Global Studies of Childhood

Languages and New Technologies on Urban Children's and Adolescents' Representations[1]

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ABSTRACT This article aims to describe the different ways that children in public schools connote values and represent two new educational tools received in the framework of two educational policies, concerning access to foreign languages since first grade, and laptops and digital literacy. How do children and adolescents represent the use of computers and the dominance of a foreign language? How do they imagine that both tools modify people's course of life? What values are associated with the use of them? Also, given that the aim of such policies is mainly to reduce social gaps, the article explores the notion that social inequalities may be evident in the representations that children build around these tools. In order to answer these questions, it analyses data gathered from in-depth interviews conducted in 2012 with a group of students from primary and secondary public schools in Buenos Aires City, in which a 'creativity method' was used as a means to determine students' perceptions about the new educational tools they had acquired. The cases were selected with maximum variation sampling, using the following criterion for differentiating residential status: informal (slum or urban settlement) or formal (upper-middle socio-economic neighbourhood).

Introduction

Globalisation and advances in new communication technologies have shortened distances and changed the reality in which children and adolescents develop today. Information has become available more readily and social interaction has taken on radically different forms, changing both behaviours and expectations around communication, learning and exchange. However, it can be argued that as well as these micro-level changes, access to information and new technologies has also posed a new macro-level paradigm of inclusion/exclusion. This paradigm has been very influential in the Argentinean political agenda over the last decade, especially in terms of public policy demands and debates about the educational system. The three main outcomes were as follows. First, a national education law (National Law No. 26.206) came into force in 2006, significantly changing the Argentine educational system. This law prescribed that, from 2009 in Buenos Aires City, all children attending public primary schools must learn a foreign language [2] (mostly English) from first grade. Second, from 2010, the same district implemented the Integral Plan of Digital Education (in Spanish, PIED) [3], seeking digital inclusion of students and teachers of public primary schools through the delivery of laptops and digital literacy. Third, during the same year, the nationwide Connecting Equality Program [4] (in Spanish, Conectar Igualdad) began operating; this programme had similar goals to the PIED, but with a nationwide reach, affecting adolescents attending secondary schools, special schools and public vocational schools. In this context, it can be inferred that from 2010, children and adolescents in public schools in Buenos Aires City have had access to foreign languages, laptops and digital literacy in their school curriculum.

Languages and New Technologies

This article aims to describe the different ways that these children have come to connote value and represent the new educational tools they received in the framework of these policy changes. It asks three main questions: how do children and adolescents represent computer use and domination of a foreign language? How do they imagine that both tools modify people's course of life? What valuations are associated with the use of them? Also, given that the aim of such policies is mainly to reduce social gaps, the article explores the notion that social inequalities may be evident in the representations that children build around these tools. In order to answer these questions, it draws on data gathered from in-depth interviews conducted in 2012 with a group of students from primary and secondary public schools in Buenos Aires City, in which the researchers used a 'creativity method' as a means to determine students' perceptions about the new educational tools they had acquired. Specifically, subjects were asked to represent their answer to the following questions through a drawing: 'How do you imagine the life of a person is who cannot speak English or use a computer, and, in opposition, how do you imagine the life of a person is who can speak English and knows how to use a computer?' By being asked to imagine contrasting realities, the children were able express their representations of both. This methodology was based on the understanding that in drawings, an 'original' and 'spontaneous' process of denaturation operates (Scribano, 2008). Selected cases from the results of these interviews were chosen for maximum variation sampling, using the following criterion for differentiating residential status: informal (slum or urban settlement) or formal (upper-middle socio-economic neighbourhood).

Background: public policies regarding foreign languages and digital inclusion

A national education law (National Law No. 26.206) was enacted in late 2006 and contained a renewed normative core, composed, among others, from the law of Technical Education Professional No. 26.058 and Education Financing Law No. 26.075. Its main feature was that it defined actions of compliance and the sovereign decision to generate a model of social and economic development, with education as both a priority and a requirement (as stated by the law itself in its general principles) (Filmus, 2008).

About the Teaching of a Foreign Language

Under this law (as part of the socio-educational policies then enacted by the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires), the 'Junior Languages' programme was born, proposing that a foreign language be taught from the first grade for all students in the city's public schools, so that they have the ability to access that knowledge for free. Thus, since 2009, in the same district, the teaching of a second language has been present, starting with first graders in all primary schools dependent on the Directorate of Primary Education (Decree 39/2009); by 2011 this measure had reached all third graders. Furthermore, this initiative was accompanied by an increase in language workload for fourth through seventh grades (grades where languages are taught at a level incorporating dictation, and more).

