



**Early Childhood Development in urban poor locales in
Colombia:**

Tensions and liberation of local perspectives

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Contents

Abstract	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Contextualizing the research problem	1
1.2 Analytical lenses	3
1.2.1 Postcolonial Critique in Childhood Studies	3
1.2.2 The Developmental Niche Framework.....	5
1.3 Approaching ECD in contexts of urban poverty.....	6
1.3.1 Situating the research	6
1.4 Data sources.....	7
1.4.1 Study participants.....	7
1.4.2 Secondary data.....	8
1.5 Data collection.....	8
1.5.1 In depth semi-structured interviews	9
1.5.2 Participant observation	9
1.6 Ethical issues and reflexivity.....	10
1.7 Organization of the paper.....	11
2. Contextual overview of ECD in settings of urban poverty	12
2.1 Marginalized places: Childcare in urban poor locales in Colombia.....	12
2.2 Poverty and Care: Approaching ECD policy in Colombia.....	14
3. Examining the policy framework: ECD for whom and by whom?.....	16
3.1 Universalism: unhidden the dominant narrative on ECD	16
3.2 The quality discourse and its influence in policy implementation	19
3.2.1 Professional expertise vs. Local knowledge	20
3.2.2 Pedagogical approaches: The danger of Reggio Emilia Industry	20
3.2.3 The case of Community caregivers: situated ways of knowing and doing.....	22

3.3 Family strengthening: The in-between children and family situated experiences of caregiving.....	25
3.4 ‘If there is a will, there is a way’: Childhood and Childcare in Altos de la Florida	27
3.4.1 Networks and Reciprocity: the community Level.....	28
3.4.2 Learning for lifelong: Childcare and Education in Altos de la Florida	29
3.4.3 The displaced condition: Ties with the extended family.....	31
3.4.4 Social responsibility: Older Siblings also raise a child	33
3.4.5 Fatherhood: presence in the absence.....	34
4. Concluding thoughts.....	37
5. Reference List	40

List of appendix

Appendix 1	46
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List of tables

Table 1. Study participants and activities planned	8
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List of Acronyms

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ICBF	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar
IDB	Interamerican Development Bank
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
HCB	Hogares Comunitarios de Bienestar

Abstract

In recent years, Early Childhood Development (ECD) has become a policy concern in Latin America. Despite the great efforts to provide comprehensive ECD services for children in poor locales, these services are still far from the local realities and focused on deficiencies in these marginalized contexts instead of the potentialities that they can offer. This research is an attempt to explore the ways in which ECD policy framework in Colombia influences local practices in a context of urban poverty in Soacha a town near to Bogotá.

The study draws on empirical evidence policy makers, teachers, caregivers and children as well as secondary data to argue that policy framework in Colombia promotes a Western ECD model that contrast with the actual experiences of communities in urban poor locales. Accordingly, the paper teased out the power/knowledge relations embedded in the ECD field in Colombia by uncovering the key policy assumptions on issues of universalism, quality and family strengthening. Simultaneously, is illustrated its influence in program's implementation and the varied intersections with economic and cultural issues of childhood and childcare in this context. The findings revealed that beyond these discursive practices, people in contexts of urban poverty navigate within them developing coping and resilient strategies as counter narratives to the dominant ECD framework.

Relevance to Development Studies

The research is located within the current debates and discussions on ECD in which policy and programs aim to provide comprehensive and a holistic wellbeing for children. In order to ensure more contextually responsive ECCE policies and programs, the study states the necessity to bridge the existing gap between cultural and policy interests. This, would contribute to enhance a dialogue between different narratives and perspectives on ECD and a more inclusive and equitable policy.

Key words

Childhood, Care, Early Childhood Development, Local Knowledge, urban poverty

1. Introduction

1.1 Contextualizing the research problem

Early Childhood Development (hereinafter ECD) has shifted globally from a marginal position in social policies. In the last decades, ECD has gained a prominent position in the international Child Rights Discourse¹ that has recognized it as a foundational base for human development. Accordingly, ECD, is defined as the set of processes that affects children's development at emotional, physical, social, cultural levels and that are important "in order to establish a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and well-being" (Marope and Kaga 2015:17). Notwithstanding, currently ECD' field continues to be characterized by sectorized policies and interventions that makes difficult to implement effective programs. In addition, multiple deprivations including poverty, lack of early stimulation, maternal health and mortality continue to undermine children's development and wellbeing (Munene and Okwany 2016). The situation is worse in marginal contexts like urban poor locales, where children and families face a lot of limitations in access to services. These, are some of the reasons why is necessary to push for more integrated approaches to childhood development in policies and programs.

However, going beyond these efforts, behind this growing public interest in ECD, there is an implicit rationale used to justify interventions. In developing countries, government' justifications to invest in early childhood programs, rely on scientific and economic arguments framed on a dominant narrative on ECD (Penn 2012). This prevailing narrative, is built upon a discourse dominated by Western values, norms, ideals that enforces a universal conception of childhood, childcare and parenting practices. The problem with this, is that often time's alternative voices are back grounded such as the role of local knowledge. Additionally, in marginal contexts (poverty, lack of services and infrastructure) the coping social strategies of people to thrive are ignored and even framed as 'deficient'.

Even so, this dominant narrative has become in a 'template' for action influencing the way ECD is understood and practiced worldwide (Penn 2005, 2012, Okwany In Press, Okwany and Ebrahim 2015, Dahlberg et al 2007).Consequently, this universalizing ECD narrative has dominated the field and present itself as the most 'trustable' to justify economic investments on ECD. Nonetheless, recent debates on early childhood have highlighted the importance to create a more inclusive and multidisciplinary dialogue between different actors and narratives which could inform better policies and programs. This call can be found in the studies from African, Asian and Latinamerican scholars which aim not only to challenge this dominant narrative but to make visible the role of power in the

¹ Through the General Comment No.7 2005, where is established the basis needed for a comprehensive and holistic Early Childhood Development and wellbeing.

generation of knowledge around ECD in different contexts (Okwany and Ebrahim 2015: 432).

However, to make this dialogue possible, these scholars emphasize on the necessity to expand the ECD field. This expansion needs to include alternative narratives that have been traditionally neglected and new methodologies that influence the way knowledge is produced. As a starting point, is the realization of more studies that unhide the assumptions behind this dominant narrative and analyze the power relations in the field (Canella 1997, Díaz and Swadener 2002, Viruru 2004, 2005, Penn 2005, 2012, Tobin 2005, Ebrahim 2006, Munene and Okwany 2016, Okwany and Ebrahim 2015). Ultimately, this call is about an emancipation of the field where silenced voices have a space to be heard and recognized.

In Latin America, international organizations (IO's) have played an important role in the designing and funding of these programs (Vegas y Santibañez 2010). Accordingly, donors and financing agencies such as the Interamerican Development Bank (hereinafter IDB) have supported and funded investigations to reinforce the arguments about the benefits of this investment. For instance, in Colombia, the government has had IDB's support in studies carried out in the country to serve for future investments in ECD (Interamerican Development Bank 2016). Based on the result of these investigations² the government launched a national strategy called "From Zero to Always" which seeks to integrate services and improve their quality (From Zero to Always 2011). Recently, this strategy became in a State law opening a political and social debate on issues related to standardization, quality and the universalization of programs. Hence, its implementation has not been easy at a local level, where issues related to the 'modernization' of programs has implied –in some cases– the bypassing of community based programs.

Taking into consideration, the growing public interest to invest in ECD programs in Colombia as well as in other Latin American countries, this study aims to analyse the ways in which *policy discourses on ECD in Colombia influence local practices of Childcare in contexts of urban poverty*. The country is at an important political juncture with the approval of the strategy "From Zero to Always" as a State policy for ECD. However, little critical analysis and engagement on it has been done.

To do so it was useful also to tease out the underlying assumptions in Colombian ECD policy and how they influence implementation. This because, though practitioners in the field have certain 'autonomy' to design and implement

² See for instance the technical note No. 244 IDB Country strategy 2010-2014 <https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/4951/Nota%20sectorial%3A%20Atenci%C3%B3n%20integral%20a%20la%20primera%20infancia%20en%20Colombia.pdf;sequence=1>

their own programs, those who receive financial support from the state are also required to follow the general policy guidelines.

Finally, it is explored *how caregiving is experienced by children and families in a context of urban poverty?* To this end, interaction with children, caregivers (parents and teachers) and community members allowed to foreground the nuanced situated experiences of people in the purposively selected urban poor locale.

Based on a study carried out in a local context in Colombia, I argue that policy framework in Colombia promotes a Western ECD model discarding the local knowledge in marginalized communities such as urban poor locales. Accordingly, this research illuminates the power/knowledge relations embedded in the ECD field in Colombia, through: i) a critical analysis of some of the policy assumptions regarding child development, care and family role and ii) Recognition of the silenced voices that reveal alternative narratives of child development and care in a urban poor locale which are marginalized by policy and practitioners. Findings revealed that though there are global/local tensions ECD beyond this, there are in-between situated experiences of people who navigate and negotiate in their everyday lives within these discursive practices. Thus, the study contemplates multiple and nuanced stories of people in an urban poor locale to provide a nurturing environment and care for their children.

1.2 Analytical lenses

1.2.1 Postcolonial Critique in Childhood Studies

To talk about ECD in developing countries and the ways in which policy discourse have influenced local practices, it is necessary to drawn on three different elements: power, knowledge and colonial practices. Accordingly, the analytical lens that guide this study is ‘postcolonial critique on childhood studies’ since it serves as a “useful resource for those interested in questions of power, what happens when marginalized groups speak and how power is exercised to silence them (Viruru and Cannella 2004: 6), questions that this research aims to explore throughout the paper.

The research is based on the theoretical contributions of scholars such as Radhika Viruru (2004, 2005), Gailles Cannella (1997, 2004) Lourdes Díaz Soto (2000, 2002) and Beth Blue Swadener (2002). In this way, since post colonial critique in Childhood studies find its roots in Foucault’s work and his interpretations of power/knowledge and discourse (Viruru and Radhika 2004, MacNaughton 2005) it is useful to define these concepts and then the way they were applied in the analysis. First, power is understood as something that is “exercised rather than possessed by someone, is productive since it is produced by human beings and privileges certain

groups while labeling and limiting other groups and can be repressive”.(Viruru and Cannella 2004: 46).

