and unfolded in the native, endogenous sense with which the visible alterity of these children has become a component of

the continuous construction of the foreigner's condition, especially because children born in Brazil are nonetheless Bolivian, since the term "Bolivian" has become "the way" of identifying an outsider in the schools studied. Continuous observation allowed registering stigma (GOFFMAN, 2004) built on the specificity of this adaptation process. It was also possible to register scenes of willingness to welcome and gestures of adaptation from both sides. The interactions analyzed reproduced frontier representations. In this analysis, frontier is not only a geographic reference, but also a place of demarcation that appears whenever one asserts one's identity with the intention of not being confused with "that other one" (WOODWARD, 2007).

The term "assimilation" has been used to analyze analogous situations in international literature, and has even taken the place of the word "adaptation" to refer to similar processes. But here we chose to use the word "adaptation" meaning to recognize that, even in adverse situations, these children and their families are also agents of themselves and undertake the continuous task of adapting to the others and to their spaces. We realize that we cannot state that those who live the experience of displacement cease to "be who they are" to become "totally another".²

To understand the rightful place of these children in the world of Emeis, it was necessary not only to observe their daily lives in the classroom, but also to examine the opinions issued by Conselho Estadual de Educação (CEE – State Board of Education) and by Conselho Municipal de Educação (CME – City Board of Education). Restrictions imposed by legislation governing enrollment in public municipal schools still bring about obstacles to the realization of the right to education for foreigners, especially because the legislation defines many of them as "undocumented".

The observations in loco occurred from 2012 to 2014 in three Emeis of Diretoria Regional de Educação (DRE – Regional Board of Education). Those Emeis are located in Mooca, Bras and Pari neighborhoods, in the downtown area of Sao Paulo city. The names of those Emeis have been omitted to protect the identity of the people described and of respondents. They have been called just Emei 1, 2 and 3.

The following groups were observed: *Infantil I*, formed by children born between January 1st and March 31st, 2009, and between April 1st and December 31st, 2008; *Infantil II*, with children born between January 1st and March 31st, 2008, and between April 1st and December 31st, 2007. Children were enrolled according to Decree n. 5,741/12 issued by Secretaria Municipal de Educação (SME – City Department of Education). Children mentioned in the text were given fictitious names.

In addition to direct observation, 21 depth interviews were conducted, with many hours of free account: three with pedagogical

2

For a broader discussion of the issue, see Bateson (1989) and Corsaro (1997).

coordinators of each unit, fifteen with teachers and three with parents. All the respondents were given fictitious names. In addition to school settings, field visits included three city spaces recognized as Bolivian *pedaços* [areas] in Sao Paulo.

Many of the children who participated in this research are, in fact, Bolivian by birth. But they have adapted to the unwritten rules of inferiority produced by prejudice and, when asked, they affirmed that they were Brazilian. This attitude is in fact less of a lie and more of a strategic positioning of someone who wants to establish closer ties with the social group to which one wants to belong, even if it reinforces the false perception of inferiority that weaves the relationship of school workers with Bolivians.

In general, children of Bolivian origin, including Brazilians by birth, have ethnic and phenotypic traits which are highlighted in moments of tension, when someone refers to children as “Bolivian” or “Boliva” instead of using their names. While all these children deal daily with the construction and reconstruction of the foreigner’s condition, their parents, especially their mothers, rework themselves on the sidelines of a hostile everyday life which is encoded in the city as “underworld”.

The school proved to be a refuge and a guarantee to parents who have, in the public sphere of the metropolis, a place of recovery of the dignity threatened in the labor relations which they are subjected to.

CONTEXT

In the twenty-first century, the country’s economic scenario has undergone important changes. Brazil still has deep social disparities; yet, it has a special appeal for immigrants from different all over the world, especially Latin American.

For some decades, studies of Bolivian immigrants have demonstrated the specificities of this community and pointed the broad need for public policies that address the uniqueness of the current situation.

Woodward (2007, p. 21) stresses that immigration is a process marked by economic development inequality, since that is the main factor that “expels” some people from their own places. This context favors the dispersal of people around the world, intensifying in local dynamics the reactive production of identities and alterities.