About the Digital Inclusion Policies

Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, National Education Law No. 20.206 gave rise to digital inclusion policies in Argentina, through the provisions of Article No. 27, which states that there is a 'need to generate pedagogical conditions for the use of new information and communication technologies, for students and teachers in public schools across the country'. Since 2006, then, policies for digital inclusion began to take shape at national and local level, which, in the case of Buenos Aires City, materialised into a plan with two main lines of action (from different sources), according to the educational level of schools. On the one hand, a secondary-level national programme emerged as part of the Connect Equality Program. On the other hand, at the primary level, state intervention came from local government through the PIED. The implementation of this plan included delivering laptops to students (with support service, warranty and maintenance, and specialised care centres), and also the distribution of laptops to teachers as well as other educational actors (managers, librarians, supervisors of the education system, digital teaching

facilitators and facilitators). The Connect Equality Program, unlike the PIED, was a policy of the national government created from the Decree 459/10, and implemented jointly by Office of the President, the National Social Security Administration (ANSES), the Ministry of Education Office, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Federal Planning Public Investment and Services. It began to be implemented in April 2010 through the distribution of netbooks at public secondary school level across the country, as well as to special education schools of all levels and vocational schools dependent on special education.

By March 2012, both educational policies had achieved their implementation targets for children and adolescents in public schools in Buenos Aires City, the population from which respondents were selected for the investigation.

The Research Approach

The research approach was shaped by the understanding that imagination, creativity, expressiveness and experience are condensed as sensible practice in the gap between expressiveness (caused by the imagination and creativity) and the subject's experiences. These are understood by Scribano (2008) as itinerant mediations that occur in the context of relations between positions and conditions of being-in-the-world subjects. This, in turn, implies that in experiences a crossing and re-assimilation of sensations arises, and this and the associated emotions give effect to the flow of everyday life. Indeed, the future of the social experience of living a narrative can be captured through the network of expressiveness (Scribano, 2008, pp. 264-265).

Furthermore, social experiences mediate the different positions of the subject as a 'being-in-the-world' from its life lived. *Creativity* allows subjects to enrol in various surface experiences while living, such as memory and projection, and the face they present to others when showing their emotions, feelings and meanings of the everyday world they inhabit. Thus, *expressiveness* has the purpose of unwrapping or unpacking what has been naturalised and placing it 'on the verge' of those experiences as class habitus, getting the wrapping and putting it in connection with what was involved, capturing the trajectory experience/story/experience (Espoz & Ibáñez, 2008). In this context, expression opens up paths to other ways of shaping the voice; the subject regains its silent identity that was hidden and re-takes its reality from his or her potential recognition. Thus, this practice is composed of symbols and meanings that are always beyond 'reality to the naked eye'. Pictures symbolise turning points in the 'naturalness' of the social world and re- map the meanings (Scribano, 2003).

In this context, an expressive methodological praxis was proposed for this inquiry, to make and remake the world of interpretations and representations of the subject in a creative way. Examples of this praxis include using aesthetic experience recording techniques – such as theatre, painting, photography, music, and many other ways of expression – that are presented as productive to inquire about the child and adolescent world (Espoz & Ibáñez, 2008). Plastic expression (specifically through drawings) allows the subject to be brought into a game, in relation to the work and the senses/feelings. In the act of creating, horizons about 'here' – memory and projection, defining what, who, why and for whom it is produced – are created. Artistic expressions such as drawing and playing, but also watching, show the contents of the subject's experiences in connection with the individual-subjective-social, 'to shape and color the world' in his or her ability to create constructive ways of expressing it for the appropriation and interpretation of others (Espoz & Ibáñez, 2008). In this sense, drawing, as a tool in the creative process, allows us to investigate these ways of 'seeing' and 'feeling' in the world of these children and adolescents, and thus to deconstruct their representations and advance the valuations that they have on education and the educational tools analysed.

For this article, the scheme for the interpretation of the drawings was based on three levels:

(a) The stage of expressiveness. The context of interaction in which creative work (in this case, the drawing) is performed and the imaginary synthesising of the experience of 'being-in-the-world' that subjects described takes place (Huergo & Ibáñez, 2012).