This way, looking critically at the ECD policy in Colombia and their hidden assumptions, it is revealed how power operates at the different levels and how a specific model of ECD has been privileged marginalizing others (e.g local knowledge in urban poor locales). Second, power/knowledge link is understood as the “way something is established as a fact or as true [while] other equally valid statements are disqualified and even denied” (Mills 2003:67).

I sought to examine this relation and the way specific knowledge systems on ECD in Colombia (those behind the policy framework and practitioners) have been privileged and others indirectly marginalized. Lastly, discourse is interpreted as a mechanism where both power and knowledge are joined together (Viruru and Cannella 2004: 47) and is an exercise of power talked and practiced. Thus, I looked at some of the discursive practices of ECD in Colombia from the policy framework (documents and policy makers), from the practitioners who implement the policy interventions at a local level and finally I surfaced the stories that are “left behind” by the policy from the situated experience of people living in an urban poor locale called Altos de la Florida.

Thus, recognizing that the field has been dominated by a specific Western narrative, focused on a particular notion of childhood, the purpose of postcolonial theory is to “stop looking at childhood as an isolated phenomenon intelligible only through the lens of ‘experts’ that have studied the child through this dominant discourse, and start to think about children as people who are part of a much larger complex whole” (Viruru and Cannella 2004: 3). Here, ‘Colonialism’ or ‘Colonial practice’ refers to the ways in which power is exercised resulting in the imposition of certain ways of thinking and doing, leading to the construction of the ‘other’ as opposed to what is promoted or validated by the colonizer (Viruru, 2001, 2005, Viruru and Cannella 2004, Díaz and Swadener 2002). Additionally, these practices are embedded in Latin-American history, since it cannot be ignored the colonial past that countries of this region have.

So, the study is based on these concepts and relations and aimed to tease out these power/knowledge relations, traced through the policy, its implementation and local practices on childrearing. As opposed to this, ‘decolonization’ is an exercise that recognizes the importance but and the same time the inappropriateness of dominant knowledge and the way in which it can be refreshed from and for the margins (Viruru and Radhika 2004: 23). Therefore, there are recognized the great efforts that policy makers and practitioners in the field have done to provide services to children across the country but also the efforts and knowledge’s of the local community where the study took place.

Some of the exponents of this theoretical approach, call for a critical interrogation of dominant discourses on ECD so it can contribute toward a more liberatory theories, research and practice which value the voices and knowledge that traditionally have been ignored or silenced (Díaz 2000, Díaz and Swadener 2002). The study adds voice to this call by the examination of the policy discourse giving some glimpses about power relations and knowledge on ECD in Colombia and in urban poor contexts where multiple forces converge and have shaped childrearing.

Therefore, as Okwany and Ebrahim pointed out, by challenging the dominant narratives, not only issues of power become visible but can emerge spaces for dialogue between this dominant and marginalized narratives. This, requires also a “critical engaging with local people, their spaces, their practices, beliefs and interpretations [which] serve as sites where global and local forces may converge or diverge” is needed (2015: 433). Thus, in doing so, postcolonial lens was useful to elaborate analysis which not only contribute widely to the discussion and the recognition and liberation of new theories, practices and research on ECD but brings the field closer to a “dreamspace of social justice and equity for children, families and teachers” (Díaz and Swadener 2002: 51)

Secondly, under this theoretical framework is acknowledged that one of the ways in which ECD field can benefit from postcolonial thought, is by ‘decolonize’ the way research is conducted (Díaz and Swadener 2002: 57). This implies more collaborative research and cultural theories to join us in solidarity and as allies with multiple vices where diverse children, families and communities can experience social justice (Díaz and Swadener 2002: 58).

1.2.2 The Developmental Niche Framework

Thus, since the study is built upon taking into consideration the situated experiences of people in an urban poor locale near Bogotá city in Colombia, I also use the the Developmental Niche framework (Super and Harkness 1986, Harkness et al 2013), which found it roots on the sociocultural theories of childhood. This framework helped me to foreground the situated experiences around caregiving in the micro context bringing out the ways in which childhood and childcare that are marginalized in policy and practice are experienced there. This framework gave me some of the conceptual hooks to analyze the interplay between culture and child development going beyond it and “looking outward to the environment of daily experience as it is shaped by features of the larger sociocultural setting” (Harkness et al 2013: 146).

The development niche comprises three different components which include: the physical and social setting of daily life, the customs and practices of care and the psychology of the caretakers that encompasses the parental ethno theories. Accordingly, these 3 components operate as a system and influence each other but are also influenced by forces in the larger culture and define the developmental experiences of children in their care contexts? (Harkness et al 2013). I used this conceptual framework to tease out the nuanced and varied local experiences from local people in this specific context. Here, economic, class and cultural issues as well as changes and aspects of the larger environment intersect and influence caregiving (Super and Harkness 1986). Accordingly, the situated experiences of children and families in Altos de la Florida illustrate the various intersections on different issues that have influenced caregiving and ECD. Overall, these are the analytical lenses that provided me the conceptual hooks that guided the study.

1.3 Approaching ECD in contexts of urban poverty

1.3.1 Situating the research

The fieldwork was conducted during one month, in Soacha a small town close to the capital city Bogotá, in one of its ‘comunas’³ called *Altos de la Florida*. According to ACNUR (2013) almost 15% of the neighborhoods in this town are located in peri-urban areas configured as slums which in the majority of the cases are not legalized and face problems in terms of infrastructure and limited access to public services.

Additionally, it is the biggest recipient of displaced people from all the regions that have been affected by the armed conflict in their hometowns, who migrate to the city, (some of them temporarily some permanently) in search of new opportunities (UNHCR 2013). Within this town, there is a settlement called ‘*Altos de la Florida*’ which has almost 7000 inhabitants and 2500 families, this community was formed about 25 years ago when its first inhabitants arrived (UNHCR 2013, UNDP 2015). These features, make it an interesting case to analyze the complex situation that many children in poor urban locales face in their daily lives.

Regarding childcare services, there were previously almost 13 formal day care institutions called (community households) and other informal care spaces where some mothers of the neighborhood take care of children from their neighbors and the extended community (AT, Community leader, Personal Communication, 3 August 2016). However, with the ‘modernization’ of programs under the new policy

³ The term comuna is used to delimit internal geographical spaces within the town. Soacha is composed by 6 different kind of comunas which some are located in periurban areas such as Altos de la Florida

framework 'From Zero to Always' these small providers may close their 'community households' (Hereinafter HCB for its Spanish initials) in the short term and start to work for one of the main providers (at a large scale).

As mentioned above, practitioners are in charge policy implementation through programs and projects. The offer of services comes from different types of organizations including formal, informal, NGOs. Organizations that receive support from the government (financing) must follow the general policy guidelines this is in part, due to the State's limited capacity to reach all children and execute the programs itself. Under this scenario, a local non-governmental organization has implemented a program in Soacha and provides ECD services to 500 children from the community (0 to 6 years old including pregnant women) through a 1) Home-based program (children from 0 to 3) and 2) an institutional program (Early Childhood Development Centers for children from 3 to 5).

1.4 Data sources

1.4.1 Study participants

1. Policy Officers: Public officers that work in the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (hereinafter ICBF), the core institution that not only participated in the design of the policy but is also in charge of its implementation.
2. Parents/Caregivers: The identification of families (parents/caregiver) and community members was done using a snowball sampling method since the teachers and program helped me to establish communication with people in the community and then with the caregivers that collaborated in the research process. Is important to highlight that the participant selection and including households and caregivers regardless of their marriage status, with children between 1 and 3 years, without age restrictions. For the study purposes, the interaction with these parents/caregivers helped me to know and understand the childcare situated experiences in local contexts.
3. Teachers: People that are currently working in the local NGO but that have broader experience in the ECD sector in this community even before the program started in the location.
4. Children: Though children where little (1 to 3 years old), this does not inhibit their participation during the study. Their attitudes and behavior in their everyday routines, locate them as speaking subjects. During the fieldwork, I observed children interacting with their peers and family members and this was a critical aspect of understanding how childcare and childhood was experienced in context. Additionally, older siblings of these children were also important participants as the findings revealed that they play an important role in the caregiving system.

1.4.2 Secondary data

1. Policy: Institutional and official documents from the main state agencies that designed and implement the policy programs on ECD. Documentation from the strategy 'From Zero to Always' was used such as technical guidelines, policy discourses and interviews done to the main policymakers that were responsible for the design of the strategy.
2. Program documents: Reports and documentation from the NGO. One of the core documents reviewed for the analysis was the “*Educational Experience*” (curriculum) developed by the organization and which summarizes the adaptation of the pedagogical approach Reggio Emilia to the Colombian context.
3. Literature review: Analysis of different research studies and theories which highlighted the main debates in the ECD field including the conceptual framework that informed the study.

1.5 Data collection

Table 1 Study participants and activities planned

Study participants	Activity(s)	Method used
Family caregivers (12)	Daily routines with children, time allocation and experiences on childcare	In depth Semistructured interviews: Eco cultural family interview Participant observation
Teachers- caregivers:5	Daily routines with children, previous and current experience in the ECD field, adaptation to the new program, their social interactions in the community	In depth semi-structured interviews Participant observation
Program staff (4)	Dialogues about the pedagogical approach and its adaptation to the context where the study took place, the core principles of the pedagogy	In depth semi structured interviews
Public officers (3)	Designing and implementation of the National Policy From Zero To Always, the obstacles in the field, the restructuring of the traditional programs.	In depth semi structured interviews
Children (0 to 3 years)	Daily routines with their caregivers, social interactions in the community, family interactions	Participant observation

Source: Author

1.5.1 In depth semi-structured interviews

I chose this method since is based on ‘guide’ questions to frame the conversation they didn’t have a fixed order because during the conversations emerged unexpected issues that were worthy to explore (O’Leary 2013: 216). It provided a level of flexibility to explore themes around early childhood. These interviews took place in the households and the spaces facilitated by the program staff in the ECD center in Soacha. I used the eco-cultural family interview (Weisner 2011) since it is focused in the daily routines of children and their caregivers, their time allocation for different activities and their childcare experiences.

These dialogues not only gave me a sense on the situated experiences of children and their caregivers but informed me about the sociocultural interactions and the care practices, customs, beliefs in this particular place. Furthermore, these conversations and collaborative process brought the possibility to locate them as ‘*speaking subjects*’. Regarding this, I perceived these dialogues with them as a ‘liberatory exercise’ since they could express themselves freely, their opinions and perspectives about caregiving, family life and ways to carry on even in difficult conditions.