Bourdieu (2005) thinks something similar about the conflicting presence of African immigrants in France. The groups of newcomers seek to adapt to and to improve the situation often through an “adaptive dismantle” of their original identity, which even includes the aesthetics and postural reorganization of the body. It is worth quoting what

Bourdieu (1998, p. 11) comments regarding this self-reorganization process: “Neither citizen nor foreigner, not truly on the side of the Same, not really on the side of the Other, the ‘immigrant’ exists within that ‘bastard’ place of which Plato also speaks, the frontier between being and social non-being”. For Sayad (1998), among the elements of the immigrant condition are: provisionality, feeling always a foreigner, and living with a permanent desire of return. Bolivian immigrants have been essentially temporary workforce, but have a paradoxical experience of provisionality that is often perpetuated in time.

To identify more clearly the areas of human mobility, whose aspects favor the construction of social networks, identities and alterities in Sao Paulo, we have used the concept of “territory” (TARRIUS, 2000). These children have entered inhospitable territories. As an extension of the “territory” category, the concept of “migratory territory” can be understood as a symbolic and political space in which the socio-cultural relations shared by “outsiders” are produced.

Regarding the presence of foreigners in Sao Paulo, the oldest censuses report that foreign population rose from 12,290 (25,8%) in 1886 to 205,245 (35,4%) in 1920, and 287,690 (27,8%) in 1934. The 1920 Census indicated that the immigrant population consisted primarily of Italians (46,6%), followed by Portuguese (31.5%), Spaniards (12.1%), and people of different nationalities (11,8%) (BASSANEZI, 2012). These data show that the presence of immigrants in the demographic composition of Sao Paulo city is not residual, nor episodic. Sao Paulo is a multifaceted city.

After the decrease in international migration, from 1930 to 1970, the city has become part of the route of internal migration, a result of the displacement of rural populations to urban centers. In the 1980s, there was a drop in migration to the city. However, metropolises such as Sao Paulo never cease to be poles of attraction (BAENINGER, 2005).

The latest census conducted by Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia Estatística (IBGE – Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics) reported the entry of 268,486 new immigrants in 2010 against 143,644 in 2000, an increase of 86.7%. The main countries of origin of immigrants were the U.S.A. (51.933), Japan (41.417), Paraguay (24.666), Portugal (21.376), and Bolivia (15.753).

However, it should be noted that there is a large contingent of undocumented Bolivian immigrant residents, especially in Sao Paulo city, which makes the actual number much higher than official statistics indicate.

In the series of interviews with early childhood teachers, they were asked about what they knew about the families of Bolivian pupils. Most replied that they knew very little.

LOCATING THESE FAMILIES IN SAO PAULO CITY

In recent years, despite statistical dissonances, it is a fact that a large Bolivian contingent occupies the central areas of Sao Paulo city. Estimates of the actual size of the Bolivian community in the city vary enormously: the Consulate of Bolivia estimates there are 50,000 undocumented; Pastoral dos Imigrantes (Pastoral Care of Immigrants) believes that 70,000 undocumented Bolivians live in Sao Paulo, 35,000 of them just in Bras neighborhood; the estimates of Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego (MTE – Ministry of Labor and Employment) range from 10 to 30 thousand undocumented; Ministério Público (MP – Public Prosecutor) calculates there are 200,000 Bolivians, including legal and illegal ones; Sindicato das Costureiras (Union of Seamstresses) speaks of 80,000 illegal workers (CYMBALISTA; XAVIER, 1999, p. 123). The only consensus is that Sao Paulo has the largest number of Bolivian immigrants in Brazil.

Most of these immigrants have been employed in sewing sweatshops in conditions analogous to slavery. They live in houses provided by the owner of the sewing shop and have to work for numerous hours to pay the hosting costs. In addition to this effort, there is a moral obligation to save money to send to relatives left in Bolivia (SILVA, 2006). The humiliating situations faced by undocumented workers in sewing sweatshops are also extended to children:

The human rights of undocumented Latin American immigrants who work in the sewing industry in Brazil are systematically violated. [...] Journalistic characterizations recurrently mention: exhaustive journeys of up to 18 hours; salaries below the minimum; poor nutrition; document retention; curtailment of the right to come and go through locked doors and/or surveillance cameras; deductions from payments for expenses with food, housing and the Bolivia-Brazil trip; insalubrious conditions such as poor lighting, deficient sanitary facilities, and housing (which are often confused with the workplace, since the place of sleep is a mattress placed near the sewing machine of the worker); risk of fire and explosions due to poor electrical installations; children locked up in dark rooms or tied to the sewing machine during parents' working hours; high tuberculosis rate; intense psychological coercion on the part of employers, who threaten to report workers to immigration authorities etc. (ILLES; TIMÓTEO, 2008, p. 205)

Some places in neighborhoods where Bolivian immigrants live and work serve as meeting points. For exploratory visits, we chose three locations, notoriously recognized as Bolivian territories in Sao Paulo: Kantuta square, Coimbra street and Mooça district park. Kantuta, the name of the square of the Bolivians is the name of a green, yellow and

red flower of the Andean highlands, the same colors as those of the Bolivian flag. Coimbra street is located in Bras neighborhood, in the central area of Sao Paulo city. Recently, there has been an attempted sale of workers there. The news was published on *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper on February 14, 2014. There are dark aspects in this fabric.

For Bolivians who have small children, access to early childhood education in practice means enhanced wellness and safety for the families that can enter their children in the public sphere domains.

EDUCATION AND RIGHTS

On May 26, 2013, *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper reported growth in the number of foreign students enrolled in schools in Sao Paulo city. The news article drew attention to the variety of nationalities, with representatives from 55 countries, and highlighted the Bolivian majority.

It has not always been so. In the 1990s, Sao Paulo State government, through the Department of Education, presented Resolution no. 9, which prohibited the enrollment of foreign students without Brazilian documentation. Thus, children who did not have Registro Nacional de Estrangeiro (RNE – National Register of Foreigners) could not attend school (BONASSI, 2000) and this marginalized mainly Bolivians.

An awkward action of the state government generated a series of demonstrations by organizations which work for the rights of immigrants. In 1995, Resolution no. 9 was replaced by Resolution no. 10, which recognized the right of foreigners to school education regardless of proof of legal status in the country (MAGALHÃES, 2010). Shortly thereafter, the State Board of Education published Resolution no. 16/97 providing for the enrollment of foreigners in primary and secondary education. Article 1 of that document determined that the enrollment of foreigners was to be carried out without any discrimination, following the same patterns of the enrollment of Brazilians.

This scenario stabilized thanks to Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education], n. 9394/1996, which combined aspects of the 1988 Federal Constitution and the 1990 Statute of Children and Adolescents.

In Sao Paulo, the CME Opinion n. 7/98 ensured the enrollment of foreign children or adolescents in the municipal school system, registered or not, recognizing that the current legislation assumed that enrollment is a constitutionally guaranteed right.

However, in the course of fieldwork, we recorded the arrival of a Bolivian mother who wanted to register her son for enrollment in one of the schools researched. The mother was received by an official of the school, who promptly asked her about documents. Not mastering Portuguese, the woman tried to explain that she did not have them.

Then, she was informed that without a document there would be no possibility of registration. The woman walked away.

Eva, one of the interviewed immigrants, went through a similar situation. She and her husband worked in a sewing shop in a neighborhood in the northern area of the city. When the work ended, they had to move house and go to a neighborhood far from where they lived. Guided by the school, she formalized the withdrawal of enrollment to try a place in an Emei near her new home. But the arrival at the new school caused, she said, the following dialogue:

You have no documents, you can't enter. "Pero I have a visa", I said. "No", he said. Pero he has already been to school, allâ they accepted him. In this school he said that, and every school I went to alí, I went to many schools to consult how things happen. In one they said: "you at least have to have documents, if you don't have documents... of the boy no és a huge problem, pero you have to have documents", he said. Pero in the other school he said: "no! If you and your son don't have, you can't!". He said only that and this half year I was unable to complete Emei. (Eva)

The difficulty in communication is evident and the absence of documents is a factor of great instability. This favors the dissemination of a strategy of access to basic services: "borrowing" Cadastro de Pessoas Físicas (CPF – Registration of Individuals).

Despite these difficulties, there is no doubt that, for immigrant parents, especially Bolivian ones, the school plays an important assistance role. They justify this by stating that, during the classes, the family can concentrate fully on the job, secure in the knowledge that their children are safe.

