

Childhood in Augusto Cury: an analysis of the government of childhood in the overflow of self-help literature in Education^{1 2 3}

Infância em Augusto Cury: uma análise acerca do gerenciamento da infância no transbordamento da literatura de autoajuda na Educação

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze and comprehend of which childhood Augusto Cury speaks when talking about childhood in his self-help works geared toward education, seeking to trace discursive traits that contribute to understanding to which government it is linked. The analysis produced in this text is based on an alliance with the theoretical framework of Foucauldian studies, examining power-knowledge relations that lead — according to a particular regime of truth about childhood — to how we categorize individuals seen as immature as having specific characteristics. By focusing on the discourses in which Cury serves as a nexus of meaning and, at the same time, disseminates particular discourses about childhood, I was able to organize two childhood characteristics that are central to his arguments: immaturity and dependence. Thus, I seek to contribute to discussions on the proliferation of self-help literature geared toward education in order to denaturalize discourses that affect us in order to invisibilize the relations of production of meaning on how we understand certain individuals as children.

Keywords: Childhood, Augusto Cury, Foucauldian Studies

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³ Funding: Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo compreender e analisar de qual infância Augusto Cury fala em suas obras de autoajuda direcionadas à educação, buscando traços discursivos que contribuam para perceber a que governo está atrelado. Para a análise produzida neste texto me alio aos estudos foucaultianos buscando por relações de saber e poder que conduzam, a partir de determinado regime de verdade da infância, à maneira como categorizamos os indivíduos vistos como infantis com determinadas características. Ao me atentar aos discursos em que Cury serve como um nexo de sentido e, ao mesmo tempo, dissemina certas discursividades acerca da infância, pude organizar duas características de uma infância que são centrais para suas argumentações: imaturidade e dependência. Desse modo, busco contribuir para as discussões em torno da proliferação da literatura de autoajuda voltada à educação, de modo a desnaturalizar discursos que nos atravessam e assim invisibilizam as relações de produção de sentido, que nos levam a entender determinados indivíduos como infantis.

Palavras-chave: Infância, Augusto Cury, Estudos Foucaultianos

Introduction

My goal is to understand what childhood is enunciated by Augusto Cury⁴ in the selected works. I think the problem that leads me to writing this is a very objective question: of what childhood does Cury speak when talking about childhood?

However, it is not enough to reiterate what is already so commonly emphasized by studies of childhood in Education, that there is not only one childhood, but many, plural ones, that need to be recognized. It is necessary, in this text, to make it clear that I am in line with a comprehension of childhood as culturally produced, understanding culture as a complex and diffuse field of conflict of meaning in frictions of knowledge and power relations, producing specific modes of governance of a historical *a priori* (Hall, 1997; Veiga-Neto, 2000). Thus, the designation of what other childhoods are possible or recommendations for understanding childhood potentials will not be part of this study, limiting the scope to an analysis.

⁴ Augusto Cury is a psychiatrist and one of the best-selling book authors in recent decades. His books were published in more than 70 countries and sold more than 30 million copies, and some of them have already been adapted for film and theater. His career has spanned more than 30 years, and he developed the Theory of Multifocal Intelligence. He is increasingly notorious for his self-help books, his company providing courses on emotion management, and an educational program and network of schools called the School of Intelligence. I discuss his biography in more detail in my dissertation (Machado, 2020).

I also delimit that I will not seek to discuss in depth the traces of provenance, historical lines of the past that we could perceive in these discursive productions, but rather examine and discuss the emergence conditions in the analyzed discursivities. In the words of Foucault (2019) in his text entitled *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*,

The emergence is [...] the entrance into the scene of the forces; it is their interruption, the leap by which they pass from the backstage to the theater, each with its vigor and its youth... No one is ... responsible for an emergence; no one can self-glorify for it; it is always produced in the interstice. (p. 67-68)

Also, for the opening of this study, I elaborate a little more on what I like to consider as alliances: methodologies and perspectives. With the task of a perspective on Foucaultian studies, I take as a key to understanding the look into discursive practices and that, for what I intend, seems productive, above all, the form of constitution of truth regimes that position childhood in a certain manner in a “tangle of discursive series that establishes a set of more or less stable meanings that, over a period of time, will function as a broad symbolic domain *in which and through which* we will give meaning” (Veiga-Neto, 2000, p.57, emphasis added, our translation) to childhood. I take as a background, following Veiga-Neto (2016), the use of the second Foucauldian domain: being-power. Thus, examining the relations of how we become subjects of action, seeking to understand the conditions that enable articulations in which certain knowledge produce certain relations of power, as well as certain relations of power produce certain knowledge.

Regarding the methodological framework, I present a brief summary of the research procedures. Augusto Cury was chosen as the main focus of research mainly due to his wide circulation and scope of action, ranging from fictional books, research on intelligence, to an extensive network of schools. In a first step, with the delimitation of focusing only on the books, I was able to read on the websites of the publishers that publish him the synopses of his books. After that, I read them again seeking for more information only on those that had education as a topic of discussion. Thus, I stipulated just four books: *Pais brilhantes, professores fascinantes* [Brilliant Parents, Fascinating Teachers] (2018a); *Filhos brilhantes, alunos fascinantes* [Brilliant Children, Fascinating Students] (2015); *20 regras de ouro para educar filhos e alunos* [20 Golden Rules for Educating Children and Students] (2017), and *Socorro, meu filho não tem limites!* [Help Me, My Child Has No Limits] (2018b). With them, I prepared charts for building the

corpus and highlighted excerpts⁵ that were used in the body of the text. I read the four books mentioned above and gradually produced notes, in an exhaustive reading so as to trace recurrences. Such recurrences enabled me to better understand the set of discursivities and, in a *Word* document with information on books and pages, I listed excerpts that meseemed would be useful in the future. This first process resulted in a file with twenty-three pages of excerpts in sequence. In a second process, the reading was carried out only in my file, as in an action of “removing” the discourses from their materiality and seeking to make certain visibilities become even more visible, looking for *happening* relations. I emphasize that it was during this process that many other theoretical paths emerged — in addition to what I initially imagined —, such as an important emphasis on what I could recognize as being linked to the security device. The statements had as a recurring argument the risks to which children and students – emphatically positioned in childhood – were exposed at this time when, as the author claims, society is sick and we live in an educational system in crisis. Considering the recurrences, I was able to invent an analytical division around axes of analysis, thus producing about eighty pages of charts that I compiled as corpus of analysis, later marking what was or was not used in the body of the text.

Thus, I chose thirteen of the excerpts contained in the charts that I understand as being directly related to the theme of childhood and, of these, due to some repetitions, I chose eleven for the body of the text. With these excerpts, I prepared an argumentative division of three axes: Governance and political economy of childhood, Immaturity and Dependence. The first is a discussion of the emphasis that Cury builds regarding the importance and attention as to childhood and the following two axes deal with what I propose as characteristics that are central to the childhood of which Cury speaks. I did not arrange the topics so there is symmetry between the number of excerpts presented, but rather so the excerpts presented are not examples, but instances of what I argue about. That is, understanding them as statements that consolidate the nodes of coherence that the author produces around the problem I propose to look into.

⁵ I note that I differentiate quotes from excerpts, recognizing as excerpts the fragments that are part of the analytical corpus.

Centrality of Childhood

Dora Marín-Díaz (2012), with her thesis on the provenance of the processes of individualization that constitute anthropotechnics until the emergence of the consolidation of what we know as self-help literature, helps us to understand this process of individualization as part of the construction of what we understand, especially in Modernity, as a cohesive and internalized Self. Based on her, I can understand that

There is in this process, also a part constituting the Modernity, a series of exercises that produced and were produced by disciplines and knowledges that gradually emerged from psy knowledges, as well as, for example, sociological objects that are articulated in the notion of public-private and society-subject. The expansion, especially from the eighteenth century, of the “recognition” and fixation of who one is “in fact,” a supposed essence of each individual so one can, thus, be free (Machado, 2020).

It is also important to emphasize, as Marín-Díaz (2012) points out, the pedagogical character of self-help. When used to modify the conducts by the action of each one on oneself, this literature approaches institutionalized educational discourses, albeit with different conditions and prestige, by focusing on the practices of self-government and individualization that orient contemporary developments. This approach can also be reflected on with Rebeca Arnosti et al. (2019), researching the influence of self-help on teacher work, pointing out that

.... if the first self-help books encouraged workers to do something to raise their status in factory systems, to deal with the possibilities that opened up in capitalist-industrial society, today self-help literature, in the scope of education, seems to be aimed at solving one of the central problems that affect 21st century teaching: the challenges of dealing with students, with the conflicts that are inherent to this relationship, with the plurality of cultures present in the classroom, which increased after education became a right for all and a duty of the State. (p. 437, our translation)

Marín-Díaz (2012) raises three characteristics that help us understand this productivity and that will help us think about what I problematize as overflow. The first characteristic is to sound like a common language, commonplace, but at the same time as a novelty. The second characteristic is to appeal to justifications of a whole discursivity involving a specific lexicon, academic disciplines, which most often come from knowledges of the psy fields (psychology, psychiatry, psychopedagogy, etc.). These two characteristics are strongly articulated with the

fertile soil that the consolidation of neoliberal rationality has been producing. One is responsible for their own success, but much learning is required to change oneself; and, in order to change oneself, one needs to know oneself. In order to know oneself, this inner Self, there is a whole proliferation of knowledges and constitutions of power relations specific to these shifts of the present that arise when one seeks, all the time, better and more effective ways of leading oneself. It is still with Marín-Díaz (2012) that we can see this proliferation of self-help as part of a crisis of governmentality.