In fact, there was another researcher who was worked with a group of parents around issues of displacement. We both conclude that people not only need to talk but to be listened, these exercises offered them a space for sharing experiences and do a kind of ‘catharsis’ on the difficult experiences but also about their goals and hope. As Díaz and Swadener highlight “gaining insights from collaborative research on children’s daily lived realities can guide the field to critically examine long held practices and establish equity and social justice as paramount aims”. (2002: 54).

1.5.2 Participant observation

According to Thomas Weisner “qualitative and ethnographic methods are fundamental to understand family life” (2014:163). Thus, as a complementary method I chose participant observation. The use of this method implied an active involvement in the daily experiences and routines of children and their families at the center and within the household. Through that, I could better capture the different meanings, interpretations and cultural beliefs around childcare. In addition, this method complement the interviews done and helped to triangulate the information provided by caregivers and teachers during the visits. Since many discursive practices are unspoken, through the observation of interactions between the different actors involved in the care spaces it was possible to analyze the different settings of the development niche in this scenario.

1.6 Ethical issues and reflexivity

Some ethical issues I faced during the study included, the informed consent, children's participation in the research and my positionality as a researcher and as a learner taking into account that I was part of the organization's staff. Thereby, since the staff program helped me to have access to the community, as a first step I used a 'consent form' to inform the program staff about the study, the main objectives and the possible activities that we could develop with the participation of children and families. At first, that strategy worked well with teachers and the program staff because it gave them an idea of the research and they provided instead new insights about how I could better approach children and families.

However regarding children's and family's participation, an informed consent was approached differently as a continuing process during the time of the study. Researchers such as Hasina Ebrahim emphasize the importance of a "situated ethics approach" (2010:290) to engage children in research. Since childhood is experienced differently in the diverse contexts, a flexible position from the researcher is needed to make decisions in situ (2010:291).

Thus, once I went to the community I decided to first explain to the caregivers what the study was about and asked for their consent and their will to participate in the process. With children I decided to ask to the main caregivers if I could record or take pictures in certain situations and asked children in certain situations if I could participate on what they were doing. This is best described by Ebrahim, as "assent", the way to gaining children's agreement within concrete situations in the research process" (2010: 292). Accordingly, the non-verbal language of children, located them also as speaking subjects in the research process. This helped to position myself not only as a researcher but a learner in an ongoing reflexive process through the different dialogues and participation in daily routines. .

Lastly, I was aware of the power relations that could arise from my position as a researcher, middle class white women who previously worked in the program where families and community are currently assisting. I tried to be careful with these power relations and don't harm them being conscious of my position. In this matter, the collaborative research process was fundamental. I found the eco cultural interview (Weisner 2011) a very useful source that provided a space to children and families to express themselves about their daily lives and reflect on them. Additionally, the complementary participant observation, gave me the possibility to participate actively and interact with teachers, caregivers and children in their everyday routines. At the end that also helped me to position myself as a learner minimizing these power relations (Ebrahim 2010)

1.7 Organization of the paper

The paper is organized as follows: First it is provided a contextual overview of ECD in urban poor locales, including not only the current situation of children in urban poor spaces but an institutional overview of ECD policy under the ‘new’ policy framework that has been developed recently. Second they are discussed and analyzed some key policy assumptions on childcare and parenting practices based on the policy objectives and how do they influence implementation by looking at a Local NGO. Next, following this analysis these assumptions are also contrasted with the situated experiences of people in *Altos de la Florida* providing insights on the ways careiving is experienced in this setting. The previous sections helped me to tease out the power relations in ECD field through an analysis of the ways in which policy has influenced local practices and implementation. Finally, a concluding section is provided with some of the study reflections and implications for policy and practice to promote a comprehensive and contextually responsive early childcare.

2. Contextual overview of ECD in settings of urban poverty

This section aims to provide a brief contextual overview of ECD in context of urban poverty. Thereby, first there is a characterization of the place where the study took place taking into consideration the multiple vulnerabilities that people in this place face and then an approach to ECD policy in Colombia taking into consideration the way poverty and care intersect. This showed a gap between policy and local realities which leads to critically examine the policy uncovering some of its key assumptions.

2.1 Marginalized places: Childcare in urban poor locales in Colombia



Source: National Registry Office <http://www.registraduria.gov.co/1-de->



Source: Author

And what about the community that is upside?

“There, the conditions are extreme, poverty, gangs, insecurity, intrafamily violence and many rights vulnerations, is a hermetic and very ‘caliente’⁴ place so is not easy to enter it. Children live in the middle of these vulnerations, there is a lot to do there, and work is hard.” (OQ Pedagogical Coordinator, Personal Communication 19 July 2016).

When I went the first time to the community of *Altos de la Florida*, I must confess that I was a bit nervous. Not only because the program staff told me that it was preferably not to go there due to the complex situation that their inhabitants lived there, but also because there was a collective imaginary about the peri-urban areas as dangerous and insecure places. This came out during the preliminary conversations with the program staff when I exposed my interest to go to *Altos de la Florida*. When I first talked to the coordinator she told me that it was preferable to choose other area to do my research. This left me perplexed especially when I asked her if she had gone and her response was negative. The issue with urban poor locales, is that often times is assumed that because there are material and economic deprivations, these are deficient environments and even dangerous places.

⁴ Popular expression that refers to an insecure, violent and risky place

However as time passed while I was working and interacting with people there, I could realize that this was only one part of the story and that there was another face where stories of resilience from families and community took place. A place where despite of the adversity, families struggle and find different ways to provide a nurturing care and environment for their children's wellbeing.

Regarding issues of poverty and marginalization, according to UNICEF children Latin-American countries, are exposed to negative circumstances like the increasing inequality where not everybody has the same opportunities and societies where the income is low and a high proportion of children don't have access to minimum levels of basic consumption in terms of nutrition, housing, health, education and recreation (2005:8). An example of this, is the empirical evidence showed in research studies on child poverty in developing countries like the Young Lives. This longitudinal study, illustrated how for children in these settings, poverty also "means to growing up with uncertainty, managing multiple risks (security) accessing limited opportunities" (Crivello et al 2014:110).

Soacha as mentioned before, is a town which has the highest rates of migratory flows according to ACNUR (2013). Some of the reasons for this, include its closeness to the capital city Bogotá and the low cost of life that it has in terms of housing, food and basic services. The growing migratory flows during last years has led to unplanned settlements and the establishment of 'slums' with limited access to services. In addition, some of them are illegal or informal settlements which difficult public investment and consequently an active State' presence. In fact, according to the UNHR (2014) 152 neighborhoods from the 368 that this town has, are illegal. Under these conditions live the families of *Altos de la Florida*, an urban unplanned settlement that started to be populated 25 years ago (UNHCR 2013) with the arrival of displaced people due to the armed conflict in rural areas, intraurban and interurban displacement, and the high level of poverty in the country. (UNHCR 2013).

In *Altos de la Florida*, inhabitants have to struggle every day to get a minimum livelihood. Thereby, people usually work in the informal sector, are vulnerable to the fluctuating costs of life and have to adapt to a urban environment that often times is aggressive and unfriendly with them. In this context, is where young children also are growing up (Perez and Grajales 2016).It cannot be denied the hard reality that people face every day. The convergence of these multiple vulnerabilities though has marginalized people in this urban setting has also pushed their inhabitants to give the best of themselves to thrive and enhance a nurturing care environment for the young children. Thus, childhood and childcare are experienced in multiple ways, beliefs and practices have played an important role.

2.2 Poverty and Care: Approaching ECD policy in Colombia

Poverty Alleviation, is one of the arguments used by policy makers in developing countries to justify investments in Early Childhood (Penn 2010). Research on brain development emphasizes on the pervasive effects that a harmful environment can have on young children especially for the under 3 years (Shonkoff 2010). These studies have stressed out that extreme poverty is a factor that can have negative effects on children behavior and learning due to the toxic stress to which children are exposed (Shonkoff 2010:360). This evidence has served also to reinforce the economic arguments on why to invest in ECD programs, especially for the most disadvantaged since life opportunities of most poor and vulnerable children can be improved if they receive an appropriate care in the early years of life (Heckman 2000, 2011 Knudsen at al 2006). Based on these premises, caregiving services in rural and urban poor locales such as *Altos de la Florida* have been prioritized by policy makers in public agendas.

However, as Penn notes (2010: 53) these findings are based on research conducted in Euro American countries and have been extrapolated to other contexts through international agencies and used by policy makers in their intervention strategies. Furthermore, research in ECD has downplayed the importance of context (2010:53), and scientific research on how beliefs and practices influence early development is scarce (Shonkoff 2010:363). Even so, the recognition of the importance of culture is commonly stated in policies and practice, but little evidence is provided.

In Colombia, as well as in other Latin-American countries, the design and implementation of ECD policies and government strategies have counted with the support of different international organizations in the region such as UNICEF and the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB). These international organizations have played an important role in terms of funding and ‘technical assistance’. Based on the recommendations included in the ‘Technical document No.244’ from the IDB (Interamerican Development Bank 2010), the national government with the support of technical ‘experts’ and different sectors designed and launched the strategy “From Zero To Always” in 2011.

Thereby, this strategy seeks to i) Establish a long term policy to guide the country in terms of financial and technical sustainability, the universalization of the attention and the strengthening of the territories ii) To guarantee the quality in the comprehensive attention by the articulation of actions iii) To strengthen the family as a fundamental actor in the early childhood development. (From Zero To always, 2012). So, this ambitious strategy who recently became in a national state policy is

the current ECD policy framework that define the guidelines to provide childcare and education services for children from 0 to 6 years old and their families.

Despite major efforts from the government to integrate the actions of different public agencies that intervene in the provision of services to this population, there are still some gaps in the implementation. There is still low articulation and coordination between the different sectors, information systems are still fragile which affect the local data collection, a weak monitoring system and the particular situation with the traditional programs where current providers feel that there are no space for them within the policy. Added to this, there is a critical situation with children under 3 years old since the services for them are still insufficient and fragmented (UNICEF 2010, Bernal 2014).

These problems contrast also with the conditions in urban poor locales like *Altos de la Florida*, where the caregiving system at an institutional level, continues to be characterized by the existence of informal programs and a high community involvement in the provision of these services. Despite of the presence of an institutional public offer, this is limited. This in part because of the invisibility that children and families face due to the illegal status they usually have (e.g unregistration) that limit their access to the institutional offer. Thus, traditionally the offer have come from private, informal and community initiatives (Bernal 2014). Embedded in this context are the hybrid arrangements for care and practices and beliefs around childhood that have traditionally being silenced in policy statements, but that also show that even in difficult conditions parents and caregivers have diverse ways to enhance well-being for their children despite the economic difficulties that the and that are discussed in the following sections.

