

34th EECERA CONFERENCE
FUNCHAL, MADEIRA
August 2026

**CHILDREN AND TEACHERS
IN A JOINT LEARNING JOURNEY
FOR DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT**



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CHILDREN AND TEACHERS IN A JOINT LEARNING JOURNEY FOR DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT

The title of my paper is the key for my dialogue with you today.

I will concentrate on:

- Practitioners' and children's **togetherness in learning**;
- **professional development for children's education**;
- **development of democracy** in daily action.

As it matters whose thinking we dialogue with, I will make clear my **central dialogues**.

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution

- Pedagogic dialogues are the basis of our pedagogic memory.
- Without pedagogic memory one can not be called a Pedagogue.
- The pedagogic memory that humanity created goes back to **Socrates, Plato, Aristoteles.**
- This memory developed through the centuries.
- The *school* was initially a service for a social elite.
- The Enlightenment put forward the democratic idea of a **school for all citizens.**
- The French Revolution interpreted this as the promotion of ***Egalité, Fraternité, Solidarité.***

The movement of *Éducation Nouvelle*

The movement of *Éducation Nouvelle* started in late 19th century and developed in the two last centuries, supported by Pedagogues such as **Pestalozzi, Fröebel, Dewey, Freinet.**

And, more recently, **Paulo Freire** and **Loris Malaguzzi.**

They all represent a meaningful challenge to the traditional transmissive pedagogies.

All these Pedagogues created, not only **theoretical and ethical knowledge**, but also **praxeological knowledge.**

Thinking in Pedagogy

Pedagogy belongs to the group of Human and Social Sciences. It dialogues with History, Psychology, Sociology, and others.

But Pedagogy preserves its **own identity** as the science of teaching for learning:

- it is **dialogic** and **autonomous**.
- it creates **theory, praxis and research**.
- it presents publication and promotes **dissemination**.
- it has developed and created a wealth of knowledge about **educational contexts, pedagogic mediation** in daily praxis of teaching for learning, sustained in **pedagogic documentation**.



The sunflowers
Sofia, 4 years old

Action and context – Morin

In his last book, Edgar Morin (2025) writes that the outcome of an action may be contrary to its intention, since **the flow of an action depends on its context.**

The capacity of the child to act is an impetus that she brings with her and is awakened when she begins to relate with the context.

The pedagogic **context demands knowledge, reflection, action.**

When a child enters in a context like the pre-school classroom, she has her **own expectations, she scrutinizes the context asking:**

Am I safe here? Is it good for me? Am I going to have friends?
Can I play? Am I going to have toys?

Facts or guidance



The sunset
Sofia, 4 years old

It is of central importance that the early childhood educator has **thought beforehand about children's possible questions and the answers that can be provided** about the context of daily life in the classroom.

The answers will also **depend on the pedagogic approach for teachers' teaching** - either direct information of facts or democratic guidance.

Facts, facts, facts – Charles Dickens

The traditional teacher education approaches are based on an **accumulation of knowledge from different disciplines, with scarce contact with daily life in classrooms and schools.**

The international community of early childhood education (Pascal & Bertram, 2003, 2009) started raising questions, such as:

What is quality in early childhood education?

What is the role of the teacher in quality education for children?

How do we best prepare these teachers?

Teachers make a difference – Jere Brophy

The connected processes of children's education and teachers' education can represent a hope for the development of a **more humanistic and democratic society**.

When educators experience their teacher educators' acknowledgment of their **agency in being democratically taught to participate in their own learning**, they will be **more motivated to develop the same processes with their children**.

These two processes are **isomorphic**, meaning that both use the same form: teaching children and teaching teachers **demand homologous change**.

Indeed, **progress requires transformation** (Machado & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2024).

How to promote transformation?

For me, as a university teacher educator, willing to help early childhood educators to change their minds about teaching children and children's learning, my first step was **to work on my own change** - I needed to prepare my own mind.

I did this through the **search for democratic and participatory isomorphic approaches** for teachers' learning and children's learning.

My professional hope for the development of children's participatory learning has demanded from me and my team the creation of a **Context-based participatory approach to professional development** (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2001; Machado, 2019; Sousa, 2017). It demanded, as well, **rigorous and documented processes of experiential learning** with direct involvement of the university.

Pedagogic models as grammars for daily praxis

The Pedagogues I referred to previously made me aware that Pedagogy is not the mere application of theories into practice, but a **dialogue between solid theoretical knowledge, solid practical knowledge and solid ethical knowledge** (Formosinho et al., 2024) in the search for pedagogic models.

Pedagogic models can be grammars for the organisation; development, reflexion and documentation of **teachers' and children's joint learning**.

We face a **challenge of complexity**: teachers' professional development and children's learning as **isomorphic** (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008; Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2016).