Both with this individualization, in an incessant pursuit of better conducting oneself, and with the two characteristics mentioned that the third characteristic appears as an articulation with the field of Education. For this literature intends to show itself as part of a broad and general knowledge of life in which one can seek answers from these other knowledges to solve the particular problems that arise, including in school practices. Thus, in increasingly complex tangles of discourses about crises in the most diverse spectrums of society, self-help arises as a novelty linked to ordinary life that, supported by recognized knowledges, presents broad and clear explanations for leading life in fluent changes and overcoming oneself.

These are points on which the research of Carine Winck Lopes (2012; 2016) can help us reflect by showing us how, increasingly, the self-help literature can be seen among the readings not only of active teachers and those in training, but has also been recommended by teachers during their undergraduate program in Pedagogy. The introduction of discourses produced, or channeled, by these works into educational settings can be reflected on with a common character: the student.

Narodowski (1993, p. 24, our translation), in his thesis on the relation of childhood with pedagogical knowledge, points out that “the being-student is not a step subsequent to the being-child, but part of their genesis,” and hence this requires a whole gamut of theorizations and the construction of a pedagogical knowledge. “Childhood is the obvious key to the existence of Child Psychology and Pediatrics: it is a specific part of the human life cycle that justifies the elaboration of numerous equally specific premises and statements, particular to this stage of man’s life, exclusive to childhood” (p. 27, our translation). In order to understand this non-essentialist childhood, I follow closely the well-known study of Ariès (1986) in which it is claimed that this childhood with the characteristics we perceive is historically recent. I do

not intend to say — as Ariès has been much criticized for — that there were no children before this cultural production, which arises around the 16th and 17th centuries, but that there is, since its production, a feeling of childhood that builds these children’s characters with an important emphasis for modern society. This feeling has its particular characteristics through practices of pampering, through elements that are gradually considered as proper to children, the invention of clothes, stories and games. Games that were mostly miniaturized adult customs. Gradually, these characteristics became insufficient to think about children and, thus, it was

... among the moralists and educators of the seventeenth century that we saw the development of this other feeling of childhood ... and that inspired all education until the twentieth century, both in the city and in the countryside, in the bourgeoisie and in the people. Attachment to childhood and its particularity was no longer expressed through distraction and play, but through psychological interest and moral concern. (Ariès, 1986, p. 162, our translation)

If I am focusing on the relation with psy knowledges, it is because Augusto Cury is a psychiatrist and positions himself as an authority on the functioning of thought, childhood and, as we can understand with Foucaultian studies, conduct. That is how he makes clear the importance of childhood in his works on education:

I have given lectures to countless magistrates and educators and commented with sadness on the collective murder of childhood. Childhood is the most important stage in forming archival platforms that structure the most important personality characteristics, including empathy and the ability to process frustrations. Smartphones and video games are two important causes of this pernicious murder. (Cury, 2017, p. 70, our translation).

Two things seem important to me in this excerpt. The position of authority in which the author places himself when claiming his recurring lectures for types of audiences that are too broad and, at the same time, prestigious. As well as the centrality he places on childhood. The emphasis placed on this “phase” is interspersed with an allegation of its very murder, as something that existed and has been dying mainly due to smartphones and video games. These two types of devices are two causes that he argues here and, in the course of his work, other examples of digital technology devices and media are presented as responsible for the acceleration of children’s thinking.

In treating Cury's discourse not with the intention of a hermeneutic of depth or seeking what is "behind" these words, but in its aspect of monumentality⁶, tracing discursive networks that make it possible for such statements to be said, I understand that there are certain historical lines related to the Rousseauian notion of childhood. Such notion is "built in the folds of a political rationality and is configured as the childhood of man, place of non-reason spontaneously oriented to reason." (Weinmann, 2008, p. 13, our translation). It is in this invention of a spontaneity that a political-pedagogical project "aims to educate autonomous, that is, self-disciplined citizens." (Weinmann, 2008, p. 14, our translation). Not disturbing the spontaneity seen as natural to childhood is the best way to prevent what is being called the murder of childhood. Thus letting childhood follow its own direction from a non-reason to a rational adulthood. Undoubtedly, this notion has its traits that can be perceived, but the difference needs to be observed carefully. In his works, Cury certainly does not deal with a purely spontaneous childhood, much less towards an Enlightened reason. He often stands in opposition to this, posing reason as a problem to be overcome by managing emotions through his own educational program.

The Rousseauian notion of childhood is an important part of what was developed as a possibility of a science of childhood (Ariés, 1986; Narodowski, 1993; Weinmann, 2008). After all, "The Rousseauian childhood formation is one of the conditions of possibility of the appearance of psychological knowledge. In return, psychology established such mode of infantilization as the nature of infantility." (Weinmann, 2008, p. 141, our translation). With the invention of knowledges specialized in this nature, a whole series of power relations is organized that exploit a space seen as advantageous in relation to children. A whole rationalization and an economy of the acceptable or unacceptable levels of the most varied conducts, as we can see in the following excerpt:

Very well-behaved and super-obedient children should draw our attention. If they are cheerful, sociable, creative, we should not worry, but if they live isolated, dispirited, super attached to their parents, it can be a sign of depression, sexual abuse, chronic *bullying*, phobic state, or excessive shyness. (Cury, 2017, p. 77, emphasis added by the author, our translation)

⁶Monument, in Foucaultian studies, opposes the representative quality of the documents. Examining discourses in their monumentality is to recognize them in their own materiality, not as a "mirror of reality."

It is not necessary to say here whether this is “really” true, whether it is good or bad, but to understand the discursive condensation in this brief statement as producing other discursive practices, already part of school routine and of so many non-discursive practices. Thus, we can understand that Cury speaks — from this privileged place of the science of child behaviors — about a childhood that is raised to a spontaneity that needs to be prepared for the self-government increasingly required to survive in neoliberal governmentality. A self-government that, at the same time, produces itself as human capital and takes responsibility at all times.

Immaturity

The characteristics I will argue in this text may sound strange to those who already know the works of Augusto Cury, for they are always so emphatically pragmatic and hopeful. Always highly exalting a better life and the blessings of what is good in this or that aspect of each individual. Why then do I emphasize what is produced around two characteristics of a lack, of a negativity? To this I answer the following: the forces that Cury exalts are always associated with antropotechnics, as Marín-Díaz (2012) tells us, exercises in producing ourselves in a certain way, to change ourselves. The characteristics that I seek to analyze here could not be of this type, after all, childhood, according to the author, is something prior, not something that can become, but a phase that has its characteristics and that we need to instrumentalize and manage.

In addition to this question, I understand that Cury makes use of childhood in two ways: as a noun and as an adjective. In both cases I understand that the characteristics I have selected are related. The differential is in an application sometimes in children and sometimes in individuals who, for having these characteristics, are given the adjective of childhood, as we can see in brief forms as when saying that certain adults “are boys with power in their hands” (Cury, 2017, p. 47, our translation) or, more elaborately as when he tells us that “we all know people who are over 30 years of age, but who have the emotional age of a 10 or 15-year-old individual. If they are minimally contradicted, that is enough for them to enter into a deep crisis” (Cury, 2018b, p. 23, our translation). This relation of associating adults as to whom he was making a value judgment with “boys” introduces a sense of childhood that is irresponsible

or more explicitly incapable of dealing with this “power in their hands.” As in the second excerpt, the emphasis on the supposed naturalness of a phase that enters “into deep crisis” when contradicted imposes on adults an infantilized categorization when behaviors like these are observed. Childhood is, thus, a certain incapacity and lack of control, not because of inexperience and short time in the world, but because of innate characteristics.

In the book *Brilliant Parents, Fascinating Teachers* (2018a), the author makes a series of recommendations for the education of children and adolescents and when focusing on the book that derives from this, *Brilliant Children, Fascinating Students* (2015), a question draw my attention. In the second book, the author decided to approach the same subjects, but focused on another public. He approaches the children here not only as an object, but as readers, and for this he writes the book almost entirely employing a fictional style, having as protagonist Professor Romanov. Romanov, due to a traumatic experience, changed his life and has since worked in schools considered difficult. Schools with conflicting relationships, violence, low grades, etc. And it is through the “voice” of the characters that the author expresses his ideas about education. But why does he make this change? He himself explains that this narrative technique is used as what we can consider a utilitarian use, because he understands it as inherently characteristic of this age group that he thinks as a public. A phase of life in which individuals tend to be more attracted to a fictional story.