Overall, this reflects a disconnection between policy and local realities. In part, this gap came from the design of policy since there are some implicit assumptions that weakens its responsiveness with the diverse communities (rural, urban, poor urban) where is being implemented. Furthermore, practitioners in the field such as the local NGO where the research took place must follow this policy guidelines, affecting also the way care services are currently provided. Accordingly, some of these key assumptions are uncovered in the next section, showing that the policy discourse as well as the implementation by practitioners have hidden norms and values that not only discourage local people to be engaged with policy but discard the multiple nuanced and rich stories that can be found in local contexts.

3. Examining the policy framework: ECD for whom and by whom?

This section aims to provide a critical analysis of the ECD policy ‘ From Zero to Always’ in Colombia uncovering its assumptions based on the key core objectives of: universalism, quality and family strengthening. Simultaneously, it is analyzed and contrasted it with the way this policy framework influences implementation and the way caregiving is experienced locally by children and their families in Altos de la Florida. Consequently, it is exposed the way policy promotes a certain ECD model that neglects and contrast with the nuanced in between experiences of people Altos de la Florida. People in this locale, not only navigate within these discursive practices but have historically developed ways to provide a nurturing care for their children.

3. 1 Universalism: unhidden the dominant narrative on ECD

First, regarding the first policy objective about the universalization of the attention, I argue that with the aim to integrate and reach uniformity of programs, policy can lead to exclusionary processes. On one hand, because this universalization implicitly has an idea also of a universalization of a particular model of Early Childhood Development. In developing countries the policies on ECD rely on the premises of ECD that have been constructed internationally. This can be problematic since these premises are also constructed based on evidence from studies carried out in specific contexts (United States and Europe), on which there is also a particular notion of childhood and hence of childcare.⁵

This can be defined as a “*semantic universalization*” which refers to the “repetition of statements and arguments that become universal and used by international organizations, governments and practitioners for the promotion of ECD” (Tag 2012:42). This is problematic since as noted by Penn (2005) “practitioners and policy makers, and even researchers themselves have extrapolated the data to describe and explain children’s journey or ‘development’ and justify particular kinds of childcare and education practices” (Penn 2005:45). Consequently, as noted by Tag investment arguments especially to reference to scientific evidence are being universalized worldwide. (2012: 44)

⁵ Policy documents frequently cite the studies such as: J. Heckman and P.Careneiro (2003) Human Capital Policy. National Bureau of Economic Research- Working Paper 9445 , Schweinhart (2004) The High/ Scope Perry Preschool Study Through age 40: Summary, Conclusions and frequently asked questions The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation; Rolnick A and Grunewald R. (2003) Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return.

For instance, in Colombia, in most of the policy documents reviewed, the introduction includes primarily these scientific arguments (result from brain research) that justify why investment in early childhood need to be done:

Aligned with the scientific and economic investigations, the Colombian government welcomes the evidence regarding human development ensure that a good quality of life during childhood is reflected in adult life. The country is lined with multiple studies showing that investment in early childhood is the most profitable it can make a society. (From Zero to Always 2013: 20)

Scientific evidence shows that although human development is an ongoing process that occurs throughout life, the basis over they will get complex the abilities, skills and human potentialities occur on the first years.” (From Zero to Always 2011: 10)

Nonetheless, aside from this overreliance on scientific arguments, policy provides little information about how childhood (s) in diverse contexts have been constructed. In urban poor locales, childhood (s) is constructed and occur in varied ways. Here, intersecting forces such as class, rural-urban, race and ethnic features also determined the way childhood is perceived and even what are the specific needs they have according to their background and current situation. Notwithstanding, inscribed in a particular model of ECD, little accounts on the diversity of existing childhoods along the Colombian territory are provided. During conversations with policy officers, they explained that implementation process haven't been easy in these particular contexts since the people don't understand the meaning and importance that early education has:

“Families in these contexts don't understand the importance that early education have. The idea is that families go out from the program, strengthened. At country level this is not happening, there are a lot of vacuums with respect to the understanding that it needs and the sense of early childhood education” (Policy officer ICBF 2016, Personal Interview)

Here, a discourse of lack emerged and families are defined in terms of what they lack and as a vacuum that need filling. As Viruru and Cannella argue, “colonial discourses define the silent group in terms of what they lack; they are still somehow incomplete, and their deficiencies become the way to control them.” (Viruru and Cannella 2004: 112). Consequently, the implicit universalization of ECD as a model have back grounded precisely local voices and the different meanings that they can attribute to childhood and childcare.

Second, universalism of ECD in Colombia also have a numerical connotation (Tag 2012: 45). Here, not only for the ‘quantitative’ side where government aims to reach all children it can, but also because it supposes the construction of indicators and standards to measure the development and the effectiveness of programs. Accordingly, one of the first steps that the Colombian Government did, was the integration and uniformity of programs. In this task, the

strategy defined two type of programs: i) Homebased program (for children from 0 to 3 years old) and ii) Institutional program in ECD centers (for children from 3 to 5 years old. (From Zero to Always 2013).

Therefore, this universalism also speaks out to the uniformity of attention and the restructuring of the traditional community programs. However, this tend to be problematic since these standardization is linked to the service's quality implying that only if these standards⁶ are reached it means there is a quality service. The ultimate goal of the policy regarding these community programs, is that they should transit gradually to one of the two programs defined in the policy guidelines. Local people behind traditional programs felt overwhelmed with the accomplishment of these standards, especially those related to human resource (qualification), pedagogical and educational processes and infrastructure conditions.

Hence, though policy states that the definition of standards should be flexible and collective process (From Zero to Always 2013) this haven't happened in practice. For instance, when I talked to some people that previously were part of the community program, one of the reasons why they are supposed to migrate to the 'new' program was that they didn't have the physical 'conditions' to provide a quality service but does not go beyond to the meanings that quality has in this particular setting.

“When the ICBF, came to explain us how would be the transit, they told us that children in our houses were at risk, due to the infrastructure conditions of our homes. That is why we should transit to the new centers that have all the adequate conditions and materials to provide a good service” (OR, Female Teacher, 2016 Personal Interview)

To sum up, universalism leads to exclusionary process because: 1) it is based on arguments based on scientific evidence of studies conducted in particular places and extrapolated to policy interventions in the developing world but little emphasis on contextual definitions of childhood are provided and 2) supposes a standardization of the attention (uniformity of programs) where indicators were defined at the policy level but not locally. In a similar way Joseph Tobin contrasts Early Childhood Education in different cultural settings (Japan, France and US) to question the universality of standards in US and arguing for “standards should reflect local values and concerns and not be imposed across cultural divides” (2005: 426). Therefore, universalism also has the implicit idea that quality standards are also universal and general.

⁶ There are 6 basic components to which these standards are formulated: i) Family, community and social networks ii) Health and nutrition iii) Pedagogical and educational process iv) Human Resource v) Infrastructure vi) Management

3.2 The quality discourse and its influence in policy implementation

Second, following the above discussion about quality, I argue that this component (the second policy objective) and the modernization of programs do not reflect the situated experiences of childcare in *Altos de la Florida* since it is based on the ‘expert’ discourse on what constitutes ‘good parenting practices’ ‘good childcare’ and a ‘good services’. Instead of this, quality should also reflect local concerns and values beyond the binaries of what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Viruru 2005: 16). Issues on quality have been widely discussed by ECD scholars like Dahlberg et al (2007) who argues that is necessary to unpack this quality component and the implicit ideology that it has, “[T]he concept of quality is one particular discourse of evaluation produced from within a particular paradigm (modernity) and inscribed with the values and assumptions of that paradigm [...] The language of quality speaks of universal expert-derived norms and the extent to which services or practices conform to these norms” (2007:8)

In this matter, the national strategy seeks to improve the quality of services through the modernization of programs and the application of international standards (Bernal 2014). Moreover, the strategy’s design had the support of international organizations where the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank played an important role. In fact, in most of the policy documentation reviewed (From Zero to Always 2011, 2012, 2013) it is continuously mentioned the support of these two organizations and their international experts. In addition, recent evaluations on the ‘quality’ of programs under the policy framework, showed that there is still a hard work to do to achieve ‘high quality’ in the attention (Bernal 2014). However, it is important to acknowledge who determines the quality standards and based on what kind of evidence. Thereby, evaluations and monitoring have been conducted based on international scales such as Class, ECERS and ITERS⁷

This quality discourse has had a strong influence in the implementation of programs under the Zero to Always framework. Thereby, practitioners in the field come to implement their programs influenced also by these policy guidelines, which tends to be partialized and impose certain ways of doing and thinking. In *Altos de la Florida*, this can be reflected with the case of a local NGO, a practitioner which has developed an early childhood program based on the Reggio Emilia model. This organization, is focused on the provision of comprehensive attention (nutrition, care and education) to children from 0 to 5 and their families in 2 different types or care spaces: home-based and the institutional program. Though is important to recognize

⁷ International rate scales used to asses and evaluate quality of early childhood environments and classroom monitoring.

its efforts, this program came with its own ‘agenda’ or model and its ‘adaptation’ and responsiveness to the context is blurred.

3.2.1 Professional expertise vs. Local knowledge

This can be exemplified through the application of the Reggio Emilia approach, a pedagogical model which has its roots on the Italian educational project and the restructuring of the traditional community based program in Colombia. Therefore, I argue that this ‘adaptation’ often named by the professionals of the program as an ‘inspiration’ have discarded historical community ECD practices. Here, issues of power emerged regarding the experience of people that had worked previously in the community based program. It seems like relations between professional pedagogues and local people were strained because of the ‘professional preparation’ from teachers as opposed to ‘experimental formation’ from community caregivers.

Consequently, this adaptation process have marginalized the ways of knowing of people that have lived and worked more than 20 years in Altos de la Florida with children, families and community members. These ways of knowing and doing can be defined as “[t]he wealth of internal resources within communities that have been developed over time, regenerated, appropriated and incorporated into hybrid coping strategies and social network that form the central element of community capital” (Okwany et al 2011:21). Thus, this local knowledge have also shaped the caregiving system based on the needs and community’s features. This also showed that that ECD is a fluid process whose significance and meaning varies according to the context.