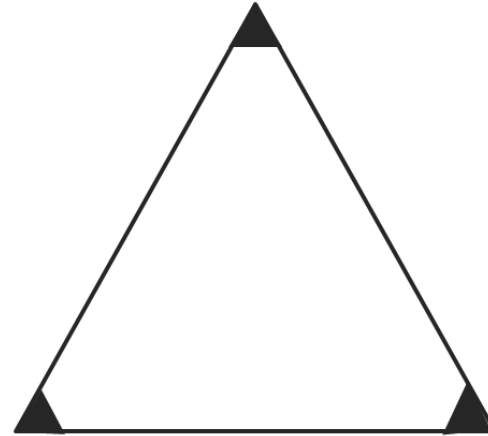
Luckily, there are alternatives!

- I will name just three alternatives:
 - **Childhood Association, Portugal** (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho, 2001, 2016)
 - **CREC, UK** (Pascal et al., 2024)
 - **OBECI, Brazil** (Fochi, 2019)
- These three organisations created **pedagogic models for teachers' professional development** and share three key characteristics:
 - a very clear and articulated democratic world vision
 - a democratic approach to research
 - a participatory pedagogy

Childhood Association developed a recursive conceptualisation of educational transformation

Pedagogy-in-Participation

(as the alpha and omega of transformation
and its research)



**Context-based Participatory
Professional Development**

(as a pedagogy of transformation)

Praxeological Research

(as an epistemology of
transformation)

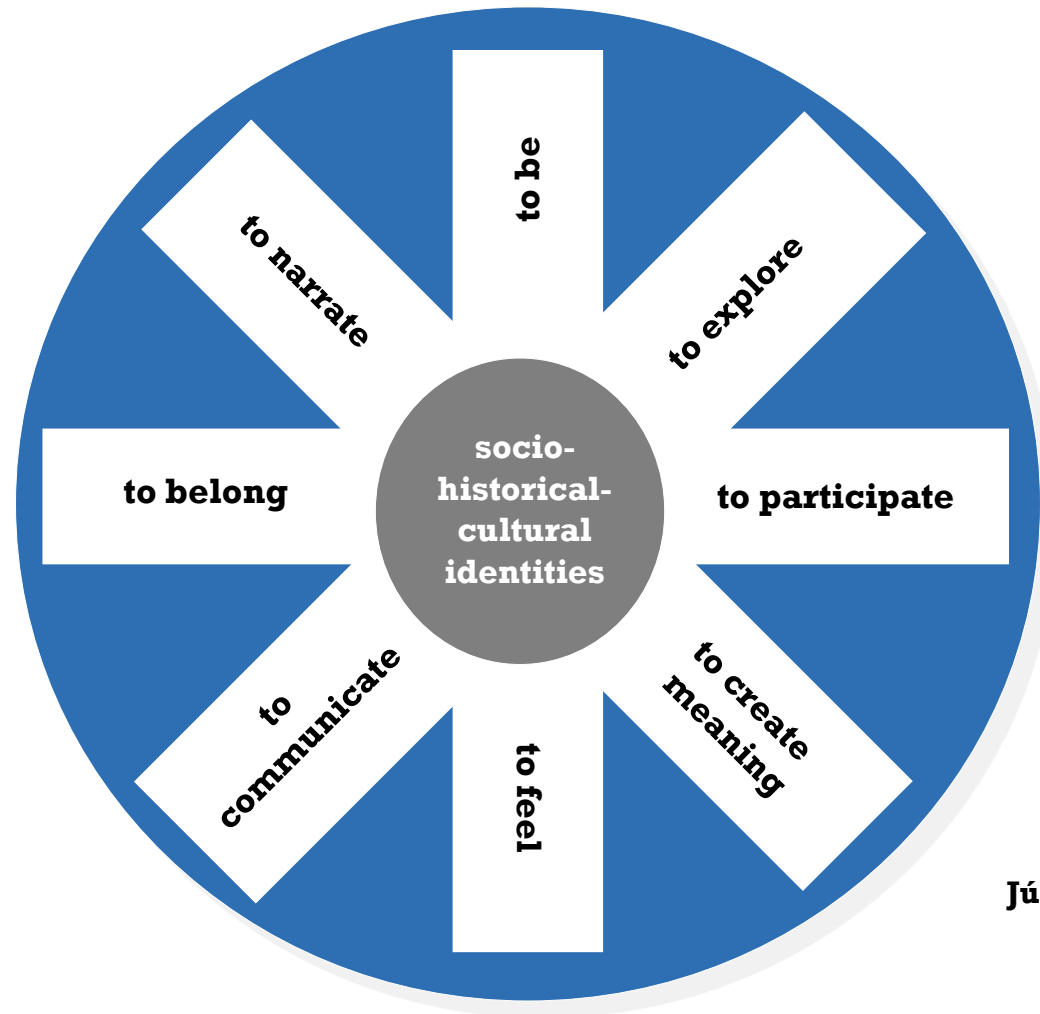
Pedagogy-in-Participation

(Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2012)