In this sense, we look at the educational system through Romanov’s eyes: “Romanov knew that science was generating giants in information, but boys in emotional maturity, in development as human beings. The educational system of which he was a part was dry, cold, distant, dehumanized” (Cury, 2015, p. 61, our translation). I understand that we can perceive not only childhood as an adjective when talking about emotional maturity as the function of an educational system that makes these failures effects of its own mistakes. Errors that could be corrected if the author’s recommendations were followed.

I will not delve into this literary use of fiction as a niche in the children’s and youth publishing market of self-help aimed at education, as I would deviate a little from what I propose, but I raised this issue because I consider it useful to reflect on another of the aspects that are so naturalized. As naturalized as the way of relating childhood to an unreasonable mode of all humanity that would need to be overcome, such a strong aspect of an

Enlightenment historical evolutionism. However, with other characteristics, the emphasis on the development of emotions appears as a focus in order for humanity to improve.

Why are we so intellectually stupid and emotionally childish when we discriminate against human beings because of skin color, race, religion, culture, sexuality? (Cury, 2017, p. 89, our translation)

As we already have many indications, humanity will completely self-destruct. Therefore, instead of affording us a tremendous advantage, the superevolution that differentiates us actually turns us into boys with bombs in their hands: bombs of anxiety, depression, and self-centeredness. (Cury, 2018b, p. 16, our translation)

The first excerpt poses complex issues such as religious intolerance, ethnocentrism and racism as childish immaturity. The second excerpt also presents the biological argument of an alleged superevolution, even if the author does not provide any explanation or basis for this superevolution. On the one hand, we discriminate because of our childishness, on the other hand, we develop psychic diseases, or characteristics that we need to overcome, also because of our childishness. However, it is not childishness, infantility, but precisely immaturity that is addressed in this relation. For someone immature, who does not self-govern properly, who does not pay attention to one's own conduct, seeking to overcome oneself and using the tools that Cury proposes in his books, the constant possibility of failure becomes a permanent risk. Failure in the face of life in one's stupidity, failure in relation to oneself by developing pathologies and an undesired personality. Cury proposes, in order to modify oneself, a series of theories about thinking and a writing usually in manual form — the main proposal of the book *20 Golden Rules to Educate Children and Students* (2017) — so one can manage emotion and become the protagonist of one's own story.

In focusing on the externality of discourses, it would not be enough to examine the characteristic of immaturity without tracing what conditions of possibility ensure what the author recognizes as maturity, this direction sought in the educational precepts postulated by Cury. A factor meseems an important key to understanding what has been practiced in contemporary education: neoliberal rationality. A concept that has been increasingly productive since its elaboration by Foucault in the course *Birth of biopolitics* (2008), in which Foucault shows us that neoliberalism is much more than a set of ideals, an ideology or something that corresponds only to economic aspects of society. While liberalism emphasized

exchange processes, consumption and manufacture, neoliberalism emphasizes competition, self-investment, and the expansion of market logic to all spheres of life having the company as a model.

Neoliberalism is the reason of contemporary capitalism, of a capitalism unrestrained by its archaic references and fully assumed as a historical construction and general standard of life. Neoliberalism can be defined as the set of discourses, practices and devices that determine a new mode of government of men according to the universal principle of competition. (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 15, our translation)

By recognizing not the factory, but the company as a model, having as a direct organizing principle an entire process of individualization that had gradually consolidated secularly, the business model contracted as an entrepreneurial imperative in which each one is a company of oneself. Marín-Díaz (2012) provides good clues about this issue, saying that

.... the ways of practicing life developed amid the techniques of governing oneself and the techniques of governing others — which were organized between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries — were the condition of possibility for the arrangement of a neoliberal governmentality. This occurred precisely because, in the first ones, the use of disciplinary and security techniques led to the predominance of the individual as an agent and main actor of the social ways of life. In it, the concern for one's own conduct was oriented, mainly, toward the fixation of the self and toward the achievement of the transformations necessary for its stabilization. While at the time of emphasis on forms of neoliberal government, the purpose of the techniques of self is mainly intended to define certain individual characteristics and produce a being in permanent transformation, flexible, adaptable and aware of the need to constantly change. This new way of being is what we call the 'entrepreneur of oneself'. (p. 133, our translation)

In the next excerpt, Cury (2017) shows us what he considers as a mature Self, while contrasting as a continuous parallel this view of the immature individual, therefore childish:

A mature Self is resilient, knows how to reinvent itself in the face of crises, its sufferings are its teachers and its losses are its masters; whereas an immature Self is paralyzed in the face of its pains, and, because it is fragile, it is an expert in describing its bad luck and an expert in blaming others for its misfortunes. (p. 46-47, our translation)