However, conversations with the program staff, and those in power positions often times disqualified these practices comparing them with what the program promoted. During the fieldwork these tensions between the professional program staff and community mothers were continuously present in the dialogues sustained with each group. Accordingly the next section explores how Reggio Emilia approach was adapted to the Colombian and this local context and how its adaptation was justified based on the notion of ‘high quality model’ and its international and professional recognition in the field. Then, it is foregrounded the existing tension between the pedagogues and local people on the knowledge and ‘best’ practices for early childhood development.

3.2.2 Pedagogical approaches: The danger of Reggio Emilia Industry

Reggio Emilia is a small town in the north of Italy, highly recognized worldwide for its public education system. This public system of child care and education has been built during the last 50 years which currently has an international center for innovation in Europe and is a reference point for many educators and early childhood professionals around the world (Edwards et al 2011). During the last

decades, this approach has become in a referring for ECD practitioners in terms of pedagogy, social innovation and education in the early years. This international recognition came from the opinion of international experts and the ability that it has developed to travel around the world, that is to say, the industry that has created for educators, researchers and even policy makers to access and see how the public education system in this place work and how to ‘implement’ it their different countries. Therefore, nowadays there is an international network called ‘Reggio Children’ that act as a worldwide advocacy machinery⁸ where different services where different services are offered including, consultancy, workshops, exhibitions and professional development programs.

This international recognition, has been taken for granted as a mark of ‘quality’. Therefore, American practitioners, educators and even researchers use it as a way to legitimate its application in their programs, since it also brings a kind of prestige to be part of it. The local NGO is a current member of this network, and part of the interest to adapt this approach to their educational project was based on this ‘trust’ that the model generated for its international recognition:

‘Reggio Emilia is not a curriculum, it is an educational model that has too much diffusion worldwide and has contributed too much around the human development. In our beginnings we had the idea to reaching many communities and Reggio has arrived to many communities around the world. For us this was important because it gives you the ‘trust’, for instance the Harvard School validates it, it says that is absolutely contemporary, innovative, the best educational bet of the 21st century in the world.’ (MAL, Pedagogical Director 2016, personal interview)

Nevertheless, at this point it was important to question, according to who is the best educational pedagogy? For whom is this educational proposal? Accordingly, I argue that the danger of this complex industry is that it has become in a kind of ‘truth’ that has been legitimated by ‘experts’ as valid knowledge and may be applied indistinctively in different contexts. This is consistent, with the analysis done by Richard Johnson, which is based on Foucault’s concept of ‘*regimes of truth*’ to explain the way in which ECD and Reggio Emilia approach define what are “both good and bad practices [...] We are so confident with this knowledge, that we easily and clearly what is the bad curricular and pedagogical practices by making them easily understandable and identifiable, and highly predictable” (1999:69) Consequently, this ‘inspiration’ masks the importation of specific ‘truths’ that may be unrealistic to the childcare and education settings where is pretended to be implemented.

Thereby, it is important to clear out the structure that the organization has, in order to understand better how it works at the local level in the communities where the program has been implemented. In management terms, there is a national office where ECD ‘experts’ and pedagogues are in charge of the program’s

⁸ For more information see <http://www.reggiochildren.it/?lang=en>

administration and regulation, this implies constantly updates about what is happening in the field, the production of documents and reports about the achievements and fails in the centers, and monitoring and evaluation of each ECD center. Thus, when I asked about the approach to Reggio Emilia, I was addressed to the pedagogical director and coordinators which had a 'clear' knowledge about what it was philosophy about, how it was pretended to work etc. These dialogues, let me to think about the position of these people and the role they played spreading the pedagogical guidelines based on Reggio Emilia.

Here, I found people from different ages and professional backgrounds. Some of them travelled to Reggio Emilia and studied the pedagogical model for a long time, which gave them a 'privileged' position, authority, and ultimately power to define what is good or bad care and education practices. This made me reflect, that when the organization came to the community is likely a colonial practice. On one hand, because ECD was framed, as a program with a particular curriculum and development outcomes which collides with the historical and social conceptions that early childhood had in this community. On the other hand, because when I talked to people about the process of entrance to the community, their answers suggested a disruptive way to approach it:

"We asked ourselves about the time, women have proposed that the program can be implemented in different ways. However 'we' have analyzed it and we came to the conclusion that is better to start immediately, to change the educational paradigm that they have and develop it gradually" (MAL, Pedagogical Director 2016, personal interview)

The term 'we' referred to the pedagogical team that designed the curriculum and coordinate the whole splice process in the community. Thus, it seems like that a top-down approach was taken, disrupting rather than inclusive. Hence, I agree with Johnson (1999:71) when he argues that the "tradition in ECD profession that tends to pervade it, is precisely the colonial practice based on top down approaches, in which those in positions of power (like the pedagogues) bring the 'valuable cultural capital to share with the marginalized childcare workers" (1999:71). In this case, the NGO 'experts' on Reggio Emilia are those with power to shape through the quality discourse of this pedagogical approach, practices in the centers and the everyday 'doing' of caregivers and teachers.

3.2.3 The case of Community caregivers: situated ways of knowing and doing

As opposed to that, is the case of 'community mothers', women that have worked in the ECD sector for long time in the community based program that is 'migrating' to the new policy program. These community mothers, most of them were formed in the field with difficult labor conditions (underpaid, lack of security) but with an enormous willingness to take care of children in their communities where they are

part of. As part of the new policy framework that has been changing during the last years, is required that these community mothers ‘migrate’ to the institutional programs (ECD centers and Home-based), this transition is supposed to be gradually, integrating their knowledge that they have acquired with their experiences taking care of children and providing a service (day care) to families.

For me it was important to know them since as members of the community they are an invaluable source of knowledge that perfectly know how the care system in the local spaces has been created and worked historically in this context. At the end, this gave me the larger picture, multiple epistemologies that have been neglected by dominant positions and produced knowledge in the ECD field by ‘experts’ (Díaz and Swadener 2002).

Before the transition to the program, these women worked in their households adapted with materials and furniture to take care of children from the community in a ‘day care’ modality. Normally they took care of 12-14 children and receive a state financial support. During conversations with them, they told me their stories on how they began in the field and different experiences they lived through it. Though they had to follow a national guideline with the minimum requirements to provide the service, they also had flexibility and autonomy to create care strategies according to the needs of children and their families. Additionally, the relation with families were much closer since she was perceived by the community not only the as person who take care of children, but also the friend, the confident, the supportive neighbor of people in the community. In dialogues with some of them about their experience and formation they pointed out:

‘I used to have autonomy, ICBF gave you the space to do things, of course there was monitoring and you needed to accomplish certain requirements but at the end you had to developed your own strategies according to the community needs’ (LR, Female-Teacher 2016, Personal interview)

‘The families that I had previously transited to this program because they know me, they know how I work and trust me because I also know their life stories, their children and their needs’ (AC Female-Teacher 2016, personal interview)

‘Of course we did not have all the means to do our labor and a high quality service, we worked with our ‘nails’ but despite of that we felt that we did a contribution to our community, we looked out for partnerships and resources to work with, sometimes we felt that this is not recognized’ (GR Female Teacher 2016, Personal interview)

During the fieldwork I observed women passionate for what they do, albeit many of them don’t had professional studies, they always highlighted how their experiences and life in the community have also formed them to know how to deal with children, take care of them and promote their wellbeing. This, despite the difficult conditions that they had to face (insufficient budget, lack of social security). However, these narratives contrast with those in ‘power’ positions about the process

the adaption process and ‘new’ program implementation. Thus, in practice, these caregivers were seen as “knowledge brokers but not knowledge producers” (Díaz and Swadener 2002: 53). This can be seen in their perspectives about the transition process which hasn’t been easy. They now face a new approach that sometimes differ from their own ways of knowing and doing. Findings revealed how issues of power affect their everyday lives and children’s and families’ lives. Here, evidence suggests contradictions and assumptions of their previous work that not only disqualify but label them continuously as ‘deficient’.

‘The work with them is very difficult, because we had to start with the construction of relations between children and the teachers, teacher and the parents and even between parents and their child. We are conscious that it wouldn’t be an easy process. First, they did not want a change. These women most of them had most than 30 years taking care of the children in their communities, where they had autonomy but also the ‘worst’ way to interact with children, there wasn’t any awareness of education, so is understandable that the change is overwhelming. Moreover, the environment in those houses was the worst, the communication with parents was informal, they were leaders’ (OQ, Pedagogical Coordinator 2016, Personal Interview)

Regarding their experience, pedagogues referred to them as having an insufficient knowledge on childhood development, focused on care but without any pedagogical standards and sophistication that ECD requires:

First we had to construct relations that previously does not exist, we had a mother in her home that cooked and look out at children and that’s it, there wasn’t a relation, their work was only about care and this is not enough for children’ (MAL, Pedagogical Director, personal interview 2016)

‘We are aware of the concerns, limitations and we try to understand them is not easy to integrate them, is not easy to change, they had different customs and ways of doing that were very poor’ (Program Staff 2016 personal interview)

Though, there is a big commitment from the program staff with these women to recognize, mediate, negotiate and integrate their visions, beliefs and customs to their everyday routines and try to do it the best way possible. Notwithstanding, the assumptions and negative labels around their previous experiences, the community care system, unconsciously neglect also the richness of the socio-cultural context and the relations that have historically existed in this place. Even so, is important to acknowledge also the efforts and positive changes that this transition has caused in their lives. First, their labor conditions have improved, they now have a more fair salary and count with social security which has an impact in their economy. Secondly, they have now access to scholarships if they want to get more professional qualification. Therefore, these efforts are important and have an impact in the care work sector, which historically has been economically marginalized by the state.

Thus, my analysis is consistent with the postcolonial, where some of its exponents (Viruru and Cannella 2004, Díaz and Swadener 2002) expose the way issues of power have influenced the way knowledge is constructed. Some of the debates have pointed out how in the ECD field childhood discourses can “disqualify certain forms of knowledge creating power for certain groups and subjugate others” (Cannella 1997: 42) based on certain values and on a specific notion on childhood that may temper the local voices and alternative knowledge’s around this . Although is important to recognize the effort that current policy and practitioners in the field are doing to provide consistent programs also important to look carefully how ‘improvement’ and ‘adaptation’ processes of programs and pedagogical models (in this case a Eurocentric approach) is happening in the ground. Overall, discursive practices on ‘high quality’ ECD services have disqualified not only the local knowledge but discarded ECD as a lifelong process embedded in communities and cultures as opposed to the delivery of a policy, program or project.

