Research with children in Communication: an experience report

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1 Abstract / Introduction

I present here an experience report of doctoral research in Communication Sciences area entitled I do not want to be the naughty woman! I’d rather be Isabella Swan! Appropriations of the female identities by children in media reception, which aimed to analyze the meanings produced by them about female identities in media reception. The initial proposal had as observable printed magazines, but the “place of speech” of the subjects in the magazines revealed so only the adultcentric view about children and childhoods. Children were conceived as producing-cultures subjects (Corazza, 2004; Sarmento, 2018), so it was necessary to listen to them, to know their choices and what they are offered and the perceptions and meanings they produce, refuting the perspectives that identify the child audience as the passive pole of the communicative process. In this sense, the reception is the object that became the place of research, entended with production and consumption (Lopes, 1999, 2014; Orozco, 2011; Canclini, 2010).

2 Field immersion: challenges and possibilities

It is important to consider that the field is not given but is actively constructed in the relationship established between the researcher and the research subjects, between observable phenomena and the meanings that the subjects give to the lived, to their actions, which integrate their practices and ideas, and which are intertwined in the relations of power and resistance, is “[...]] at first, of everything that the researcher relates to, once the field is a certain conjunction between a physical environment, actors and activities” (Guber, 2004, p.47).

In this perspective, the field research took place in the city of Teresina, Piauí State, Northeast of Brazil, in 2011 and 2012, with two groups of children, one from public and the other from private school, in order to understand what the different social classes attribute to the matters related to their appropriation about feminine identities. The research was attended by seventeen children, between ten and thirteen years old, female, 6th grade students of elementary school, who voluntarily joined it. Some of them expressed interest in participating because they had the understanding that they would be excused from classes for research activities. Others expressed joy

1 We understand that, according to Louro and Goellner (2007), the cultural and social attributes que os atributos culturais e sociais conferidos ao gênero são construções sociais, culturais e históricas acopladas ao corpo biológico.

2 Magazines “Decora Baby” (Ed. Escala), “Pai e Filhos” (Ed. Manchete) and “Crescer e Família” (Ed. Globo).

3 At this phase, we returned to schools in an attempt to reunite the 2011 children’s groups to deepen questions about the object of study, but without success. Some children no longer studied at these schools. Faced with such difficulty, we decided to perform it only in public school, with another group of children.

4 We accorded the research the guidelines with the directors, coordinators and children, as well as asked for the parents’ or responsible’s consent.

5 The research was approved by the Ethics Commite of Unisinos.

6 We used both the Child and Adolescent’s Act (ECA) (Law No. 8.069 / 90, Article 2), which defines child, the person up to twelve years old, and adolescent, the person between thirteen and eighteen, and the perspective of Corazza (2004) and Ariès (1981), in which children and childhoods should not be seen as static and fixed instances, but understood in their historical and social constructions.
after knowing about the possibility of handling a computer and accessing the internet at school. In the first group, eight children participated and, in the second group, nine. The children were identified by the following names: Isabella Swan, Carla, Alice, Roberta, Rihanna, Fergie, Avril Lavigne, Médica, Gretchen, Ivete Sangalo, Shakira, Ana, Maite Perroni, Paris Hilton, Lady Gaga, Kelly Key, Ana Hickman. Most of them are national and international media celebrities: actresses, singers, models and television hosters.

Fischer (2013) emphasizes that the media, with the whole apparatus of the cultural industry, is present in children’s everyday and their imaginary, with seductive offerings, focusing on the production of subjectivities and constructing identities. Immersed in the consuming culture, which transforms people into commodity, according to Bauman (2008), children produce and reproduce hegemonic, standardized and dichotomous identities, because the media messages do not only sell products, but desirable values, ideals and identities that raise current hegemonic social order. It is noteworthy that exerting effects is not determining, because there are always spaces to be filled, which allows us to understand the relations of power, domination and resistances.

3 Refining research instruments and techniques:

Data production had transmethodology as the theoretical-methodological background, based on a multimethodological premise (Maldonado, 2012, 2013, 2015). This perspective starts from the understanding that reality and its processes are appropriated in their multidimensionality and interdisciplinarity. Thus, multiple sources of data are used: Field Diary, Questionnaire, Drawing, Essay, Internet (Google and Social Networks) and Conversation Circles through interactive back and forth movements, going back and reviewing the decisions that were made, without dismissing the acuity of critical-reflective thinking, unfolding the embarrassments, contingencies and nuances found in its path, because we know that it is impossible to portray the facts exactly as they happened, since we are always halfway or in the way of things in their own middle (Queiroz, 2013).

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7 Main character of the movie The Twilight Saga, aired in Brazil in December 2008, inspired by the book of the same name.
8 Teenage character from the soap opera Rebelde, Brazilian version, aired by Record since March 2011; and part of a music band, along with Alice and Roberta. SBT broadcasts a Mexican version.
9 Caribbean singer, born at Barbados island.
10 American singer, born in Los Angeles. Cantora estadunidense, nascida em Los Angeles.
11 Canadian singer, called the pop punk princess.
12 Brazilian singer and sancer, born at Rio de Janeiro, whose career began at the 70s.
13 Brazilian siner, born at Bahia.
14 Colombian singer, born at the city of Barranquilla.
15 A great friend of mine.
16 Adolescent character of the telenovela Rebelde, mexian version. Also acts as singer.
17 American socialite, born at New York.
18 American singer, born at New York.
19 Brazilian singer, dancer and tv hostess, born at Rio de Janeiro.
20 Brazilian model and tv hostess, born at Rio Grande do Sul.
Figure 1. Techniques and instruments used for data production

The techniques and instruments used for data production were designed from the group of children with whom we were interacting, the institutional space of school in which we were located and the theoretical-methodological frame. There were several returns to the field in the search to broaden the horizons on the investigated phenomenon.

4 Conclusions

The produced data showed an interconnection between media consumption and the children’s identifications, related mostly with women, which are ingrained in their daily experiences. The children’s identifications included a diversity of models and conceptions, with strong media affects, defined in the following categories:

- Strong, mothers, hard working versus professionals, intelligent and estilosas.
- Maidenlike, fragile, delicately versus sassy, naughty, hot, slut.
- Celebrities versus common.
- Pretty/good looking versus not pretty (ugly).

The identifications sometimes approached conservative and moralistic hegemonic models - socially referenced in Brazilian society -, sometimes moved away from them in a critical and emancipatory movement, which led us to cast a more cautious and attentive look at their manifestations.
In the construction of the research process we always maintained a dialogical and reflective relationship with the children. We listened to the them (as we listened to us). We seek to follow the rhythms, the yearnings and the needs that arrised from the research. The children participated, indicating methodological alternatives, sometimes giving their opinion and rejecting some proposed activities. And this led us to constantly reflect about our actions, relationships and behaviors in the development of the research. I believe that his work can be described as na innoation and it certainly was with respect to the research subjects - the children.

References:


