

IN THE TRACKS OF THE DISCOURSE: THE EXPANSION OF COMPULSORY ENROLLMENT AND PRE-SCHOOL AS PREPARATORY¹

NOS RASTROS DO DISCURSO: A AMPLIAÇÃO DA OBRIGATORIEDADE DE MATRÍCULA E A PRÉ-ESCOLA COMO PREPARATÓRIA

EN LOS SENDEROS DEL DISCURSO: AMPLIAR LA OBLIGACIÓN DE MATRÍCULA Y EL PREESCOLAR COMO PREPARATORIO

Aliandra Cristina Mesomo LIRA²
Ângela Mara de Barros LARA³

ABSTRACT: The article discusses research data that had among its objectives, to problematize the expansion of mandatory teaching for pre-school, putting into discussion, the meanings and rationality that support this approach. The theoretical-methodological path includes documentary analysis of materials produced and disseminated from the 1990s onwards by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO. By paying attention to the foundations that support the Brazilian legislation, it was also possible, from studies already published, to recognize the implications and challenges arising from the implementation of mandatory education for part of Early Childhood Education, which impact both institutions, professionals, children and their families. In particular, we observe the prevalence of the idea of the child as a future and of a preparatory pre-school to the later years of schooling, the latter aspect being the central focus of this reflection.

KEYWORDS: UNESCO. Educational policies. Mandatory teaching. Child education.

RESUMO: *O artigo discute dados de investigação que teve, entre seus objetivos, problematizar a ampliação da obrigatoriedade do ensino para a pré-escola, colocando em discussão os sentidos e a racionalidade que sustentam tal encaminhamento. O percurso teórico-metodológico inclui análise documental de materiais produzidos e veiculados a partir da década de 1990 pela Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura – UNESCO. Ao atentar aos fundamentos que sustentam a legislação brasileira, também foi possível, a partir de estudos já publicados, reconhecer as implicações e desafios decorrentes da implementação da obrigatoriedade do ensino para parte da Educação Infantil, que impactam tanto as instituições como os profissionais, as crianças e suas famílias. Em especial, observamos a prevalência da ideia de criança como futuro e de uma pré-escola preparatória aos anos posteriores da escolarização, este último aspecto foco central dessa reflexão.*

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² Midwestern Paraná State University (UNICENTRO), Guarapuava – PR – Brazil. Professor at the Pedagogy Course and at the Graduate Program in Education. Post-doctorate in Education (UEM). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2945-464X>. E-mail: aliandralira@gmail.com

³ Cesumar University (UNICESUMAR), Maringá – PR – Brazil. Professor at the Pedagogy course and at the Post-graduation course in Health and Education. PhD in Education (UNESP). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8799-8413>. E-mail: angelalara@ymail.com

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: UNESCO. Políticas educacionais. Obrigatoriedade do ensino. Educação infantil.

RESUMEN: El artículo analiza datos de investigación que tenían entre sus objetivos, problematizar la expansión de la enseñanza obligatoria para la educación infantil, poniendo en discusión, los significados y la racionalidad que sustentan este enfoque. El recorrido teórico-metodológico incluye el análisis documental de los materiales producidos y difundidos a partir de la década de los años noventa por la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura – UNESCO. Al prestar atención a los fundamentos que sustentan la legislación brasileña, también fue posible, a partir de estudios ya publicados, reconocer las implicaciones y desafíos que surgen de la implementación de la educación obligatoria para parte de la Educación Infantil, que impactan tanto a las instituciones, como a los profesionales, a los niños y sus familias. En particular, se observa el predominio de la idea del niño como futuro y de preescolar preparatorio para los últimos años de escolaridad, siendo este último aspecto el eje central de esta reflexión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: UNESCO. Políticas educativas. Enseñanza obligatoria. Educación infantil.

Introduction

Children are at the center of the discourse of robust legislation in the Brazilian context, especially the right to their education manifested in laws, documents, reports, and various materials. We also have a comprehensive network of researchers who are active both in social activism and in scientific production⁴. One of the most recent changes in Brazilian education was the extension of compulsory education from 4 to 17 years of age, indicated by Law no. 12.796 (BRAZIL, 2013), a measure that includes part of early childhood education, preschool. Since 2009, when the Constitutional Amendment (CA) No. 59 (BRAZIL, 2009) signaled this forwarding, studies and research have been conducted both to discuss the intentions that anchor the legal arguments (DIDONET, 2009; DINIZ JUNIOR, 2020; ROSEMBERG, 2002), as well as the implications of the implementation of the law, whether for children, their families, institutions and professionals (CAMPOS, 2013; LIRA; DREWINSKI, 2020; CAMPOS; BARBOSA, 2016; COUTINHO; ALVES, 2019).

The theoretical and methodological approach of this article includes a documentary analysis of materials produced and disseminated since the 1990s by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in order to problematize how the discourse of documents supports the legal determinations in the education of young Brazilian

⁴ On this issue see Brazil (1996, 2009), Rosemberg (2002), Flores (2017), Carvalho (2016), Campos (2012), Arelaro (2017), among others.

children. We study the documents produced at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, in 1990 (UNESCO, 1990), at the World Summit on Education for All, held in Dakar in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000), and the Report on Education for All in Brazil, 2000-2015 (BRAZIL, 2014), prepared by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in partnership with UNESCO.

The discussion tensions the regulatory character of the policies and their implications in the government of children, while considering the right of all to a quality early childhood education that respects children's specificities. It considers that "[...] discourses are practices that systematically form the objects they talk about" (VEIGA-NETO, 2000, p. 56, our translation), that is, in this case, they constitute the child, as should be early childhood education, reinforcing the modern narrative.

In relation to the sections that constitute this text, besides the introduction, we present how the educational policies for young children have been historically configured. In a second moment, based on the document analysis, it questions how the expansion of compulsory schooling for 4- and 5-year-old children induced preparatory practices for elementary school. In the third section, it analyzes how the expansion also brings secondary effects, which impact on the low coverage of day care, understood as assistance, and the inadequacy of the physical spaces of the institutions, among other aspects. The article ends with the final remarks.

Childhood and its education in the movement of history: a way to understand the policies for young children

By understanding education as human formation, which takes place in social relations and in a systematized way in educational institutions, we recognize that, historically, children have been on the margins of public policies, occupying a central and decisive place linked to the legal and social order of the capitalist society. In the analysis of the conditions of constitution of a schooled childhood in modernity and with the purpose of problematizing the schooling of Brazilian children from the age of 4, Silva and Henning (2019) take as an analytical element the legal apparatus that regulates the compulsory enrollment and permanence of children in school. They recognize that Law no. 12,796 (BRAZIL, 2013) expands the attendance of 4-year-old children in basic education from the perspective of right and includes the element of obligation, and it is productive to consider the impacts of legislation on the shifts in the forms of the service provided.

Thinking the present from history leads the authors to reflect on the implications of the legal apparatus in the constitution of the child-schooled subject. They are dedicated to the

events that put in evidence childhood and its education in modernity, in the traces of a narrative that delineates, defines, frames, since they consider (SILVA; HENNING, 2019) that the emergence of schooled childhood is crossed by power and knowledge relations and immersed in a game of forces. They undertake a critical exercise that problematizes and questions how the discursive network that dictates truths about childhood was formed, recognizing that it is through the school institution that it becomes the target of control.

The idea of the child as a future, guided by the logic of work and production, conceals the exclusion and the antagonism of social relations and justifies the need for its education: "Historically, education has been assigned the task of conducting childhood, because it has always been seen as the source of behaviors to be educated and corrected" (MAGALHÃES, 2012, p. 147, our translation).

From 1970 on, early childhood education began to be considered as a political issue, a terrain permeated by disputes around the maintenance of meanings assumed as legitimate, such as understanding it merely as a preparatory stage for the subsequent school years (FRANGELLA, 2009).

The responsibility for the education of young children became the object of attention very recently in the Brazilian context, whose history reveals the dichotomy between daycare and preschool in early childhood education. Thus, for children from 0 to 3 years old, the care focused on assistentialist actions, permeated by an education for the formation of habits and behavior control in the attention to basic needs. For children from 4 to 6 years old, the preparatory action has marked the attention for a long time, with reconfiguration in different historical moments. With the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (LDBEN), nº. 9.394 (BRAZIL, 1996), the attempt to overcome the dichotomy of practices and conceptions between daycare and preschool was intensified and materialized in some realities. However, more recently, by making enrollment mandatory for only part of early childhood education, we recognize that the preparatory perspective is resumed (LIRA; DREWINSKI; SAPELLI, 2016). Some theoretical notes of researchers who have addressed the intentions, conceptions and rationalities that acted in the constitution of the last 50 years of the field of early childhood education help us in the reflection.

Thus, the expansion of the right to education has occurred progressively in recent decades in Brazil (FLORES; ALBUQUERQUE, 2016). Following the Brazilian Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), the LDBEN nº. 9.394 (BRAZIL, 1996) reaffirmed the right to early childhood education for all children, considering it as the first stage of basic education. In the following years, there was an effort to organize guiding documents for the area of early childhood

education on physical spaces, quality standards, the role of interaction and play, in short, a set of important issues and aspects for the development of pedagogical proposals in the municipalities.

When discussing the construction of the right to early childhood education and taking stock of 20 years after the LDBEN (BRAZIL, 1996), Flores (2017), recalls important aspects of the recent trajectory of this stage of education and challenges to ensure the right to education for all children. Regarding the compulsory enrollment in preschool, the researcher points out the risks regarding the organization of proposals with a preparatory bias, which can mischaracterize the purposes and objectives of early childhood education.

Regarding the mandatory enrollment, the concern involves knowing if there will be gains in the right to education, how is the freedom of choice for families and if we would be going back to the conception of a preparatory preschool (CAMPOS; BARBOSA, 2016), that is, what are the effects for an area still fragile in its constitution. More recently, in 2017, we had the approval of the Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC in the Portuguese acronym) (BRASIL, 2017), whose formulation was shrouded in a series of conflicts and tensions. Such an undertaking responds, in part, to the documents analyzed here, an example of which is the production of teaching material focused on the teaching of letters and numbers.

Preschool as preparatory in the narrative of the texts

In a scenario of many challenges, in the first decades of the 21st century, part of early childhood education, preschool, became compulsory in Brazil, whose legal provisions can, on the one hand, be considered an achievement, but on the other, due to the way they have been interpreted and implemented, generate concern. In this sense, Campos and Barbosa (2016) question whether the focus on the years close to elementary school is configured as a historical priority and whether it would be possible to meet the law from a universal policy logic.

Considering the focus of the study, we focused on the documents produced by one of the agencies that most influence education in different countries, looking at the text, fruit of the Jomtien Conference (UNESCO, 1990) and the Dakar Summit (UNESCO, 1990), taking into account the developments resulting from the proposals presented, whose focus was the defense of Education for All (EFA) and its role in inducing educational policies. We also took as a source of analysis the Report Education for All in Brazil, 2000-2015 (BRAZIL, 2014), because it explains the monitoring of the principles advocated in the country. The selected analytical

corpus is presented due to the research objectives and the recognized interests of this agency in inducing policies aimed at childhood, especially in the last three decades.

UNESCO was consolidated in 1945, linked to the United Nations Organization (UNO)⁵, The role of international organizations has been configured as an organ whose declared objective is to act in strategic areas for the development of countries, including education, a movement that has intensified since 1990. The role of international organizations, their objectives and field of action need to be considered in the historical scenario in which they are presented. Carpes (2017) points out that the concept of international organization arises from agreements signed between sovereign countries, with predetermined purposes. International treaties result in conventions, which enjoy autonomy to manage specific interests and purposes, resulting in documents and guidelines that act directly in peripheral countries, driving reforms and policies.

The educational phenomena can be looked at from different theoretical perspectives, which help us read reality and understand how it is constituted. Among the theoreticians that support this reflection is the French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose writings are instigating to think about education, as Veiga-Neto (2003) warned us. The vigorous and intriguing character of his thought leads us to examine education in a position of permanent criticism, which questions and problematizes the relations between power and knowledge, helping us to perceive how knowledge and practices have been working and are made explicit in the weaving of documents, exposing the interface between childhood and power, as Bujes (2005) warns. By analyzing the documents mentioned above, we seek to recognize intentionalities and rationalities underlying the discourse that guides and directs the compulsory education in Brazil.

Anchored in the Foucauldian perspective, Lemos (2009) recognizes that the government of the population that emerged in the second half of the 18th century was linked to the defense of society with a view to extending life, managing behaviors, the spaces where this management takes place, and the time considered linearly towards development, carefully used to expand capacities. In the following centuries, gradually, families and children become the target of prescriptions, emanating, especially, from the documents of international agencies, effecting the government of life in the name of the security of the population, with cost calculations to enhance order and regulation, that is, to spend resources efficiently.

⁵ Created in 1945, right after the Second World War, it currently brings together 193 member states that are active in different strategic areas. See more at: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/index.html>. Access on: 22 June 2020.

The practices aimed at the management and regulation of human processes are understood by Foucault (2003) as biopower, which, when acting over populations, maximizes their vital processes. Whether in health, education, or private life, a set of strategies is put into action, acting on the collectivity and on individual subjects. The author's concern was the subject and its constitution and, in this endeavor, he presents us with the concept of power, which is interesting to recall. Foucault (2003, 1995) explains that what makes power maintain itself and be accepted is that it does not impose itself as force, in the person of a subject, but permeates relations, produces things, forms knowledge, builds discourses.

The need to manage the child population is socially placed in modernity and can be analyzed in the Foucauldian perspective as a social interest of the productive organization, which needed living and docile bodies to work in factories. From the moment that childhood is considered as a social category that differs from the adult, the entire child population begins to be looked at with interest, both from the point of view of their needs and their potentialities (FOUCAULT, 2002a).

The government of the child population intensifies with the political restructuring of society. In interpreting Foucault's reflections about neoliberalism, Laval (2020, p. 62, our translation) points out that the state maximizes its indirect effects, manipulates interests, so that the market is the regulating principle. Thus, "[...] neoliberalism is primarily a way of rethinking the role of the state and the mode of government intervention [...]", it is active governmentality aimed at the market.

The author recognizes that the norm operates in the game of market interests, it is productive, education being a form of activity produced by subjects who act according to the rules, who are part of the process and not outside it: "According to Foucault, there is no life that is not normatively oriented [...]" (LAVAL, 2020, p. 102, our translation), and in society "[...] power is exercised within practices and subjects" (LAVAL, 2020, p. 103, our translation), operating a 'biopolitical normalization' as it merges with life processes at a crossroads of discipline and regulation.

Foucault (2008) defines this process as governmentality, the exercise of power in a complex and extensive way targeting the population, putting biopolitics into effect. Laval (2020) recalls that in the Foucauldian perspective, the productive character of this investment is recognized, therefore, institutions that deal with different moments of life, such as schools, are fertile ground for its exercise.

Investments in education in the 1990s, with funding from international organizations, consider pre-school as an appendix and an extension of schooling, as a way to prevent school

failure in elementary school, and it is in this perspective that the documents and financial support are based. Thus, in the 20th century, the focus changes, widens, and includes part of early childhood education (ROSEMBERG, 2002).

The State and educational reforms, underway since the 1990s, have put the issues of childhood at the center of the discussions, providing access and minimum quality standards, a recurring indication of international organizations. In this purpose, education appears as a compensatory redistributive policy, without acting on the structure of the production of inequalities of capitalism, and focusing on some target groups. The intention to focus on the needs of vulnerable populations is supported by a legitimate discourse that seeks to mitigate the problems; however, it does not act on the causes of poverty, learning difficulties, or school dropout, for example, acting in a palliative way. Thus, although the guidelines of international organizations do not translate into direct actions, because they are interpreted by governments, the texts deserve to be analyzed (CAMPOS, 2013).

The entanglement of power relations sustained and intensified in modernity presents new contours in recent decades, a process that began in the mid-twentieth century and that highlights new institutions and agents committed to the management of the child population. This capillarity of power that acts in the production of truths becomes evident in the action of international organizations, carriers of the discourse that begins to manage childhood, its care and education, and that associates with other actors, mainly from civil society, with foundations linked to business.

A historical and documentary analysis of the reports produced by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century is undertaken by Lemos (2009) from the perspective of life management strategies, the government of children, activated by the discourse of the agency, the management of space and time for children. As she points out, UNICEF, which is widely active in Brazil with the production of materials, advisory services, events and project financing, and the agency's documents emphasize the need for childhood care as a way to promote the progress of countries.

In a study on the legal frameworks related to compulsory and free education in three countries - Brazil, Chile and Uruguay - Diniz Junior (2020) identifies that the declarations and documents of international organizations have contributed to the standardization in each country, whose legislation regulates the expansion of schooling, but does not guarantee access, the realization of the right. The author highlights the decisive role of international organizations with their conventions and declarations, acting in the legal scope of each country.

The World Declaration on Education for All of Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990) represented a milestone in the affirmation of the Education for All (EFA) slogan to be adopted and implemented throughout the 1990s, especially by stressing that the work of governments should be supported, cooperated, and participated in by other agents, through partnerships. In several passages, the document resulting from the Conference indicates the need to guarantee basic and fundamental education for all children and young people, and stresses the importance of including goals in this direction in each nation's national education plans. It is worth noting, based on Carvalho, Axier and Frangella (2019) and Marcello and Bujes (2011), that for the Foucauldian perspective, policies act as regimes of truth, whose text can be understood as a discourse that involves power disputes for meaning, in a language loaded with intentionality.

From the recognition that education operates in an imbricated web of power relations, committed to practices of regulation of the child population and that collaborates with the general government of society, we consider that economic interests overlap with those of another nature, since the systematic social inequality is identified and mentioned, but not overcome. Fischer (2001) understands that given the complexity of investigating the things said, we need to consider the relationship between discourse and power, working hard with the texts conveyed, letting them appear. From the Foucauldian perspective, the author reminds us that the statements and relations are put into operation by the discourse itself, which is studied as a social practice that acts in the constitution of that which speaks.

The Jomtien document emphasizes the indispensability of meeting basic learning needs by expanding access to basic education, with emphasis on the reiteration of the expressions 'quality' and 'equity'. The notion of learning made explicit and underlying the text highlights the desire for people "[...] to acquire useful knowledge, reasoning skills, aptitudes, and values. Consequently, basic education should be centered on effective learning acquisition and learning outcomes [...]", with emphasis on the importance of "[...] defining desirable levels of knowledge acquisition in educational programs and implementing performance assessment systems [...]" (UNESCO, 1990, art. 4, our translation).

Neoliberal rationality is a form of government of individuals, from the financial perspective: "The only effectively conceivable and legitimate form is immanent to the very functioning of the market [...]" (LAVAL, 2020, p. 75, our translation), and assumes airs of naturalization in accordance with the natural movement of society. The author helps us recognize that the market is a normative space and the economy a lever of power, since "to govern in the neoliberal way is to act on the environment in such a way that the individual evolves there, respecting the rules that govern this environment and responding to the

incitements that this environment produces in the direction of the growth of its capital" (LAVAL, 2020, p. 80, our translation).

The indication for education of young children, whose regulatory frameworks have been presented since the 1990s and are accentuated in the 2000s, includes early childhood education as a strategy to combat poverty, prevailing in general from 0 to 3 years the focus on protection and nutrition and, in 4 and 5 years, the preparation for future schooling (CAMPOS, 2013).

When analyzing the configuration of compulsory schooling in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, Diniz Junior (2020, p. 9, our translation) notes that the 1990s were a period of elaboration of new legislation for education and that "[...] the 2000s were a milestone in the expansion of education in these countries, to the point that, by 2013, they all offered 14 years of compulsory and free schooling," noting that, in the three countries, education is compulsory from ages 4 to 17, which shows the adoption of a common agenda.