As pointed out, this quality discourse promoted by government and by practitioners, has implicit issues of power that influences the way caregiving is been provided in localities such as *Altos de la Florida*. In other words, is necessary to be aware, not only for whom is this improvement and best practices and who is behind this process. The latter, can lead to a more liberatory praxis where all the voices are not only heard but really integrated. This because often times ‘adaptation’ comes with underlying values, norms and rules that may differ from those of people and cultural communities where this process is taking place. Resulting from this, are the silenced voices of the community caregivers in this particular case, where is neglected the historical, the community’ cultural and social context where this program is being implemented.

Therefore, acknowledging these power dynamics between the pedagogical expertise and the local knowledge it is possible to think about as Diaz and Swadener pointed out that only “when the field moves beyond the rhetoric and the ‘fashion shows’ and beyond the genetically driven scientific epistemologies will the humanization and the liberation of childcare teachers, children, and families begin to evolve (Diaz and Swadener 2002: 50).

3.3 Family strengthening: The in-between children and family situated experiences of caregiving

Lastly, policy discourse emphasizes the importance to strengthen families as an important actor in early years (From Zero to Always 2013). However, I argue that if we took into consideration that policy targets children in high levels of vulnerabilities such as poverty (National Congress 2009), this strengthening takes

for granted that because families have economic deprivations, these are also traduced in a 'poor care' for their children. Thus, as Guillies argues in her study of family policies in the UK, implicitly this approach assumes that 'socially excluded' parents that do not have access to information and assistance are unable to enhance an effective parenting (2005:70). Accordingly, it is important to see how policy is conceptualizing care and childrearing in order to tease out the underlying assumptions about the 'deficiencies' that families in these vulnerable context have. In this matter, the strategy proposes:

Regarding the childcare and childrearing, the strategy seeks to strengthen the ties between children, their families and with their caregivers through the creation of enriched, safe, protective, and inclusive environments. Accordingly, this objective is composed by two components that include the 'qualification' and the 'accompaniment' to families. These are understood as the actions directed to support and prepare the families so they have all the elements needed to strengthen the bond with its children which have the general purpose to construct, transform or strengthen the family dynamics" (From Zero to Always 2013: 142-144)

When this is applied to context of urban poverty indistinctively, concepts such as 'strengthen' 'support' and 'accompaniment' speaks out to the deficiencies that these families have so they need these processes in order to 'correct' them. For instance, the terms 'support' and 'prepare' describe the "method by which parents are encouraged to reflect on and regulate their performance, through reference to 'expert' advice and training" (Gillies 2005:77) that the strategy offers.

Notwithstanding, it provides little account on what families already provide to their children and focus on the possibilities for change that the strategy offers. Thus, the component of 'qualification' includes 'educational' activities to the construction and the enrichment of 'new' practices and patterns of relations (From Zero to Always 2013:144) as if the existing ones are problematic or simply don't fit in this ECD model. Thus, families are implicitly framed as deficient so it is necessary their 'schoolification' (Munene and Okwany 2016:11) so they can be trained in 'appropriate' childcare and parenting practices. This is consistent with the argument provided by Penn (2005, 2012) in her analysis of the World Bank programs on ECD, where she states that poverty is often times equated as a personal failure instead of a structural issue. This present a single way to interpret poverty as the lack of resources which justify the 'deficient-corrective' and interventionist approach to ECD.

This 'deficient' and 'interventionist' approach on ECD started to be challenged in recent years by different studies such as the Young Lives project⁹ that "aims to improve understandings of causes and consequences of childhood

⁹ A longitudinal study on causes and consequences of childhood poverty. This study is conducted in developing countries such as Vietnam, India, Ethiopia and Peru

poverty” (Bourdillon and Boyden 2014: 3) looking at the complex dimensions of it. Accordingly, some of their findings suggest that for instance in the case of “children’s psychosocial well-being the effect of the family socioeconomic status is weak or insignificant” (2014:6). This study adds voice to these findings since it aims to show the larger picture and not only the deficiencies to demonstrate that even in difficult conditions, where family decisions are constrained, they also try everything they can, to provide a nurturing environment for their children. Additionally, latinamerican researchers like the Argentinian Carla Remorini, have questioned the way in which “states’ and international organizations programs for indigenous children and families in Latinamerica prevails a negative vision about the environment and childrearing, only recognize the deficit aspect and discard the positive aspects from the social relations and the practices in these contexts” (Remorini 2013: 816)

Under this framing, knowledge about childrearing is thus “portrayed by policy as an essential resource which parents must have access to in order to fulfil their moral duty as good parents” (Gillies 2005:78). Hence, power dynamics have shown how policy and practitioners impose certain knowledge creating an ‘expert’ discourse on ECD and marginalizing local sources. Here, I added voice to the call made by postcolonial theory exponents that “the creation of knowledge in the field is not for elitist child development researchers only.” (Díaz and Swadener 2002:53). Therefore, the following sections aims to explore how caregiving in Altos de la Florida is experienced, revealing elements of the developmental niche in this micro-context which also contributes to the production of knowledge that should inform policy and practices as well.

3.4 ‘If there is a will, there is a way’: Childhood and Childcare in Altos de la Florida

As mentioned above, people in Altos de la Florida as an urban poor locale are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities that marginalize them. We saw previously with the case of community mothers which for many years played an important role in caregiving within this community, but which have been disregarded by the program and the ‘adaptation’ process that they are currently living within the program and its pedagogical approach. Now, through the mixed qualitative methods used during the fieldwork which include dialogues (in depth-semi structured interviews) and participant observation, it was possible not only to reflect on the valuable sources of knowledge that stories illustrate but to locate them as speaking subjects of ECD knowledge. Accordingly I argue that despite the adverse conditions people in Altos de la Florida developed adaptive strategies on childcare and childrearing that contribute widely to child development (socio emotional, physical); these strategies were shaped also by the social and cultural setting but have had little resonance in the policy framework.

Correspondingly, the developmental niche (Super and Harkness 1986,2013) helped to tease out the situated experiences and the particular intersections, meanings and developmental processes that people in Altos de la Florida give to childhood, and childcare. Findings revealed that childhood and childcare in this urban poor locale are experienced in varied ways. Thereby, reciprocity, the non-division of care/education, care sibling and social responsibility and fatherhood are some features that intersect with variables such as class and gender. This illustrates the distance between cultural settings and policy and program agendas. As Harkness et al state this gap difficult contextually responsive programs that may be appropriated into family life and a full understanding of it would have the potential to enrich policies and programs around the world. (2013:157)

3.4.1 Networks and Reciprocity: the community Level

At the community level, people in this setting has developed a collaborative system to face the limitations that they have in terms of access to services. In this task, children interact and were able to participate in different activities, since cooperation and collaboration with the neighbors is an important matter for life learning. For instance, social networking among the community involves the provision of informal day care services by neighbors. Here, I had the opportunity to informally talk with one person, 'Doña Martha', she helps to take care children from the neighbors in the block when parents or caregivers cannot stay with them. This revealed another constraint that families face in this particular context. Access to Day Care facilities is difficult, since the community mothers migrate to the new program, 'day care' for children under 3 years old wasn't provided as usually used to be. Consequently, day care facilities are scarce. As opposed to this, the home based program promoted by the government and implemented by practitioners such as the local NGO, , provide a service that only involve 2 home visits and 4 community meetings per month but is not a service on a daily basis. Thus, collaboration within neighbors when someone needs is strong.

Another example illustrative of this reciprocity and social network is the case of limited access to public services. Here, since the neighborhood is not legalized and is located in a peri-urban area, the access to public services was constrained. One of these limitations, is the access to water. Thus, families had to buy water from a private distributor and carry it until their homes. This is a whole system of collaboration because households were usually far from the main 'road', so it implies to buy, help to carry and transport to the households. In this kind of activity, children usually participated carrying small pots. During this journey, I helped a teacher who lives in this community to carry the tanks up to her house and while I was doing so, many children in the block were outside their homes helping in this task. Particularly, younger children (2-4) were very excited during this activity. After this experience, I talked to Olga the teacher about it and she told me that

Everybody in the community (including children) when the truck arrives helps each other to carry the water, even if there is nobody at home before the truck comes you coordinate with someone from the community to help you filling the tanks for the household. If you don't do that probably you have to wait up to 20 days later or even a month to have drinkable water'. (OR, Female Teacher 2016 Personal Interview)

In this sense, without any distinctions of age, this kind of activity were practiced by all the members in the community even the youngest. This, reveal a sense of collaboration among the community members that was valued and important for children to learn about. Cooperation among the community members or neighbors household and within the community was constantly present in the dialogues that I sustained with caregivers in this matter.

This is consistent with the argument presented by different scholars such as Barbara Rogoff whose studies in Guatemalan communities and her concept of 'Guided participant learning' (2003) revealed the way childhood in this context is lived based on the experiences and interactions in the physical and social settings where children's lives occur. In addition, as Okwany et al pointed out in their study in Uganda and Kenya with ethnic groups, whose finding show that "community social networks emerged as a vital aspect to strengthen the overstretched safety net for self -sustenance and for protection and care for their children" (2011: 129).

3.4.2 Learning for lifelong: Childcare and Education in Altos de la Florida

As stated before, the construction of the 'child' has changed over time in diverse historical contexts (Cannella 1997). However, the definition of the modern child seems to neglect different childhoods in diverse realities and contexts as larger cross cultural studies have illustrated (Okwany et al 2011, Serpell 2011, Rogoff 2003, Super and Harkness 1986). During the fieldwork, visits to different households and families allowed me to watch how children in this particular place live their lives and consequently what kind of notions around childhood have been constructed over time. The study was done bearing in mind an intergenerational lens, taking into consideration the family history in time and space an how these have influenced the notions of childhood in this setting.

Based on this, I initiated conversations with primary caregivers including mothers, fathers, grandparents and siblings, about their daily routines. Here, most of the participants were dedicated to work within the households, and in their description of their daily activities, although children were present, that doesn't mean that their routines were only based on the presence of children in the household. Conversely, children at households participated in these activities (cooking, cleaning, and socialization with neighbors) in different ways. For instance, is natural that a mom took the child with her while she was cooking and talk to him/her about what she was doing, meanwhile the child watched what was going

on. This way, since they are little they participate in the main activities that sustain the household and these are conceived as opportunities for life learning.