During the first months of field research, we had the opportunity to follow closely a group of three and four year olds of early childhood education in one of the schools researched. This way, the "inner angle" of this research was delineated. Before long, we had reached our first conclusion: the willingness of the teacher to accept the language difference is a decisive factor for the emotional stabilization of Bolivian children in these institutions.

LANGUAGE AND TENSE COMMUNICATION

What led us to remain attentive to the first group identified was not the number of foreign children in the classroom, since the class had only two Bolivian children. What sparked particular interest was the interaction with teacher Antonia, 30, and the concrete possibility of witnessing efforts to overcome language barriers.

The field diary recorded that, at the beginning of the school year, the teacher asked José, a four-year old Bolivian, to explain the drawing that he had produced. José did not communicate much: “*Mi papá, mi mamá y yo!*”. Attentive to the speech of the child, the teacher repeated: “Your dad, your mom and you?”, and the child answered: “*Si!*”. Realizing that the teacher had understood, José expressed joy and the following days proved that at that moment a reciprocal trust relationship had begun.

Producing other drawings, whose original explanation had the same starting point, “*mi papá, mi mamá y yo*”, the child gradually became more willing to talk with those who communicated in Portuguese. The fear of not being understood, something witnessed by us in many situations, lost its *raison d'être*. The difference in relation to the Bolivian children who were severely reprimanded for not using Portuguese became palpable. Little by little, expressions like “*¿Puedo hacer piz?*” or “*¿Puedo hacer caca?*” became part of the everyday life of that classroom.

Gradually, the teacher gave José the necessary support to learn in Portuguese the vocabulary and expressions equivalent to his needs.. At the end of the semester, albeit with some mistakes, the boy already communicated confidently with colleagues and teachers. Amid “*holas*” and “*hellos*”, the boy proved very affectionate and significantly adapted to school. He participated in collective games and understood them.

One day, José ran into a swing moving and cut off his head. The family was notified and the boy was taken to hospital. The next day, he returned to school. When questioned about the decision to bring him to school, and reminded of the possible need for rest, the mother answered that her son wanted to go to school because he did not want to stay all day long between sewing machines. The speech of the mother reaffirmed two aspects previously identified by the teacher. First, that José was fully adapted to school and enjoyed being there. Second, that the conditions for staying in the domestic sphere were so uninviting that, even weakened by pain and discomfort, going to school was a more pleasant option for José.

In addition to José, the class had Inácio, a four-year old Bolivian born in La Paz. Despite his clear difficulty to draw and write his name, Inácio gained resourcefulness and became beloved in school. Inácio returned to his native country a few months after José. The school missed them a lot.

From the perspective of Sayad (1998), the return is a constitutive element of immigrant condition and we observed that this idea is part of the imagination of Bolivian immigrants. However, the realization of this dream varies according to the material conditions to which they are subjected.

The research demonstrated that the experiences of José and Inácio are exceptions. At the end of fieldwork, it was possible to carry out a grim accounting. On balance, we realized that obtaining affection occurred much less frequently than rejection, which was always anticipated by the refusal to listen to the child speaking Spanish.

The presence of these children in the municipal education system stimulates those who research to compare situations and analyze details that are decisive in the dissemination of prejudice.

For example, the coordinator of one of the schools studied commented that, in the nursery where she worked previously, there were two foreign children, a Japanese one and a Bolivian one. With a certain naturalness, she commented that, in the morning, when they received the first child, teachers hugged and kissed it celebrating the arrival of the Japanese baby, while the arrival of the second one was accompanied by a warning to the others: “Bolivia” has arrived!

On another occasion, a teacher asked us to observe Violeta, a five-year old Bolivian immigrant girl. Violeta was a few meters away in the sandbox with the other children and she was handling four or five toys. The suggestion to observe her had a discriminatory intent: “You see how many toys Violet has? It fits what Susana says about ‘their’ wanting it all to themselves”.³ But seconds later Violet began distributing among colleagues the toys she was handling, and kept a smaller number of pieces for herself. The teacher, who followed closely the steps of the child, silenced embarrassed.

