

## ABSTRACT

The goal in this study was to understand the conflict in the gender relations among children from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grades. During school recess time I tried to capture how children's cultures were generated there and how they related to adult culture. The lack of Brazilian research on the issue led me to privilege the international literature.

The problem in this research sprang from my questioning about the mechanisms of interaction and of group organization during school recess time, which seemed to occur under a conflicting relation between boys and girls. Ethnography was employed as an ethical and methodological mediation in a research that was built based on three different approaches: that of psychology, of sociology and of anthropology. The material to be analyzed resulted from field observations and interviews. In the year 2001 I made 28 field records about the school recess time, in which 240 children circulated. At the end of that year I followed 40 classes of 50 minutes each, given to four classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades; priority was given to gym and art classes due to its privileging of group activities. Fifty-five of a total of 120 children in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades were interviewed.

I established a difference between those conflicts created as a strategy to get closer to another child from those that meant ruptures and oppositions. In order to do so it was necessary to follow them in their contexts, to watch the result of the interaction, to observe the children's disposition (words, gestures, looks) and try to understand the meaning in all that through its complexity. It was necessary to define the concepts of conflict, aggressiveness, violence and playfulness. In addition, I had to include the concept for gender games in order to make possible an analysis of the playful-conflicting scenes. About such a mode of interaction, I proposed the hypothesis of sociability of the conflict, which is characterized by the distancing between the sexes during those moments of friendliness, and intentional proximity during the situations of conflict. The study followed three lines of action: turbulent activities; invasion episodes; and physical and verbal provocations, including name calling by the boys, and slapping by the girls. A different mode, which I defined as regulation of gender relations, could be observed in the experiences of "small clubs", which organized the distancing or the approximation moves between the sexes in a friendly way. The "small club" was a kind of group organization based on rules made by the children themselves, aiming at the approximation or separation between the sexes, partially similar to episodes that occurred in the streets of the city of São Paulo in other historical periods, as analyzed by other authors.

A number of aspects pervaded those gender relations: the importance of language, the interconnection between a culture of playfulness, childhood and school, the management of different spaces, the politics of sexuality and corporal experience. The results show those particularities of an infantile culture and its production/reproduction of gender relations, and the school as a contradictory space in which it is possible to offer understanding towards infantile needs and to develop actions focused on them, thus contributing to make day-to-day life include criticism to social inequalities and to prejudice based on gender issues and other differences.

**Key words:** childhood, gender, school recess time, conflict, school violence, elementary school.