Thus, childhood in this context is fluid and non-fixed and offer alternative understanding of it that may differ with the modern notion of the child as universal, dependent isolated and innocent. On the contrary, in this context, childhood is part of a social context and is articulated with the larger family and community systems where they belong to. As Dahlberg et al noted that children in the postmodernist perspective are viewed as “existing through its relations with others and always in a particular context” (2007: 43). In Altos de la Florida since most of their inhabitants came from rural areas to the city result from the internal displacement that they were suffering during the past, I found different notions on childhood that converge in the physical and social setting where children live and the practices and customs regarding childrearing in this particular context based on their past and present experiences.

To illustrate this, another example is the way childcare and education are experienced here. Although they are part of the ongoing children’s development process in Altos de la Florida, these perspectives differ from the notions promoted by the program where care and education seems to be two separated things. According to the experience of children in this context and the opportunities of learning that are present in these settings (physical and social) care and education are entangled and present in the different places where children’s everyday routines take place.

Thus, as mentioned, these daily routines and the activities with caregivers within and outside the household constitutes not only the perspectives on childhood that show it as socially constructed but an opportunity to learn and acquire some skills that are meaningful and important for lifelong according to the context. The relations of cooperation and collaboration among neighborhoods, the social responsibility among the members of the household, including activities of maintenance (social reproduction), and the proper manners on how to behave in certain social situations provide a widely example on how care and education converge in multiple forms rather than being separated.

This contrast with the policy and program notions on childcare where though they promoted a comprehensive or holistic wellbeing of children (which include education, care and nutrition) in practice they continuing perpetuating the care-education division. In this context, ‘home-based program’ where there is an accompaniment and support to the family through the ‘teacher’ that comes to home to provide ‘pedagogical’ support to children and their families to promote what is ‘good care and education’ and indeed children’s holistic development. However, often times these practices are often seen by caregivers as something apart from them and therefore the interest in the ‘pedagogical activities’ during the family

encounters tended to be low. For instance, in dialogues with one of the teachers who was part of the community home based program before told me about the delivery of the child's progress reports to the parents and how they feel overwhelmed with them.

'They do not usually understand these reports, pedagogical terms are strange for them, we try to explain in a simple manner what they mean but even though is something that they do not easily understand' (OR Female-Teacher, Personal Interview 2016)

This, unintentionally perpetuate the artificial division care-education and marginalize the childcare provided at home as inferior with respect to education goals. Therefore, the possibilities that this caregiving micro-context offers to learning are often ignored. Without acknowledging the enormous efforts that are being made by the practitioners in the field to promote holistic wellbeing for children some of their activities are imposed instead of negotiated and tend to blur the multiple ways of nurturing learning that this physical and social setting offer to their children. In a similar way, Pugh and Duffy (2013) argues that this division continues to pose a problem showing a relative neglect of care and its meaning and importance in particular contexts. Moreover, these particular distinctions in practice not only undermine the goal of a more comprehensive attention to early childhood but neglect the "home and community as foundational spaces for early learning and parents/caregivers as foundational teachers and 'Educarers'" (Munene and Okwany 2016) in this context.

3.4.3 The displaced condition: Ties with the extended family

Another component that illustrates how caregiving is experienced in Altos de la Florida is the condition of rural migrants that had most participants in which ties with their extended family was key. When I asked about the reasons of migration, the answers were varied. The main factor was violence, since they used to live in areas where the armed conflict was intense, so they preferred to get out of these places to secure their lives. This experience was traumatic for most of them because they had to leave everything and practically start a new life in the city which at the beginning can be a hostile environment for rural migrants. In the pursuit of new opportunities they came to Altos de la Florida because even when the access to services were difficult and that they were still struggling to legalize and finish their houses in economic terms the cost of life was low (rents and food).

They also talked about the 'adaptation' to the city environment and describe it as a continuing 'struggle' and a hard environment to raise their children due to insecurity conditions. María a 75 years old women who cared for her little grandchildren express this as follows

'Life in the city is hard for us who came from rural areas, here you find a different world, that is far away to the way you used to live in the village, things were easy there, you do not have to worry about children's security and wellbeing' (MB Grandmother of 7 children 2016, Personal interview)

However, they managed to take advantage of this insecurity to maintain the contact with their extended families. This was illustrated in the case of school holidays. As members of the extended family were still in the rural areas in the farms, they take advantage of it and sent their children there for holidays: ¹⁰

'Here there is a high insecurity, there are gangs and drugs and I don't want my children to be exposed to that, so I prefer to send them to the farm with their grandfathers so they spend better the time during holidays. (laugh) There they really know what real work is' (OF, mother of 8 children, 2016 personal interview)

In this matter, most of them mentioned that they still have contact with their relatives in the villages and farms, and one strategy was to send their children on holiday. This negotiation revealed different things: i) When children are sent to the villages, parents can have extra money because mother is liberated from the caregiving so she can work outside and get some extra money during this time ii) Children travel with some money for their relatives as gratitude to host them during this time iii) They explained that when children went to the villages not only children but relatives get very happy because a *"child always brings happiness"* (LB mother of 4 children 2016 Personal interview) iv) when children returned to the city, they came with food and animals (chickens) and learnt different things about the rural life. Hence, this unveiled also a system of reciprocity and collaborative within the link urban-rural that play an important role in children's socio-emotional development and wellbeing.

This is consistent with the findings from studies in African contexts, about the capacities and strengths that families have to provide nurturing and loving care for their children (e.g the HIV/AIDS crisis) contributing to the holistic wellbeing of children (Abebe and Asse 2007). At this point is important to highlight the social resilience that the inhabitants in Altos de la Florida have developed. Taking into consideration that most of the families there, suffered severe traumas after leaving their villages, a process of 'collective resilience' (Hernández 2002: 334) has resulted in the implementation of coping strategies that helped them to overcome the traumas together and sustain themselves on a daily basis as was stated with the example above.

This made me reflect on how the place also influences the way children are raised and how the social and physical environment could affect the strategies to

¹⁰ This was present in families where there are oldest siblings who regularly study. When they are in holidays from school parents send youngest siblings with them to the villages, sometime with an adult sometimes only them

raise children from the community, these perceptions come predominantly from the grandparents with I talked and less present in the mothers who probably are more adapted or resilient to the new styles of life that the city offers. Nonetheless, this factor does not make them to change the perception of childhood.

3.4.4 Social responsibility: Older Siblings also raise a child

Another situation that gave me a sense on how childhood had been constructed and experienced in Altos de la Florida was care sibling. The question of care sibling has been an important issue that has had low attention but that is part of the daily lives and reality of families in this context, not only from the policy but from the program which have little consideration of the role that oldest children played in the processes of learning of youngest children.

In this matter, cross-cultural research in different places has revealed that care sibling is an important aspect on child's learning especially in vulnerable communities where ECD services are still restricted (Munene and Okwany 2016). Thus, their findings showed that older siblings participate in children development in a natural way and constituting an opportunity for learning for both of them, that is the case of studies done by Pence and Nsamenang (2008) in sub-Saharan countries in which empirical evidence illustrated how older siblings provide care to younger children when their main caregiver is busy doing other activities. The findings of this study are consistent with this argumentation.

Evidence suggested that care sibling in this community is an important component of the caregiving system within the households, it included an active participation of them. I had the opportunity to dialogue with children from 5 to 13/15 years old that were active caregivers in their homes. Besides this, most of my observations regarding this aspect were siblings talking to their young siblings in a way where they teach them about different everyday routines and 'good manners' regarding the feeding and the personal looking.

For people in this community, care sibling constitutes also an opportunity to teach older children about the importance of social responsibility. This was in a sense, a continuation of beliefs and practices from the cultures of origin where families come from (Harkness et al 2013). Most of the women told me that care sibling was a common practice in their regions and a moral duty on which children get a sense of responsibility inside the household. Additionally, some of these siblings emphasized on the importance to support their mothers and grandmothers through the interaction with young children while they were doing other activities in the household or outside it. This childcare, includes not only to feed them and look out at them, but dialogues on how to dress themselves, the importance to eat

at the proper time and sometimes strategies to regulate the behavior of babies when they were crying.

Mafe (12): Who left the food there?

Mom: The baby did not eat...

Mafe (12) to child (1 and a half) Why you don ate at lunch? There is your lunch I will not give you anymore... Please take it later, you have to eat because if you don't you are not going to grow strong and healthy

After this the child picked the dish up with food and showed it to me.

This practice (care sibling) collides with policy guidelines and in a sense with the program. Here, although the policy and the program recognize the important role that siblings play in the childcare, in practice it constitutes a kind of 'barrier' within the program. For instance, older siblings rarely had space to participate in the family meetings under the program and there was not a clear strategy on how to approach the issue. Rather there was a restriction for them because children could only assist with the main caregiver who should be an adult. In addition, the idea that young children should be in charge of an adult, neglect the capacities that these human beings (siblings) have in order to provide not only childcare but learn together in this process.

3.4.5 Fatherhood: presence in the absence

Men in Altos de la Florida worked primarily in the informal sector, thereby, since children born their presence in the first years of life of their sons is scarce. In this particular setting, women are the primary caregivers because men have to work for long hours to provide the household' economic sustain. Within the policy guidelines, an approach of gender equity is pointed out to guide the relations between men and women without a predominance of no one (From Zero to Always 2013). This aims to have an equitable sight on the care responsibility care and rearing to be shared by women and men. However, as Gillies points out, "policy neutrality disguises the fact that it are predominantly mothers who maintain primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of their children while fathering is something the majority of men are forced to fit around full time work" (2005: 78).

In the field work I could see it in the families where I talked with, that the presence of men in childrearing is important but is constrained by structural forces. At the end is being reproduced a gendered care system where mothers are in charge of children and fathers are the 'breadwinners' in charge of the household economic sustenance. This is linked to the existing tension between care and work that women historically have experienced since issues of care and rearing are awarded to them. Moreover, when I talked to program staff about these issues of fatherhood and male

involvement in childrearing, they told me that this involvement was low because Soacha is a “Patriarchal” society where ‘Machismo’ prevails, and therefore males are not interested in caregiving. Nonetheless, there are no strategies to address this issue, so practitioners even reproduce and normalize that childcare is governed by gendered rules.