In Brazil, the change of emphasis deserves a careful and restless look (MARCELLO; BUJES, 2011), since the discussion gains body and takes shape beyond the public sphere, especially since 2006, with the emergence of the All for Education Movement, an organization with the leadership of the business civil society that supports the discourse of international documents and organizations and starts to act in public decisions. The arguments for action legitimize a just cause and give support to the discourse of international agencies, but target interests that benefit the business community itself, configuring itself as an object of dispute that deserves to be problematized. The absence of participation and responsibility on the part of governments in social policies makes room for the actions of the business sector in the educational sphere, with technological services, production of teaching materials, and teacher training, all of which are very lucrative areas that are targeted by the market.

The global movement that highlights the concern with children, their lives, their education, undertaken by the sciences, by researchers, is also assumed by international organizations and the business community, whose discussion becomes vital for the social functioning, for the training of workers. In the last decades of the 20th century, these discussions became part of the agenda of international organizations and of the national government. With the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), a series of actions mobilized efforts directed to children, whose focus, initially, was on primary education, but little by little it was approaching younger children.

The concept of the Globally Structured Education Agenda (GSEA) is presented by Dale (2004), an understanding that understands globalization as a set of political-economic devices

that act to maintain the capitalist system recognized as a global economy whose engine is profit, which directs forms of authority, in the case of the educational sphere, and establishes what the author calls forms of governance. These, act on the processes of knowledge transmission, its financing and regulation, and international organizations, such as UNESCO, play a crucial role in this process.

The interests managed by the capital lead us to consider the concept of State for Foucault, composed of heterogeneous processes and multiple governmentalities. At the end of 1970 and in the following decades, in face of the crisis of society and its modes of management, it acts in the transformation of the modes of governing, through instruments that regulate interests and are sustained by economic principles: "[...] neoliberalism does not respond only to a crisis of capital accumulation; it responds to a much broader and diversified crisis of governmentality" (LAVAL, 2020, p. 133, our translation). It establishes a dense and continuous system of controls over existence, including the educational sphere, in which the new neoliberal art of governing reshapes the relationships of individuals based on competitiveness, which is at the center of market rules.

The market is considered a normative means, where the economic subject acts bending to its norms, evidencing the neoliberal normalization, that is, a power that regulates to produce more, acts in the government of interests, which makes it explicit as diffuse in the action over others, forms of power relations over the domain of individual and collective existence (LAVAL, 2020).

In the countries, according to Campos and Barbosa (2016), the political governmentality was made more as a result of coercion than consensus, by the pressure of international organizations, superimposing market values to democracy. In the absence of State action as provider and guarantor of the right to education, this becomes thought and proposed as a product to be consumed.

The goal of the common good and education as a fundamental right sustain the onslaughts of financial and corporate capital in the educational sphere, inducing policies and the construction of legislation. On the AFE website, the organization's fields of action are described and, among them, the improvement of education in the country is highlighted, including the help in instituting the expansion of compulsory education indicated by the CA n^o. 59 (BRAZIL, 2009).

Under the argument of guaranteeing the right to education, which had already been made explicit in previous laws although not implemented, the expansion of compulsory education ends up resuming a compensatory and preparatory education that was outdated in terms of

discussions and research in Brazil, but that found fertile ground to establish itself again, not least because in practice, many institutions still structure actions in this direction. Focusing on the citizen of the future, "The development of children's readiness for school and life is not just an economic slogan, but an imperative that has been translated into contemporary childhood schooling policies". (CARVALHO, 2016, p. 249, our translation).

In the EFA in Brazil Report, 2000-2015 (BRAZIL, 2014), the expansion of compulsory pre-school education is evaluated as an unprecedented challenge for the country, which includes the offer of vacancies by the public authorities and the effective enrollment by the responsible parties. The discussion on the necessary quality in the education offered is highlighted in the text, reinforcing the role of evaluations, that is, the State as manager of the service with systems expanded in recent decades: "It is observed, therefore, that, in these documents, conceiving quality is *inseparable* from a concept of a child who must learn more, who must have more opportunities, etc. It is not, obviously, to oppose this, but to show how such dynamics work" (MARCELLO; BUJES, 2011, p. 62-63, emphasis added, our translation).

The truths, according to Foucault (2002b), need to be looked at considering the constitutive role of language, an aspect that draws attention to analyze the discourse of the documents, since they not only talk about childhood, the care and education of young children, but they constitute them, which leads us to recognize that the content of the texts acts on child subjects and pedagogical practices. Fischer (2001, p. 204, our translation) reminds us that "The things said, therefore, are radically tied to the power and knowledge dynamics of their time [...]", being desirable that we interrogate the language, its form of production, mapping 'the said', showing its relation with the time, the place and the subjects that announce it.

The expansion of compulsory education to include part of early childhood education is evaluated in the EFA Report (BRAZIL, 2014) as an important step towards expanding the right to education, with policies focused on quality indicators in the provision of this service, including, especially, teacher training. In terms of structural investments, the National Program for the Restructuring and Acquisition of Equipment for the Public-School Network for Early Childhood Education (Proinfância)⁶, according to the report, acted fundamentally in the construction of institutions, with expansion of units approved between 2007 and 2013, although in terms of resources, the investment decreased from 2009. This aspect is relevant in terms of the expansion of vacancies, however, given the repressed demand of unattended children, the structures built are still insufficient, a situation that induces the municipalities to adopt strategies

⁶ Instituted in 2007 by the federal government, the program aims to guarantee access for children to daycare centers and schools, as well as improve the physical infrastructure of the early childhood education network.

to reduce the day of attendance and create preschool classes in institutions of basic education as a way to meet the requirement, but compromising the quality of the service offered.

When resuming the milestones of the conferences, the Report (BRASIL, 2014), points out that in Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990) the challenge was access, in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) permanence and inclusion, and for South Korea (2015)⁷, universalization, with special commitment to early childhood education, since primary education had already been the focus for several decades. Marcello and Bujes (2011) warn that the discussion should not be reduced to qualifying a discourse as true or false, but how it acts in the production of a new conception of childhood, that is, to consider why these propositions appear, what they legitimize and who they benefit; thinking about this helps us to reflect on the principles that support the compulsory education for preschool and how childhood takes center stage in the narratives.

The emphasis in the documents that everyone is responsible for education makes room for other actors, besides the government, to be considered as indispensable partners in the task of educating the new generations. This redefinition of the role of the State, which is no longer the main provider of this right, places it more as a regulator, which has led to its responsibility being delegated to organizations, foundations, usually linked to large businessmen in the field of technology, teaching materials, even acting in teacher training. The international order is directed to mitigate the problems of different nations, among them, education, initially considered important as a way to expand the social participation of the subjects, but, in practice, this function has been compromised by economic and labor interests that impose a more technical and less critical education. (DINIZ JUNIOR, 2020).

When seeking to understand neoliberalism considering Foucauldian writings, Laval (2020) recognizes it as a type of governmentality that needs to be analyzed from power relations, identifying it as the action on the action by the articulation of governmental techniques at micro and macro political levels. Thus, neoliberalism concerns not only the economy, but a mode of government of men, since the consequences of neoliberal policies affect the collectivity. The subject in question is economic man, and Foucault can inspire the study of the neoliberal question by scrutinizing the forms of power and state, the recreation of forms of domination and governmentality that began in the second half of the 20th century.

Taking Foucault's analyses into account requires us to consider the historical moment in which they were developed. The author followed the political actuality of his time crossed by the historical emergence of the neoliberal event, thinking it in the form of explanation and

⁷ World Conference on Education for All, held in 2015.

resistance with specific theoretical tools, considering that a theory is at the same time a method. It is worth noting that Foucauldian reflections on this theme, developed especially between 1975 and 1980, were based on the initial configurations of neoliberalism, whose consolidation and universalization took place from the 1990s on, even managing public policies. His thoughts about that time can be resumed to clarify how our time and neoliberal educational policies are configured, that is, to consider what his ideas teach us about our reality (LAVAL, 2020).

Didonet (2009) already warned that the fair measure would not be to impose compulsory enrollment on parents, but to insist on the State's duty to ensure democratic supply of early childhood education, which, as a subjective public right, would not need to resort to the principle of compulsion. This includes providing funding for the stage, expanding the number of places, emphasizing the socializing role of education for children, a movement that would resist the recent advocacy of home-schooling, for example.