The maturity — this maturity of a Self, individualized and disconnected from its setting — is, or needs to be, a state of permanent reinvention, a state that does not break with itself in a process of experience and care, but in a constant exercise of learning. It is necessary to create in oneself an unimportance in the face of the conditions in which one lives, because the responses or the results will be regulated with the mastery that one learns with each loss and each suffering. Nothing can be worse, according to Cury, than someone who complains about their suffering, misfortune, context, in short, who complains. Complaining is — as we can see — paralyzing. And anyone who stops, for a moment, has a disadvantage in the flow of competition of this company that one is. Resilience is the operation of an individual learning that needs to hold oneself — and no one else — responsible so the transformation works as a full investment in oneself as human capital⁷.

Learning is not simply a word we see appear in self-help discourses or educational discourses because it is fashionable, even though it is widely used today. It is widely used precisely because it expresses this statement of ‘elevation of life’ that we have seen develop between disciplinary and liberal Modernity and that, today, not only remains in effect, but is one of the most important driving axes for neoliberal forms of government. It is a precept of transformation that traces a path of constant exercise, in which one produces oneself as a permanent individualization. (Marín-Díaz, 2012, p. 122, our translation)

Accordingly, it is important to observe this individualization of the educational process: teaching is, thus, not very relevant. The function of the educator is — as Cury constantly states — to provide tools so each person is the protagonist of their own story. To this end, there is an incessant clamor in the most varied discussions on Education: freedom. Or more precisely as to what I seek to examine here: autonomy. In order for competition and the entrepreneur of self to function in these multiple-freedom relationships, it is necessary to build a system of government that is as economic as possible. According to this neoliberal governmentality, individuals are the more governable the more free and autonomous they are:

⁷ I understand human capital as the way to make oneself a conglomerate of constant investments in order to put oneself on the market in a competitive condition.

Concretely, it seems that perceiving the notion of learning circulating both in self-help discourses and in educational discourses — which direct many of the public policies and educational projects in our countries — expresses (and helps us to explain) the similarity between these two discursive series. This, while enabling us to realize that both are part of this contemporary government strategy that is more economical in the exercise of power, by producing these forms of individuality that are self-governed and self-produce selves. Notions such as self-esteem, autonomy, competencies, agent, human capital, continuing education and lifelong learner appear forming this field of discourses that helps us to explain our understanding of what it is to educate today and the possibilities of constituting ourselves as subjects of this education. (Marín-Díaz, 2012, p. 124-125, our translation)

With a multiplication of reflexive pronouns of the “yourself” type ranging from imperatives employed by *coaches* and self-help books — make yourself, transform yourself, improve yourself — to educational policies⁸ — Future-se [Future Yourself] — we can see a manner of discursive production that establishes, or rather, that marks as part of the common sense that each one must do by oneself and for oneself. It was with these elements that, during the analysis, I was able to view differently the characteristic that I explore in the following section.

Dependence

Simple tasks that do not affect the bodies of children and adolescents, but that lead them to be part of the family group are fundamental for them to understand that the family is a team. In this team, everyone participates and helps each other. The children are not on the bench. They should feel like key actors in the family theater. Being fertilized depended on parents, being born depended on doctors, walking depended on adults, learning depended on teachers, eating depended on the farmer who grew the food and who prepared it, even a dead person will depend on someone to bury them. We are always dependent on people, so gratitude is vital for emotional health and cooperation is critical for social health. (Cury, 2017, p. 67, our translation)

⁸ Future-se is a project that “values” what is said as entrepreneurship for university professors, encourages financial “autonomy” of universities and seeks to expand private investment with own resources in universities and federal institutes, towards a reduction in public investment.

I reiterate that I have no intention of saying whether what the author says is good or bad, but rather of seeking which discursive networks make possible what is being said in this way and not another. A very specific division needs to regulate a function to this character who is the child, to say that they are different from others in the family group. This division seems to us very naturalized, inherent in a separation that some would be seen as more or less capable of doing some things and not others. Finally, a discursivity that gradually normalizes certain functions while erasing the power relations that produced them as specific forms of a space and a time. This team in which everyone participates needs to be seen as a team, inasmuch as a company today can say that each employee needs to “be a team player” and feel part of a team with the same stipulated objective and goals. I am not saying that one discourse is equivalent to the other, but that these discourses are possible today according to logics and mechanisms that make them sound so understandable.

It also seems relevant to me to be attentive to the moment when Cury, to speak of the importance of each one, seeking to rely on a theatrical metaphor, talks about feeling. More than being important, more than playing as starters in this great team that is the family, everyone “should feel as fundamental actors.” I am not saying that there is a proposal of false feeling or anything like that, but that attention to the feeling of importance has a relevant function in Cury’s oeuvre, and this is only one element chosen for the analysis.

In the second half of the excerpt, we can see a whole narrative elaboration of everyone’s dependence on everyone. Which may seem inconsistent with my proposal, since I assign this characteristic not to everyone, but to childhood. The next excerpts will resume this emphasis, but we must observe what is said here. The series of examples of dependence takes as its central point a notion well known and explored in the most diverse areas: lack. I depend on the other because I lack something. I depend on my parents because I lack the ability to walk. I depend on the farmer because I lack food. I depend on teachers because I lack knowledge. Lack functions here as a necessarily unequal drive of exchange. It is based on an economy of exchanges — not only in the market sense so as not to fall into the reductionism of everything to an economicization of life — that they are configured in a certain way, and that, in order to live, one must be grateful.

It is important to observe the recurrence, even when not said, of a certain phobia as to the act of complaining and/or thinking beyond an individual self-overcoming. Complaining can be seen, as we will see in the next excerpt, also as a problem of misunderstanding of the debt. A non-recognition of the parents' investment in their children. Investment that can be understood, according to the theorizations of neoliberalism, as a development of human capital.

Children should not and cannot have the same rights as parents. Children and youth have much more rights than their parents: the right to study, play, practice sports, enjoy friends and venture. In addition, parents keep awake so their children have a good sleep, defer some dreams so they can dream, toil so their children have all their needs supplied. However, many children fail to recognize the greatness and value of their parents and show no gratitude. (Cury, 2018b, p. 29, our translation)

I will not go deeper into the discussion of debt here⁹, as it would open many other avenues of interpretation that would deviate from what I intend in this article. I am more interested in perceiving this debt as part of both what produces a dependence and what needs to be overcome. This debt needs to be recognized, apprehended and shown gratitude by children so, through this, they develop understanding toward independence, autonomy. In addition to this point, this excerpt addresses an important issue to be raised here, given its historical importance in liberal governmentality from the eighteenth century, taking some directions more typical of childhood in the twentieth century, and, in Brazil, with more emblematic characteristics in the period of redemocratization with the Constitution. I refer to the rights and, as I said, to the rights of children. Autonomy is a necessary state for both a liberal and a neoliberal governmentality, necessary for the operation in which freedom is at the same time, in different arrangements, the means and the end of education:

If freedom is the educational principle, schools must seek to ensure freedom, with the intention of producing the instruments and tools that will enable children, as subjects in development, to build the possibilities of a “true freedom.” Thus, living freedom presupposes the construction of autonomy and, as children are not fully developed beings, they cannot and should not have the same rights as an adult. (Marín-Díaz, 2009, p. 118, our translation)

⁹ For a better development of the issue concerning the financialization of life and the effect of indebtedness in the educational discussion, I recommend the research of Silva et al. (2018).

The presence of children in discourses about rights, in full rise in the twentieth century, follows a parallel and dynamic flow with a notion of incompleteness. Children have rights because they are also humans, flesh and blood, but they are unfinished beings, if we can recognize the possibility of a complete being. Marín-Díaz (2009, p. 118, our translation), based on Meurieu, discusses this issue as follows:

... It is not that children have the right to freedom of expression, but rather that, as children express themselves from birth, not only with voice and word, they have the right to be heard, which does not mean that they must be approved systematically, but that they also have the right to be contradicted; not that children have the right to free association, but rather that, as children everywhere gather in bands and groups, they have the right to receive an education that enables them to participate in these groups and, if necessary, to escape the domination of their leaders

Thus, it seems to me that the rights of childhood stated by Cury are, above all, rights to an adequate provision of the necessary conditions for the transition from this negativity, from a state of lack, to a state of freedom, autonomy and self-government. Education is, in this scope, a way of distributing tools so each one is able to invest in oneself, creating full possibilities of competition. To this end, it is also necessary that each one has domination of oneself. May one be free, but know to be grateful. May one be autonomous and mature, but know to be a servant. As we can see in the excerpt in which Cury is quite direct in claiming both a dictatorial nature of childhood and the need to educate it so it is governable in a certain way: “Every human being is born a little dictator and gradually learns — or at least should learn — socio-emotional skills to be a servant, a human being who takes pleasure in serving and satisfaction in making others happy.” (Cury, 2018b, p. 103, our translation)

I understand that, disposing in this way, we can see this last excerpt not as a contradiction or something that subjects certain people to others, but in a very complex game that is always attentive to an articulation with different knowledges in a language very attentive to common sense, to notions that are of simple understanding and that, at the same time, demonstrate a basis on a established authority. The “dictatorial” characteristic of childhood has increasingly been part of several discussions and even pathologizations. An abnormality, a pathology, according to my understanding, fully supported by the characteristic of seeing dependence as central to childhood. How can someone who is dependent not obey?