Teachers constantly express great expectation of obtaining commitment to school demands and involvement in learning Portuguese from Bolivian families. The material conditions for that commitment to school to become effective are considered in different ways. The teachers rely on the cooperation of mothers to make children acquire at home the hygiene habits needed to use the school bathroom. But they complain about the difficulties of the mothers to understand what to do for the acquisition of such habits:

Try to talk to him, because here I notice his difficulty to communicate with us. [...] Ask him to come show me, if he can't speak, ask him to point out, to show where it was. Because, if he doesn't cry, if he doesn't complain, and if we don't see it, it's complicated.

The teacher emphasized the deficits which she was obliged to live with in these situations:

The messages which go home are hardly ever returned signed. So much so that, in the last [teachers'] meeting, she came to bring him because she didn't understand that the note said there would

³ Susana is the fictional name given to a teacher who displayed strong intolerance toward foreign children, especially Bolivian ones. She even confided that she was angry when she heard Bolivian children self-determine they were Brazilian. According to her, “Bolivians are a race that should have stayed in Bolivia. Pigs! Thieves!”. She warned me to be careful when walking Coimbra street: “Watch your purse!”

be no class because there would be an educational meeting. She arrived here at the door, [...] and left completely embarrassed. She even apologized because she hadn't understood that there would be no class.

Early childhood education is the stage of basic education⁴ most open to interactions between school and family. Early childhood education teachers can be a significant element in the adaptation process when they are willing to find ways to relate to foreign children despite the language difficulties that inevitably arise.

All of this can only be clearly revealed when it is closely observed and the ethnographic record deciphers situations from inside. Proximity showed the prevalence of conflicting interactions and actions between highly destabilizing pairs. The analysis was not restricted to a place with few children. It benefited from a broad framework of observation with significant reiterations of registered conflicts. It can be argued that some schools are now socially identified by the more visible presence of “foreign” children.

THE SPECIFICITY OF SOME PLACES AND INTERACTIONS

In the world of early childhood education in Sao Paulo city, some schools have a “tradition” of serving immigrants. Under this “tradition”, four institutions stand out: three of them belong to DRE Penha and one to DRE Ipiranga.

All research is subject to authorization for data collection. In our case, full access to the institutions has been granted only by DRE Penha.

Emei 1 has 286 children aged four to six years. There are six classes of *Infantil I* and four classes of *Infantil II*. Forty-one of them are immigrant children. Emei 2 serves 398 students, divided into five rooms of *Infantil I* and seven rooms of *Infantil II*. Seventy-three children are considered immigrants. Just like in school 1, most foreign children are Bolivian. Emei 3 has 305 students, distributed in a minigroup, five rooms of *Infantil I* and four rooms of *Infantil II*. Of the researched schools, the latter has the largest number of foreign students, totaling 95 children. Although it has a greater diversity of nationalities than schools 1 and 2, most children have Bolivian origin.

In the research, Bolivian boys apparently found it easier to interact than girls, who often remained only in groups of children whose first language was Spanish. Rosa, a teacher who has worked in the system for just over two years, gave the following report:

4

Translator's note: In Brazil, *basic education* comprises early childhood, primary and secondary education.

Earlier in the year, I realized that all the Bolivian girls, our largest clientele, wanted to sit together, stay together, I think it's because communication between them was easier. So then what did I do? I started separating them little by little [...]. At first, there was a table with Isabel, in fact, her mother is Paraguayan, but she was born here, so she and three Bolivian girls sat at the same table. They kept together all the time. Nothing separated them. So what did we do? We thought it best to separate them. We put practically one on each table, with other children who were not Bolivian, and so they're doing really well. They now socialize with the entire group. They are no longer alone in that little world of them. Because you can't let children feel overly comfortable, because of course it is easier for them to stay with another child who understands what they're saying than to struggle to make themselves understood, isn't it?

In this case, from what we observed, treating the preference of the Bolivian immigrant girls as an effect of discrimination by the Brazilian girls would be a mistake. Arrangements between peers seem closer to the issues that in Brazil have sharper gender separation. That is, girls play in “classic” scenarios such as playing house, playing with dolls etc. They play using verbal language a lot, which occurs on a much smaller scale when boys, for example, play soccer or tag.