(b) Decomposition – recomposition of the drawing. Where the image is decomposed into its parts - which figures, which words, how they were made and how they were related to give authority to the whole, for the subsequent interpretation of expressive productions (Huergo & Ibáñez, 2012).

To this end, Scribano's (2008) proposal is used via a table containing components, elements, details and organisation of the drawings, which allows disaggregation, reuniting and rejoining of the parts (p. 283).

(c) Interpretation of drawings. Analysis of the different superimposed layers that account for the entire composition (disaggregated in the table), paying attention to the analysis of parts, and interactions of the figures together (Huergo & Ibáñez, 2012).

Results

Using this scheme and interpretation of compositions by children/adolescents as respondents, this article will attempt to answer the research questions posed in the introduction. Each pattern can be interpreted as a discourse, by which the child expresses and communicates something; it is a tool to help solve problems, create new ideas and facilitate communication. For Moreno Sáez (2002), for example, approaching the drawing of children involves contact with one of the most pure, spontaneous and sincere candidly sources of artistic expression. The essence of the design lies in the awareness that it is only a tool and is used to communicate with yourself and others; all drawing represents an abstraction - it is a language, as it handles what it perceives as real, which is not the same as reality (Jiménez Yáñez & Mancinas Chávez, 2009).

Expressiveness Scenario

For the inquiry, students from public schools in Buenos Aires City were interviewed in depth using the frame of creativity outlined in the earlier sections to understand their perceptions of the educational policies in question. The cases were selected from the population reached by the children's module in samples 2010 and 2011 of the Survey of the Social Debt Argentina (EDSA), through maximum variation sampling (Quinn Patton, in Flick, 2004, p. 82) according to residential status, using the criterion informal (slums or irregular settlement) or formal (upper-middle socio-economic-status neighbourhoods).

Interviews were organised according to the respondents' educational level: for the primary level (9-12 years old), four children were interviewed, two from the informal residential status (a male and a female) and two from the formal residential status (again, a male and a female). In addition, four teenagers were interviewed from the secondary level (aged 13 to 17) according to residential status. The interviews were conducted individually with each of the boys/girls and adolescents in their home, and the dialogue was recorded, with prior permission from the parents and the boy/girl, during the months of March and April of 2012. The instructions given to respondents were that by means of a drawing, *on one side they should express their ideas on how they imagine is the life of a person who cannot speak English or use the computer; and the other side, imagine how is the life of a person who can speak English and knows how to use the computer.* Thus, by contrasting realities, they would have the opportunity to make representations about the symbolic value they have of the educational tools.

At first sight, the production of each design was different, varying according to the age and type of neighbourhood the children came from. Also, an uneven use of colours was seen, no matter what the age group or area of origin was. However, further observation showed that those children who chose to use the colours provided did so throughout the whole composition. This use was observed in only two drawings, by a group of children at primary level. What was noted was that in both Drawing No. 5 and Drawing No. 8, teens chose to add just one detail of colour. In this article, we imagine that these subjects have mastered the tools offered by policies that are the subject of this research, whereas those people who have not mastered them only used black marker, for the same compositions. This was observed only in adolescents at the secondary level.
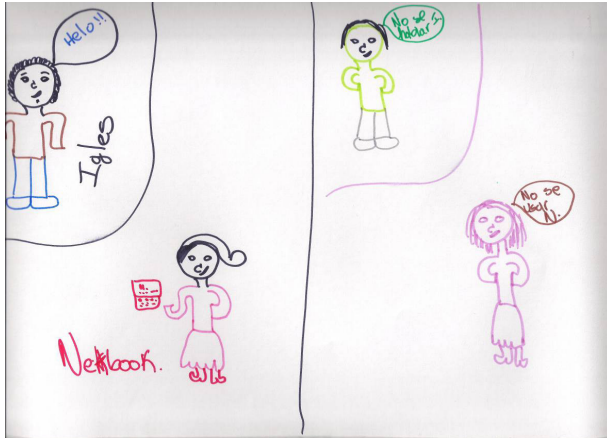
Figure 1. Girl, 9 years old – informal residential status: 'She [left side] can be a computer teacher, and she [right side] cannot'.[5]

Figure 2. Girl, 9 years old – formal residential status: 'This boy [left side] lives in a house, like this, very big and has an owl, and here has a door and a garage … and this one [right side] has nothing because he does not buy in Mercadolibre'.[6]