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE:

- World-view – **a progressive, democratic, and participatory vision**
- Epistemological paradigm – **a paradigm of complexity**
- Educational theory – **a socio-constructivist and socio-cultural theory**
- Educational praxis – **an action pregnant with knowledge and ethics that constitutes a pathway of bearing witness**
- Images of the child and of the teacher – **with rights, agency and competence**
- **Educational intentionality** – that dialogues with children, families and the educational team)

In Pedagogy-in-Participation, one of the initial concerns was defining the axes of educational intentionality



**Júlia Oliveira-Formosinho &
João Formosinho
(1992-2026)**

Pedagogy-in-Participation

(Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2012)

- The **educational intentionality**, conceptualised as **anchors for professional know-how**, harmonises the participation of children and practitioners in the **co-construction of learning journeys**.
- The **educational environment** is organised in order to enable the experience of a democratic and participatory praxis **congruent with the educational intentionality**.
- Pedagogy-in-Participation is a pedagogical perspective centred on the concern of **establishing children's rights** in daily educational praxis.
- The conceptions of **pedagogic documentation** and **evaluation** create a testimony and enable the discovery of both children's and practitioners' competence and learning (Oliveira-Formosinho (2016b)).

Context-based participatory professional development

(Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008)

A **situated praxeological approach for educators' learning journey**, is developed around pedagogical action, is open to children's questions and interrogations, and is curious about children's curiosity.

It advocates that **transforming professional action takes place at the very core of transforming the child's learning**.

As a **vivid approach** to professional learning, it benefits from **pedagogic documentation** that preserves the continuous memories of teachers' and children's learning journeys and so it helps to see **developmental pedagogic learning of children** and **developmental pedagogic mediation of educators**.

Praxeological Research

(Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2012)

- Praxeological Research (Formosinho, 2016; Oliveira-Formosinho, 1998) is an **epistemology for transformation**.
- It is **developed in daily action by its central actors** (educators, children, teacher educators), in the documentation and reflection of the flow of activities and projects.
- This approach allows for **understanding and knowledge about daily praxis**.
- It is **democratic** because it includes the central actors in processes of doing, reflecting, documenting, dialoguing.
- It constitutes a **double hermeneutic process about understanding praxis**.

Praxeological Research

(Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2012)

- Praxeological Research respects the **dialogical point of view of educators and of teacher educators.**
- In doing so, it **enriches the understanding of praxis and it helps its development**, bringing **new understandings and knowledge** for pedagogy development.
- Praxeological Research is **sustained in a complex approach to research** since it includes different voices, different times and different spaces.

Central strategies we use for Educators' professional development and children's learning



Dad and mom
Sofia, 2 years old

Pedagogic mediation

(Oliveira-Formosinho, 1998, 2016b)

Pedagogic mediation is conceptualised at the levels of **teachers' learning and children's learning**.

It shares the power of **learning how to learn** between children and teachers:

- in the creation of the educational environment
- in the organisation of the daily routine
- in the reflection and development of actions and interactions

Helen Lyndon et al. (2019) research confirms that “**the development of participatory practice is facilitated through pedagogic mediation**, as developed by the Childhood Association, Portugal”.

Ethical suspension

(Oliveira-Formosinho, 2018)

Pedagogic mediation has an indispensable requirement: an **ethical suspension**.

This is because we are in the field of **participatory pedagogies** that are dialogic, democratic, and relational.

Ethical suspension for practitioners involves their **use of voice and time, and self-control to allow for children's development of intuition, curiosity and questioning**, as well as to allow for the **creation of educational answers for children's curiosity and questions**.

Pedagogic documentation (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2016b) has an important role as it creates information and memory about experiential learning and pedagogic mediation.









The “we-ness”