Socio-emotional skills, on the other hand¹⁰, have a remarkable expansion in the most diverse areas. Far from being limited to a subject of self-help for efficiency and personal happiness, nowadays they can be found in educational policies for the entire population, such as the National Common Curricular Base. After all, someone who is immature needs to develop. Not in any way, not only with education and training, but rather, and mainly, developing, with golden tools (Cury, 2017), skills, competencies and social-emotional skills. So each one takes care of one's own future. So each one invests in oneself. So each one is flexible. So each one can *transform oneself*.

Some considerations

By placing excerpts from Augusto Cury works together with the possible provocations in the space of this article in the same boiler, I sought, at a certain temperature and as in the heat of a boil, to observe what elements emerged and what analysis could be produced. Among said and unsaid things, pops in a certain methodological heat, something that is useful to me and can be shared. That is useful not as what the author *really* says, but serve as some clues for understanding that I could point out among bubbles on the surface that he seeks to color as this broth that, taken from there, they call truth.

I did not intend to address every detail that Cury said about childhood, but to trace points of connection with what makes it possible to be said in this way. I hope that, by evoking, sometimes extensively, certain authors who have affected me and who have made me think in other ways, this text will affect those who will read it in some way. Read it not to think alike, not to understand simply more what one intends to understand, but to have the possibility of not being who one was, of thinking in other ways. Not in search of flexibility, of overcoming, or of adaptation increasingly effective through investments to be a same that is better than previously. But to be another one of oneself. Search with an attentive gaze and make visible what is already visible but, for being so worn, seems always there. See as strange

¹⁰ For a better development of this issue, I recommend Machado (2020) and, with a more precise focus on the National Common Curricular Base, the research of Tássia Ciervo (2019).

and denaturalize what seems so current, because, according to Popkewitz (2008, p. 199, our translation), “when the actions of individuals are made to appear as natural, there is a tendency to lose sight of how agendas and categories that define oppositions are historically formed. Relevance systems are taken as given.”

I understand that it is necessary, without losing sight of the historical support of truths, to suspect as to what we are told all the time as being the best to solve these many declared crises. In this text, I sought all the time to focus on this relation — singular and at the same time so broad — that consists of the knowledge and power relations that make circulate a certain notion of childhood. However, it is still necessary to address another importance. Foucault, through the courses he developed in the 1980s, elaborates an inflection in his own research: from the knowledge and power relations to the relations of government by truth. Thus, it is not enough to say that when Cury speaks of childhood he speaks of a specific childhood produced historically and that is founded on two characteristics: immaturity and dependence. It is also necessary to say that this game of discursive intersections constitutes a truth and that — according to Maria Isabel Bujes (2001) in research on the government of childhood — it produces discursive and non-discursive practices to govern childhood according to this truth. It is not appropriate here to imagine a dysfunction between “theory” and “practice,” since discourse is materiality. It is a discursive practice connected with non-discursive practices that will lead individuals categorized as children in certain ways and whose direction of government will be the doing produced as true. We can also think, based on Wendy Brown (2018, p. 39, emphasis added, our translation), about this way of governing of neoliberal rationality, in an increasingly ubiquitous shift from responsibility to accountability:

The word *accountability* is a step in this direction: from an adjective based on a noun (*accountable*), to a transitive verb based on a process, ceasing to be an individual capacity to become a governance project. Accountability marks a *regime* in which the singular human capacity to hold oneself accountable becomes a way of administering subjects, a process in which they are remade and reoriented by the neoliberal order and through which their conduct is measured.

Thus, if before the education of a liberal childhood had central attention to preparing childhood, to make it develop so it has responsibility as an adult, as a citizen, as a human, we can increasingly see that, in addition, there are practices of government of childhood for accountability. When Cury (2018a, p. 148, our translation) stipulates that the “most important task of education is to transform the human being into a leader of oneself, leader of one’s thoughts and emotions,” it is, therefore, no coincidence. It is not in any way at any time. It is so each one is flexible. So each one invests in oneself. So each one competes. So each one takes care of one’s own future. So each one... Futures oneself [Future-se].

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Submission information:

Submitted for evaluation on March 7, 2021; reviewed on September 17, 2021; approved for publication on October 21, 2022.

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