Figure 3. Boy, 11 years old – formal residential status: 'He [right side] would be sleeping all day in his house and she [left side] is a teacher, she knows how to use a netbook … this is a piece of furniture [right side], this is a chair and this is another furniture'.
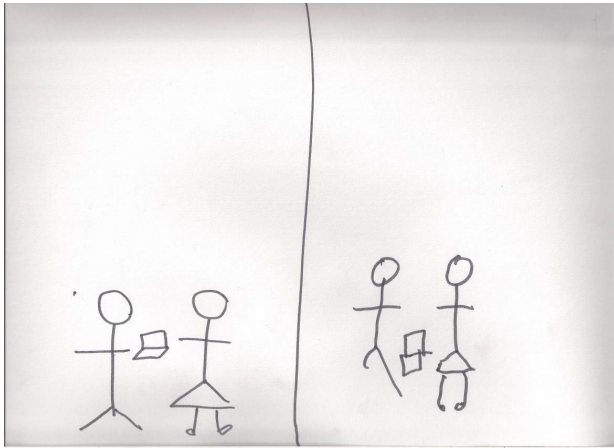
Figure 4. Boy, 11 years old – informal residential status: '… they work at home, because they don't know how to use it [the computer]'.

Figure 5. Teenage girl, 13 years old – formal residential status: 'I imagine someone my age, attending a public school where they teacher her English and knows how to use a computer, and the other person, I imagine someone in not such good living conditions, that cannot but a computer or does not get one for example, because he does not go to school'.
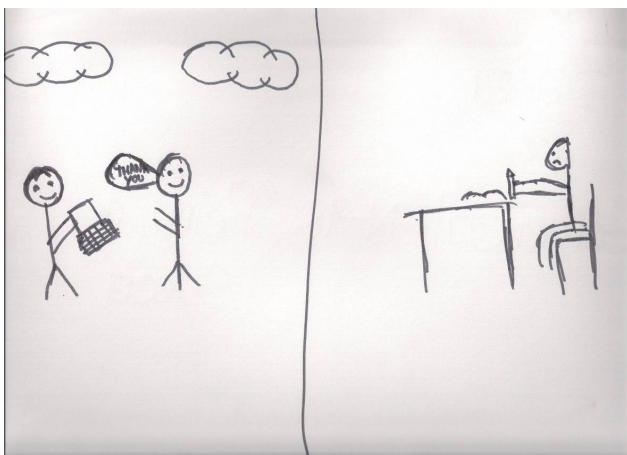

Figure 6. Teenage girl, 13 years old – informal residential status: '[right side] She is sad because she doesn´t have a netbook and does not know where to get information'.
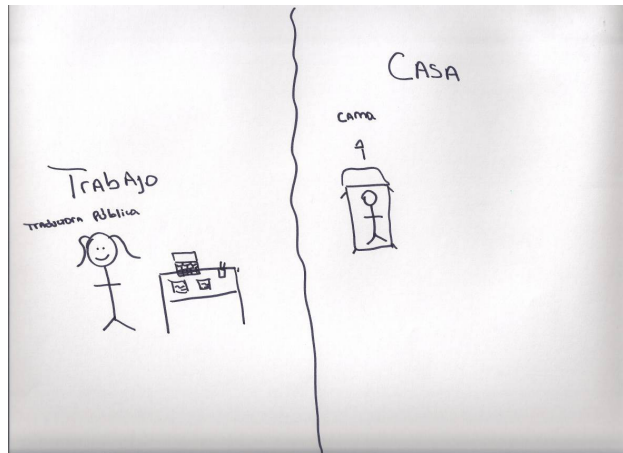
Figure 7. Teenage boy, 15 years old – formal residential status: 'He did not get a job, because he did not have … I don't know the word … did not have any training'.

Figure 8. Teenage boy, 14 years old – informal residential status: 'Lets you know what happens worldwide … what happens in other places … what could happen to your relatives elsewhere … what is happening in other places of the worlds, what happens with global warming, meteors, anything that happens in space'.

Composition: restructuring of the drawings

One possibility for framing the analysis and interpretation of the compositions is to follow the path of 'break to re-compose' (Scribano, 2008, p. 282). The points for following this framework include:

- Components: core elements of expression that focus attention at first glance;
- Details: individual traits that the authors have given the drawing to show 'beyond' or 'here' component;
- Organisation: the effect of composition, possibly in some detail, displays the representational map of cartoonists;
- Relations: indicates how the components interact in the visual organization, revealing what the artist sees as a semantic connection (or disconnection).[7]

Table I is a summary of this framework of composition analysis.