However, there are situations when boys also need to go through a trial period until they are fully accepted by “the senior ones”. In the children’s groups observed, the acceptance of new members has always required something akin to a ritual of acceptance, a fact already documented in other studies related to the world of children’s cultures (FERNANDES, 2004).

The initial difficulty of adaptation of foreign children in the researched schools reflects process of accepting new members in general, and nationality is an aspect of little relevance to children. “Managing to do it” is more relevant. The same perception is shared by Marisa, a teacher of an *Infantil II* group. In response to a question about the relationship between Brazilian children and immigrants, she concluded:

I don't see the kids making fun of, bullying anyone [...] they don't. I think they do it a lot more with fat children. In my classroom, there is no discrimination, not against Bolivians, nor color. The fattish are the ones who suffer discrimination there. They're often called porky [...].

In the observation period, there were no situations in which Brazilian children used what Geertz (2008) called “group charisma” to stigmatize Bolivian immigrants. Instead, we witnessed scenes of fellowship between Brazilians and immigrants.

Playground time was the richest moment of observation. Far from adult eyes, children had the freedom to do what they wished; the duration of games depended on their degree of boldness. Quieter games tended not to suffer interference from teachers. On the other hand, manifestations that were more aggressive or seen as dangerous were readily interrupted, but children soon reinvented them.

OTHER EVERYDAY TENSIONS

The most difficult moments of observation were those in which foreign children were clearly involved in embarrassing situations. The following report reveals situations in which to be a foreigner was a disadvantage for the child.

It was a party day, everyone was gathered in the schoolyard to sing in celebration of Children’s Day. There were sweets for distribution. The teachers put them in bowls and told the children that they should wait until the candy was equally distributed. One did not resist and reached into the bowl. The teacher overseeing looked complacently and said jokingly: “I’ll let you do it.”

Juliana, a five-year old Bolivian girl who watched the scene, seeing the success of her friend’s adventure, felt encouraged to do the same. When she put her hands in the bowl, she was scolded by the teacher, who spoke sharply in an indignant tone: “Are you going to put your hand there? You with that hand?” When the teacher realized that she was being observed, she retorted: “Have you seen how dirty her hands are?”. The hands of both children looked the same.

In the interviews, most teachers denied having participated in or witnessed situations in which the Bolivian identity was a disadvantageous factor for Bolivian children in relation to the others, but the day to day showed otherwise. The stigmatizing perception that someone, of all people, is more likely to be dirty, to be guilty, to not understand what is said recalls Goffman’s analysis (2004, p. 7) of the production of inferiority between peers. Inferiority is always produced.

We gained relevant information on this issue when we heard the coordinators. The series of interviews with pedagogical coordinators, as well as with most early childhood education teachers, occurred throughout 2013. They repeatedly mentioned the difficulty in understanding the language spoken by the children and their parents. The indication of this difficulty – sometimes as an outburst, sometimes in a complaining tone – was used in various situations as one

of the justifications for the tensions in the relationship with Bolivian immigrant children and their families.

Among the interviewed, work experience in the city's education system varies from 2 to 35 years. Despite the considerable teaching experience difference, there were similarities in the answers. Language was the factor chosen to defend the argument that problems begin in the child who does not communicate adequately:

Parents came to the meeting, the whole family, father, mother, uncle, aunt, everyone. [...] I did not understand anything, I asked Alba and she didn't understand what they were talking about either. And we tried to communicate with them, but not a word, neither me, nor her. So, it was kind of frustrating. (Marisa)

In the interviews, that teachers insist on parents speaking Portuguese with their children at home attracted our attention. Responsibility for Portuguese teaching is transferred to the family:

My concern... I insist a lot on parents speaking Portuguese at home. If they intend to stay in this country... I don't mean they should lose their language. I make this clear. It is only for the child to benefit in terms of literacy. Because this is our reality. They won't have a specific class to keep their language and extra classes when it is time to learn how to read and write. [...] They'll get to the first grade and will have literacy classes in our language only. So if they speak to the child in Portuguese, this will make first grade easier. They will suffer less. (Marina)

When immigrant children come to school with greater command of Portuguese, although they are called "Bolivian" in a derogatory manner, they are not considered "outsiders" a priori. This is because, through the Portuguese language, they manage to be integrated more easily into the school dynamics, even if the school does not make efforts for this to occur.