“Here the community is very patriarchal, the men are power figures, and with fathers the relation is almost null. They are not interested in these themes” (OQ, Pedagogical Coordinator 2016 Personal Interview)

As opposed to these notions and perspectives, the dialogues that I sustained with men and women during the visits revealed a high interest to participate and have an active involvement in caregiving practices, but issues of shame and job conditions were definitely determinants in it. Added to that, due to these structural constraints, families have developed diverse strategies where ‘father is present in the absence’. Here, even when the physical presence is difficult for them they seek for ways to be present in their children’s lives by supporting them in education tasks, readapting sleep hours for little children so they can share little time with babies when they come back home after the work, and use of technology (e.g a fix hour to do a phone call so a child can recognize that is her father who was calling and talked to her”).

‘Even when they are not present most of the time, they are really supportive – not only with money but being loving and playing with the baby in his days off, but also with the oldest he helps with the school work and tries to explain what they do not understand ’ (RG, mother of 4 children 2016, Personal Interview)

However, when I talked with men from the current generation who have time to be with children in the different care spaces (home, community spaces and in the center during the family meetings) they were very shy with the situation and talked with reservations. During a conversation a man express:

“I like to come to these meetings, I used to come more regularly because you can share with your children and learn some things, but if you see I am the only man here, so I stopped coming because I feel ashamed, but at home I like to stay with children”(MP father of two children 2016, Personal Interview)

The perspectives and voices of males were diverse. These conversations however, give me the perception that gender roles are fluid and vary across the families that I worked with. Accordingly, I add voice to the studies done by Latin-American researchers that aimed to demonstrate how fatherhood is socially constructed and also influenced by social forces, challenging the hegemonic idea of fatherhood based in historical patriarchy (Gutmann and Viveros 2005).

In addition to the latter scenario, this poses a tension in work-family relations since women are considered the main caregivers, highlighting the gendered

norms that still surround childcare practices. Many of the women who I talked with, wanted to work and share the economic household charge with the males. However the absence of day care facilities as explained before, diffculted their access to the labor market since they won't leave their babies alone while their brothers came back from school or with the neighbors. However, some of them worked in temporary jobs (when they send children on vacation). As some of the female participants expressed:

'Yes, I would like to work, but is difficult to leave children because you don't trust them to anyone, so I stayed at home with my babies' (AS, mother of 3 children 2016, Personal Interview)

These findings made me reflect on the reproduction of gender norms in practice, in a way policy discourse promotes gender equality because they allow the mother to go out to the labor market but the questions here are: why in the labor market and is not recognized as legitimate and paid work the one that they do at home? In addition what happen to men that are usually neglected from this gender discourse that is usually associated with women?. Some of the conclusions is that these structural factors at the end presents tensions with the policy discourse on ECD. In practice, there is a continuation of these gender roles that not only affect women but men as well who are seen as the economic providers at home being subjected of unfair labor conditions and a kind of 'discrimination' from the program, affecting at the end the holistic children's wellbeing and development in this context.

4. Concluding thoughts

To sum up, throughout the paper was showed that ECD policy influences local practices imposing a specific ECD model that is framed within a Western framing. This, model has been justified based on a dominant narrative where neuroscientific and economic 'value' have become in the main arguments to justify government investment on ECD programs for 'disadvantaged' children. Using a postcolonial critique lens, a critical analysis of the Colombian strategy 'From Zero to Always' revealed the hidden assumptions that issues of universalism, quality and family strengthening implies in marginalized contexts such as urban poor locales. Accordingly, it was illustrated how implementation by practitioners such as the NGO, is not only influenced by this policy framework but also reinforce these critical assumptions in their everyday practices such as the 'adaptation' of a pedagogical model in a community where caregiving has developed and constructed differently. Consequently, as a starting point the analysis found that oppressive discourse practices continue to discredit human beings that live in the margins (Viruru and Cannella 2004)

Certainly, the study went beyond the analysis of these power relations. Using the developmental niche framework to understand and foreground the situated experiences of childcare in Altos de la Florida the findings revealed that: i) Childhood and Childcare are socially constructed where multiple variables intersect and cultural values, customs and practices are shaped according to these intersections ii) Despite the macro structural constraints childhood and childcare were experienced in a way that families in the community of *Altos de la Florida* negotiate and navigate every day to provide a nurturing care to their children that contributes to a holistic wellbeing. This was illustrated through the meanings that are constructed around childhood and childcare and the coping strategies developed by caregivers to respond to the constraints that have affected them over time.

Thereby, this research contributed to challenge the binaries on ECD. Although tensions and contradictions were evidenced, findings also revealed in-between stories from children and their families in local communities who negotiate and navigate every day within these discursive practices that contrast with the discursive practices from policymakers and practitioners. This way, the collaborative and mutual learning process with children and families in their situated contexts, opened a window to transcend the division between global/local and have a better understanding of the adaptations, negotiations and fluid realities of people in urban poor locales where multiple variables converged.

Current debates on ECD state that a dialogue between different disciplines and perspectives to reach a more holistic approach and to come up with more contextually responsive policies and programs is needed (Okwany and Ebrahim 2015, Dahlberg et al 2007, Viruru and Cannella 2004, Viruru 2005, Díaz and Swadener 2002, Díaz 2000, Shonkoff 2010). This research added voice to this claim un-silencing and recognizing the policy marginalized stories of people in an urban poor local where multiple variables converge and intersect. In this context, although policy framework recognize the importance of context and culture in shaping childhood and childcare, is necessary to go beyond this rhetoric. This recognition can be considered a starting point but is not enough. Meaningful engagement with these issues could be traduced in more research on cultural practices of childcare to inform policy and get better articulation with community initiatives.

This way, complementary rather than interventionists approaches could be better used in the policy design and implementation. One of the pathways to do so, is the promotion and use of collaborative research methods in the designing phase. This research approach implies not only listening to the multiple voices of actors in the ECD field but an ongoing dialogue between different narratives in the policy process. A full understanding of their practices, values, customs can facilitate to bridge the gap existing between policy and the situated realities of children in contexts of urban poverty. In turn these practices and customs may constitute a valuable knowledge source that can enrich meaningfully ECD policy and programs nationally.

These approaches starting to be recognized by some of the exponents of developmental theories (Shonkoff 2010). It is already highlighted the importance to have in mind people's beliefs, values, and practices, since there isn't research that link their effects in brain development (neuroscientific side). At the end, this would help also to come up with policies and programs that are more inclusive equitable and sensitive to the cultural setting and context where they are being implemented. Postcolonial critique scholars suggests that in order to liberate the field from this dominant narrative that has permeated the designing and implementation of policies and programs, is necessary to conduct research that not only expose these power relations in the field but to critically engage using research methods that un-silence marginalized voices and vindicate them as valuable sources of knowledge in policy and practice (Días and Swadener 2002, Viruru and Cannella 2004, Viruru 2005)

Finally, policies in Latin America have had a great Western influence, as was shown in the case of Colombia. However, research in which local communities are involved in participatory methods have had little visibility in the design and implementation of policies. Currently there are studies continue to be in force in cultural studies as those by Barbara Rogoff (2003) and Carla Remorini (2000) referenced in the paper. However, further research would contribute to provide

insights of how cultural settings are also important in order to devise more contextually responsive policies.

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Appendix

a. Detailed profile of the study participants

Name initials	Profile
Teachers	
AC	Female, 62 years old. Teacher, mother and grandmother. He had worked for over 23 years in ECD sector, she migrated from the community based program to the local NGO. She is currently study a professional degree but her formation has been empirical. She has lived in the community for 48 years.
LR	56 years old. Teacher and mother. She had worked 7 years in the community.
GR	52 years old. Teacher, mother and grandmother. She worked in the community based program for 25 years. She lived in the community several years but she recently moved on to Bogotá.
OR	40 years old, teacher, mother and grandmother. She had worked in the ECD sector for 12 years she started in the community based program. She didn't have professional formation but had wide experience in working with children in the community. She was the one that had the closest relationship with the neighbors in the community. She was considered a community leader.
RP	45 years old. She had worked in education for about 14 years, but in private centers in different urban poor communities in Bosa, another location near to Soacha.
Family Caregivers	

OM	37 years. Married. Mother of 8 children between 1 to 22 years old and grandmother of 2 children (boy and girl) of 3 years old and 8 months respectively . She migrated to the city 15 years ago, due to the armed conflict. She and her family belongs to an ethnic called Pijaos located in Tolima in the central region of the country.
MB	76 years old. Widow, grandmother of 6 children, she migrated to the city 12 years ago, she has lived with her sons in Altos de la Florida for over 8 years. She takes care of one of her granddaughters while her daughter is working. She maintains close ties with the extended family, whose members still live in the rural area.
LB	36 years old. Married to MB's son, she worked in stationery jobs, with his husband when children are on vacation with the extended family. She takes care of her children at home, (1 year old boy and 3 years old girl.
AB	MB's son, 42 years old works on the construction sector. Stationary work, when he is at home he stays with the kids.
MS	58 years old. Married, grandmother of 5 children between 2 and 13 years old. She migrated from the north coast of the country. She worked at home making and selling clothes and take care of their grandchildren.
RG	36 years old. Married mother of 4 children between 1 and 15 years old. She didn't work and his husband worked in the construction sector. Migrated 15 years ago, from Pacho- Cundinamarca
AS	31 years old. Married. Mother of 3 children (9 months, 6 and 8 years old). She hasn't worked formally since the last child born, her husband work in security.
CR	18 years old. Married. Mother 2 years old child. Came to the city with her family when she as little, worked

	in informal and stationary jobs such as recycling. She take care of her child most of the time.
MP	38 years. Male, retired- pensioner due to a physical disability. Father of 2 children. He takes care of them most of the time, and go to the family meetings within the program.
MG	18 years old. Single. Mother of 2 years old child. She studies in the weekends, and weekly she takes care of her child and her nephew a 3 years old child. She is from Tolima.
MM	OM's daughter. 22 years old. Single. She studies and work, her mother helps her to take care of her son (2 years old).
OR	39 years old. Married. Mother of 4. 3 boys in ages from 13 to 21 years old and a 8 months girl. She migrated to the city 15 years ago, she hasn't work since the girl born. Her husband works in the construction sector.
MAL	44 years old. Pedagogical Director. Single. She has worked for over 15 years in ECD field. She studied in the United States and work there for 13 years in a Reggio Emilia Program. Currently she is the pedagogical director of the local NGO
OQ	36 years old. Pedagogical Coordinator. Married. Has worked in the organization for the last 8 years.
LG	30 years old. Psychosocial professional. She is the corrdinator of the community mothers in the ECD center in soacha. She has worked for 2 years in the organization.
Program staff	Nutritionist, she has worked for the last 7 years in the organization and is in charge of the nutritional component of the program.