Interpreting the Drawings

The unbundled network layers reflected in Table I can be deconstructed by the different representations of children and adolescents in Buenos Aires City, in relation to the domain of the two educational tools analysed. Regarding the components, it can be seen that the drawings contained at least two people, one on each segment of the paper. In some cases, such as Drawing No. 1, it can be seen that the subject joined two others to the composition, linking each to the domain or not to the educational tools. Moreover, in Drawing No. 6, the teenager decided to represent the person who dominates the computer as a pair, as part of a dialogue in English, while the person who does not dominate is alone in the other segment of the composition. Also, as extraordinary components, an owl stands in Drawing No. 2: the girl decided to associate this with the person who mastered the use of computers, because you can buy one on Mercadolibre (according to their account). In regard to details applied to the compositions in differentiate scenarios over and over, people drew personal characteristics, including a dress, a beard (Figure 3), and expressions of happiness and sadness seen in the faces of the people represented.

Figure	Child	Components	Details	Organisation	Relations
1	Girl, 9 years old – informal residential status	Four people, two female, two male	Girls know how to use the tools, boys don't	No references of floor. Women are down and toward the centre of the sheet, and the men in the top left corner, in a sort of box	The four people represented have a speech bubble or not expressing their bond with the tools
2	Girl, 9 years - formal residential status	Two people, two houses, a car, an owl	A person has the house, the car and the owl and the other has only the house and shows an expression of uncertainty	Although no reference is made to the floor, where both houses and the car are, people are also floating in the air. The owl is above the roof of the house where the person that handles educational tools lives	Drew the same man floating in the air with expressions that reflect their connection with the tools
3	Boy, 11 years - formal residential status	A man and a woman, two desks	The woman is neatly dressed and the man is bearded, sitting in the middle of a mountain of garbage	The woman is standing in front of a computer and the man is in a tilted chair with his feet on the desk	Both representations are linked to employment
4	Boy, 11 years - informal residential status	Two couples and two computers	Each couple has a computer	In the first couple, the computer is in the between them and in the second, the computer is falling down	In both cases there are couples with a computer
5	Teenage girl, 13 years - formal residential status	A woman and a man, a computer and a home	Both men and women have frightened faces, the man wears a vest and no shoes	The woman has a computer and a book that says 'English in mind' and this man in front of a house	The two representations have the same expression on his face

6	Teenage girl, 13 years - informal residential status	Three people, clouds, desktop	Two people smile and one is sad	Two people share the computer and there is a cloud above them; on the other side there is a lonely person sad in a desk in front of the computer	There is a computer and words in English in the composition of those who dominate the language while the other person is sad
7	Teenage boy, 15 years - formal residential status	A woman and a man	The woman is in a place that stands out as 'work' and men in a place called 'home'	A woman is standing and says 'sworn translator' and the man is lying on a bed	The person knows this is a representation of his mother.
8	Teenage boy, 13 years - informal residential status	Two people	One person is happy and the other person is sad	One person is in a urban context with a bright yellow sun and the other one is in the middle of nowhere	Association with global situations and urbanised world

Table I. Drawings deconstruction. Compositions analysis.
Author's elaboration, based on the drawings and interviews with children and adolescents in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, 2012.

If you emphasise the organisation of the compositions, there was a common factor in all representations, which is the horizontal division of the paper leaf, to separate each 'world' or reality. However, the organisation within each segment was varied in the compositions. In some cases, subjects drew a reference floor, while other components of the composition appear to be 'floating on air'. The most significant differences were observed in terms of the contexts that were decided on to accompany each of the situations, that they drew as domestic/labour, urban density, etc.

Finally, the relations established by the children in the compositions can be interpreted as a closeness or distance to gender when choosing the sex shown in the drawing. The same gender was chosen to represent the person who mastered the tools, and the opposite gender was chosen to represent those who do not dominate either. Also, according to the account of the interviewees, they set different bridges of relationships that they associated with their families. An example is the case of Drawing No. 7, in which the person who dominates the tools perfectly matches the description the person doing the drawing made about his mother.