The problematics acquires a broader dimension when the children and their family do not speak Portuguese. In this case, something becomes evident: the relationship between the appreciation of cultural and social characteristics of one's own group and the depreciation of the group of "the others". Accounts sometimes had an imperative tone:

So, to bring them, to say "Look, you are now in Brazil, so you have to follow the routine of Brazil, forget it! You have come here, so this is the way it works here". To explain. I think I have to begin by explaining to the parents first, because children are very small, and

the children here, to always contextualize where they are: "Look, now you're here, you've come from Bolivia or somewhere else, but now you are here in Brazil". To show the Brazilian culture to them, because this is their reality now, I believe that the school could play that role, of increasingly showing the routine of Brazil, showing the culture of Brazil. (Marta)

In a scenario with this complexity, in which the parties complain about mutual non-understanding, teacher's anxiety to make children learn quickly often grows. Such quest for speed only adds tension. However, the points of tension are not restricted to language. In field observation, conflicts widened and revealed strained resistance in the coexistence with the different ones and with their problems.

DIRTY BODIES, CLEAN BODIES

Language is just one of stigmatization targets of the Bolivian immigrant children in early childhood education schools. The issues of hygiene and clothing are among those that cause the most awkwardness. Some excerpts from the field diary illustrate that:

I think that their hygiene habits are terrible, I think they are light years away from us and have to evolve in terms of hygienic habits, because they don't have them. [...] And I can't even talk about it, because I don't see their mothers. [...] Dirty, with very dirty fingernails. That's like that, like the Bolivian girl in my group, she comes with the same clothes all week long. If I make a little mark on her clothes, I know [...]. (Marisa)

I'm talking about the public education system as a whole, but foreigners, at least the foreigners here, you notice that there is not much cleansing, like, one or two are clean. [...] For example, on rainy days, you notice that they come fully wet, they come very wet, with wet clothing, they come like that. If it rains two or three days in a row, you notice that they come with that same wet shirt two or three days in a row, so their clothes [...] their clothes smell like wet dogs. Unfortunately, it's like that, it's a matter of hygiene. I was shocked by that. (Marta)

Because, like it or not, they stink, I don't know if it's because of where they live, they don't take showers every day. (Luiza)

According to Woodward (2007), the production of identities occurs by marking the difference. The accounts collected had political

content in the tone of voice. In the case of Bolivian children, dirt was indicated as “the” most easily identifiable differentiating factor in relation to non-Bolivian children. Excerpts from expressions of opinions on the oral hygiene of Bolivian immigrant children have the same sense:

Let's start with a basic issue: hygiene. Many didn't know what to brush teeth is, and even today I notice that. You know, you talk about brushing teeth, but they don't know exactly what it is and then, even if you talk about it in a meeting, they don't bring toothbrushes. We end up giving them to them here. And you notice that there's not much care, regarding this aspect, the issue of showers too [...]. (Clarisse)

I think this hygiene thing is a cultural thing of theirs, right? It's different, the culture's different and we note that they have many dental problems, many. I think it's not just a matter of hygiene, it is a genetic matter. The number of children with black, decayed teeth, all of their teeth, is impressive. And even if they don't brush their teeth, I think it's not only that, I think it is a genetic matter. (Liz)

Oral hygiene proved to be a central theme in many tensions we observed. On the other hand, it was also capable of provoking the sympathy of some teachers who saw in the Bolivian experience in Sao Paulo aspects of the suffering already experienced in their own families.

Manuela, a teacher of Group II, described the moment of tooth brushing referring to the organization and care of Bolivian children with personal hygiene objects. Manuela's positioning may be connected to her life story. She is the daughter of Spanish immigrants and, when speaking of her students, she also spoke of her mother and of her efforts to educate her in a foreign country:

Hygiene is a very important matter at this time in our shift. There's something nice, they all have their little toothbrush case. [...] Last year, there was Caesar. He had a number of difficulties, he threw it, he lost it, he threw it on the floor, dirtied it. But most of them have a small case, something that other students don't. They keep their toothbrush, cute toothbrush, girls... girls are so cute, all of them. So, I think that there is an important learning effort on the part of parents, who make an effort to encourage them. Because parents want to do it. Because foreign parents... they want their children to be able to study. I saw it with my mother, who was Spanish and when we were little she made a huge effort for us to do everything well and right for school.