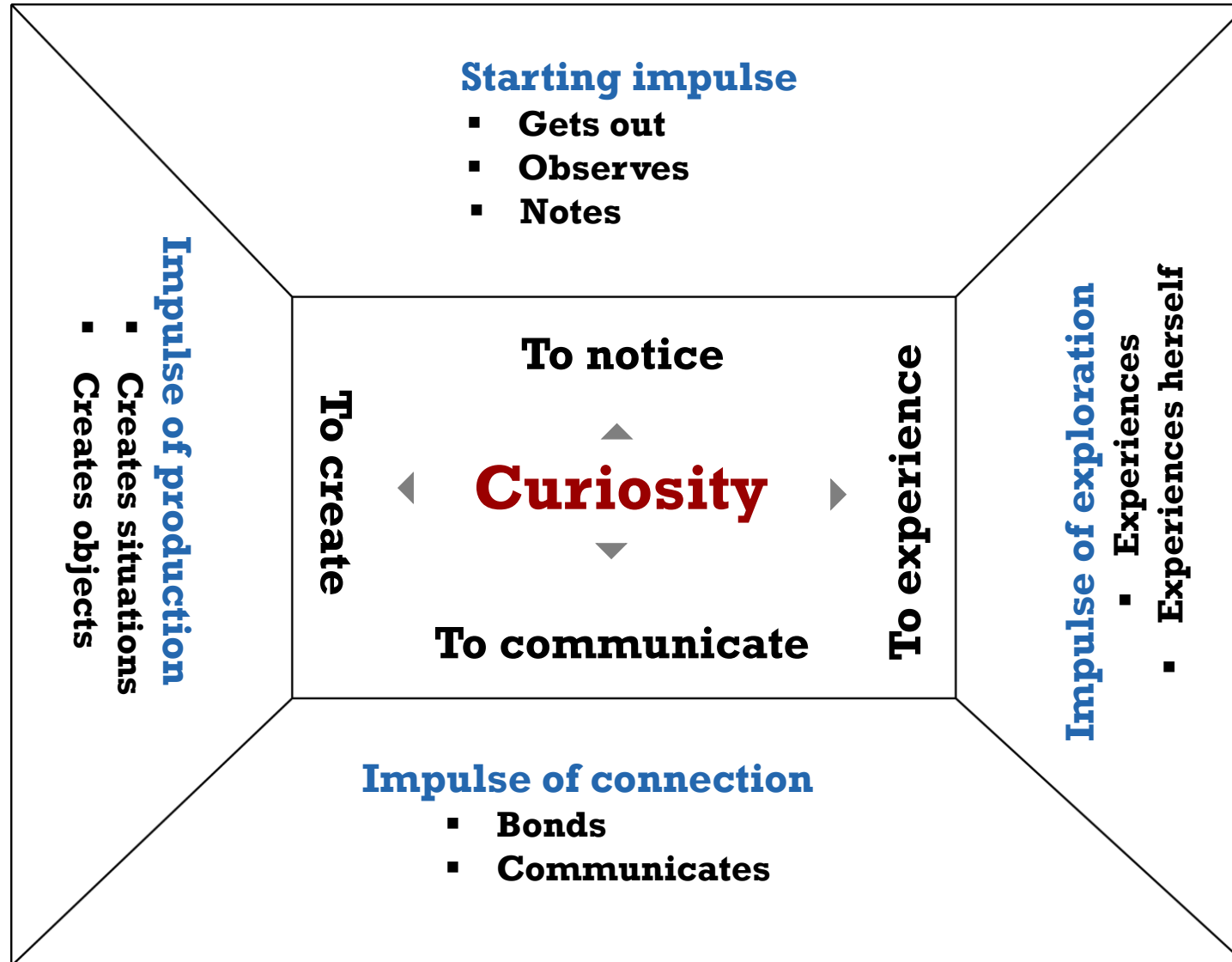
There is a “we-ness” in these classrooms! (in Christine Pascal’s non-standard English terminology).

- I understood this wonderful comment as not a “you and me”, nor “us” and “them”; but a pronoun which says **we are together, jointly and individually**, in the first person plural.
- It is a **social *niche* for the development of individual plural identities**, which consolidates the educator’s **educational intentionality and the child’s curiosity**.

The child's curiosity

- Curiosity is an **intrinsic stimulus** that does not depend on what is external to the child.
- For the child, the entire world is new and provokes wonder. **Each interaction provokes stimulation.**
- The interactions with the world develop her **curiosity** and raise **questions**.
- It is important that we **depart from children's curiosity and questions to create a democratic classroom** where voices are respected, answered and documented.
- Since science develops from knowledge, the creation of knowledge comes from trying to answer questions.
- Thus it is very important that practitioners **help children to understand the value of their questions by including them** in daily action development.

The child's curiosity



Democracy in early childhood education

Democracy is learned by children through pedagogic experience **when they:**

- have voice and turn in the **planning and development of the daily activities**, having their curiosity into account;
- have voice in the **choice of pedagogic materials**;
- have voice in the **documentation of daily action and reflection**;
- are **helped to learn, to share with the other children** the materials, the activities, the turns, the classroom space, the documentation;
- **analyse** with peers and teachers as a group the **weekly documentation** and depart from it to the *progettazione* (Malaguzzi) of **what to research and learn next**.

Democracy in early childhood education

Later in children's lives, **these documented participatory experiences will be a support for a new understanding of democracy as participation in the civic decisions** that affect the society, such as:

- voting in general elections, municipal elections;
- participation in civic decision making in organisations where they work and in other organisations;
- educational associations;
- cultural associations;
- political parties;



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