For further analysis, we can also take into consideration some dimensions proposed by Huergo and Ibáñez (2012):

(a) Absences: A constant seen in almost all the drawings was the absence of real content in the composition of the world of those who cannot handle the educational tools. In most cases these gaps, such as in Drawing No. 8, which contains only a man, or Drawing No. 2, in which the girl expresses the absence of an owl, are in the possession of the person speaking the foreign language and familiar with the use of the computer.

(b) Metaphors. A representation, linked to feelings, of the people who know how to or do not know how to use the tools in questions was observed; as evidenced in their representations of the drawings and stories, children associated knowledge to happiness and the lack thereof to sadness. This was expressed in both cases in drawn facial expressions, such as in Drawing No. 7, in which the person is lying on a bed.

(c) Metonymy. Other associations observed in both the drawings and stories were development/marginality. In some cases, such as in Drawing No. 5, it was seen that the lack of use of a computer or no foreign language proficiency was associated with rudimentary shelter, life in the trash (Drawing No. 3), or life away from urbanisation, as evidenced by the last drawing. Almost in line with the association of urbanisation/marginalisation, a tendency to relate education to wealth, employment and economic success was observed, while those who were not educated

were associated with unemployment and poverty. This was evidenced in more depth in the story in Drawing No. 4, which is expressed as a differentiation factor.

(d) Symbols. The symbols used in the drawings were mostly linked to the valuations that were associated with education, based on the two educational tools that were being investigated. This can be seen in the words that were used to demonstrate knowledge/ignorance of the provisions and in the use of colour in the representation of both worlds.

In this sense, very distinct associations were observed in all cases related to the mastery of a foreign language or computer use, regardless of the sex or social stratum of the children and adolescents, in terms of success/failure.

Final Thoughts

Returning to the questions raised in the introduction to this article, it may be said, in general terms, that this analytical journey has shown that the value the subjects place on education (from the domain of the two educational tools that were being investigated) is directly associated with economic success, participation in the labour market and access to commodities and services that promote the well-being of people. Representations of education by children and adolescents, in general, can be understood as a 'symbolic capital' that people can use in their future lives. In this context, the compositions showed that the subjects' imaginations reflect large asymmetries between the quality of life of people who dominate the tools and that of those who do not, symbolised through the feelings, attitudes and living conditions they drew.

Furthermore, by focusing on partnerships within the drawings, not taking into account the vastly different strata from which respondents came, we saw that everyone seemed to reflect similar imaginations of these situations, prioritising one or another element, even combining features. However, differences were observed when the stratum of the children was taken into account, when education was viewed in terms of the dichotomy cause/consequence of poverty. It was observed that children from higher strata seem to infer that lack of education leads to poverty, while children from lower strata expressed ideas associated with poverty preventing people from accessing education. In this sense, the representations of the children and adolescents interviewed could relate to their current or potential social position, which, according to Bourdieu (2011), is the subject of perceptions and assessments that depend on past history (thus, the *habitus*), and of possible reference frames. However, this conjecture is certainly only a first approximation to the perceptions of children and adolescents. It deserves to be deepened in later works.

Finally, an overall observation is that it is important to consider the relationship of tension that exists between the drawing, the child's interpretation and the interpretation of the researcher. While the children and adolescents performed their artistic compositions with freedom, being asked to create in the context of an interview – with the presence of the researcher and being prompted by questions – may have influenced the scene of expressiveness. Then, in the context of the interview, the answers given by the subjects to questions may also have influenced their artistic interpretation. It is important to highlight the bias of the adult's view on the creativity of children, which takes its reading from a place of knowledge and asymmetry, and so can stain interpretations and reviews of subjects.

Notes

[1] This article has a previous version, a research article entitled 'Educational Representations on Children and Adolescents in Buenos Aires City' [*Las representaciones de la educación en la mirada de los niños, niñas y adolescentes en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*], published in Tuñón (2013).

[2] Further information in
http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/educacion/niveles/idiomas/idiomas_primerciclo.php?menu_id=23075%2520

[3] Further information in
http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/educacion/programas/intec/lineamientos_pedagogicos_pied.pdf

[4] Further information in http://www.conectarigualdad.gob.ar/

[5] Author's translation of children's descriptions of the drawings.

[6] Latin American online shopping website: http://www.mercadolibre.com

[7] There is a fifth category that the author calls *materials*, which is not applicable to this analysis because respondents only received paper and coloured markers. For this reason, it was not included in the analysis table.

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