Manuela knows immigration inside. Her family is Spanish, she has white skin, enjoys the benefits of the living standards of middle-class in Sao Paulo and has training in higher education. Although the immigration context of her family is different from the situation faced by Bolivians, there is a remarkable identification. From the perspective of Goffman (2004), we can consider her an ‘informed’, that is, a “normal” person who sympathizes with the stigmatized. This characteristic of the teacher favors both forms of welcoming and the adaptation process of the Bolivian immigrant children.

When asked about the pace of learning of their immigrant students, some teachers say they have initial difficulties. However, throughout the year, their performance becomes equivalent to that of the Brazilian children. Other teachers compare the learning by immigrant children to that of the Brazilian children who come from economically disadvantaged families, and there are also those who believe that Bolivian children have specific learning problems. When asked about the guidance given to teachers for specific assistance to immigrant children, pedagogical coordinator Beatriz states:

As I have forty students per class, how can I think about it? Today I have fewer students because classes have started this week. But I usually have forty students per class throughout the year in this shift. [...] Some teacher will be absent everyday! I end up having forty students per class. So [...] how can I possibly take care of a student who comes with language difficulties in a different way?

In the face of such difficulties, there is a shared feeling of loneliness. When asked about the existence of specific training activities for assistance to immigrant children, the teachers responded unanimously that no guidance on the issue was available. In some cases, the interview sounded like an outburst:

[...] most children come from South American countries. And we have no training at all, we've never had any training... nothing, nothing, in this sense, neither as a teacher nor as coordinator. Nothing, not a document, nothing! (Liz)

FINAL THOUGHTS

The issue addressed above requires continuity and attention from many researchers of education and childhood. Our study helps draw the attention of the ones responsible for the substance of public policy. We are before an extremely painful reality for many and our omission

contributes to making the suffering of some children acquire perverse intensity.

As it can be seen, public education is a critical instance for Bolivian immigrant families and ultimately it is one of the only doors to citizenship, a citizenship that is permanently vilified in the labor relations the families of the children enrolled are subjected to.

In the relationship between teachers and Bolivian children, we realized one of the tensest aspects of the daily life of early childhood education in Sao Paulo city. Children are stigmatized, but teachers feel helpless in the face of the complex task at hand. Therefore, at the end of the study, we realized that the field diaries recorded not only creeping intolerance, but also teacher loneliness. We witnessed rude and exclusionary gestures living with bright gestures of welcome.

Thus, early childhood education in Sao Paulo city expresses in its own way a contradictory everyday life. The presence of Bolivian children in our educational territories is associated with the hope of their parents in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that the parties have different perspectives. A significant proportion of the teachers claimed not to have good expectations about the future of immigrant children. For them, socioeconomic conditions hinder progression to higher educational levels, causing what they considered a probable stagnation in low-skilled occupations. But, as a matter of fact, we should note that this expectation is the same that many teachers have about the future of most children in public schools.

We also collected counterpoints. Some teachers asserted that, despite difficulties, they trusted in their work and put their hopes in the outcome of the effort. In school environments, it is reiterated that personal efforts can lead children to a more prosperous condition than that of their parents. On the one hand, this is an example of hopeful speech; on the other, it is a demonstration of the strength that the representations of merit and meritocracy have these days.

The families studied have a unique comparative horizon. They compare the situation they were in and find some encouragement in the situation they are in now, mainly because they have schools for their children. For parents, a school for children is a strong example of upward social mobility achieved by moving abroad. Parents report, each of them in their own way, that the hardest challenge is to deal with the condition of being permanently a foreigner.

In this sense, there have been many complaints of families in relation to what they considered the school's intolerance towards the use of Spanish at home and inflexibility with respect to the time it took Bolivian immigrant children to learn Portuguese. But they admire the Brazilian public school.

On our part, we are to ensure that each school is always a free territory, an authentic homeland of the citizens of the world; a place where all borders lose their *raison d'être*.

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