The discourse of the documents reactivates the tension between the functions of pre-school, which in practice performs a preparation for elementary school, contrary to the objectives of early childhood education explained in the guiding documents of the area, highlighting the social, political and pedagogical character of this stage. In this sense, the texts, the policies and the actions they mobilize operate a rupture between what was defended about the education of young children, conceptions built and sedimented from the LDBEN of 1996 (BRAZIL, 1996), which included early childhood education as the first stage of basic education, with objectives and specificities which do not subordinate it to the later stages of schooling.

Policy side effects

The study of the relationship between early childhood education and compulsory schooling has intensified in research, as education and care services have expanded, especially in the years closest to elementary school. The apparent benefits of the character that preschool assumes attract the attention of policy makers, under the general discourse of learning from birth and the association of attendance at early childhood education with later school performance. Economists defend educational investment in young children as productive, however, the partnerships signed may bring risks and expose power relations, as studies evidence the adoption of processes typical of elementary school with losses to young children (MOSS, 2011).

Another aspect that deserves to be problematized is that, to the extent that early childhood education effects a preparatory trend for pre-school children, it resumes the welfare

perspective for children from 0 to 3 years of age, i.e., the compulsory education has effects beyond pre-school. We have followed several programs, bills, and initiatives aimed at assisting children up to 3 years of age, which make this conception quite evident. The relaxation in the training requirements for professionals promotes the reactivation of already extinct positions, such as daycare attendants and caregivers, who receive lower salaries and work longer hours. Other examples show the creation of financial aid for parents to take on the task of caring for and educating their children at home, as well as, in some localities, projects that regulate daycare mothers or home daycare centers have been approved.

Initiatives in this sense lead us to remember that the constitution of early childhood education has its origin not as a State policy, but as an action to assist families, being configured in focal and not universal initiatives (CAMPOS; BARBOSA, 2017). As already mentioned, the documents guide the policies and legislation, and the approval of the compulsory education for preschool contemplates the group of children in the years close to elementary school, configuring itself as a focused policy.

The focus on the years closest to schooling is justified by the focalist practice that is based on the logic of fragmentation and short-term, because it is understood that anticipating the entry of children in early childhood education will ensure greater success in their future schooling process. [...] the universalization of the right, when subjugated to the logic of focalization, produces a perverse effect, because it ends up including by excluding, that is, through the disjunction between quantity and quality (expansion without quality), and also by shrinking the right of others, in the case of children from 0 to 3 years old (CAMPOS, 2013, p. 205, our translation).

In an analysis developed almost a decade ago, Campos (2012) notes that by the ages of 4 and 5, education was compulsory in most Latin American countries, with differences in coverage among them. Campos (2013) also points out that public responsibility is more visible for 4- and 5-year-olds, which is evident in the cut-off of compulsory early childhood education in Brazil and nearby countries.

Recently, in conducting a comparative study of compulsory preschool in this context, Arrabal (2019) identifies a general trend of extending preschool to all young children, with the expansion of supply concentrated in the year before entering elementary school. Especially in the last two decades, the legislation of Latin American countries extends compulsory schooling to preschool; in all countries it is compulsory at age 5, and in most of them earlier, as can be seen in Chart 1⁸.

⁸ No data from Cuba, Haiti and Dominican Republic were found.

Chart 1 – Latin America: age range beginning compulsory education

Country	Age group/compulsory pre-school education
Argentina	4- 5
Bolivia	4 – 5
Brazil	4 – 5
Chile	5
Colombia	5
Costa Rica	3 – 5
Ecuador	3 – 5
El Salvador	4 – 6
Guatemala	4 – 6
Honduras	5
Mexico	3 – 5
Nicaragua	5
Panama	4 – 5
Paraguay	5
Peru	3 – 5
Uruguay	4 – 5
Venezuela	3 - 5

Source: Prepared by the authors from Arrabal (2019)

The researcher points out, however, that countries have taken different paths to reach this line of action, especially considering the great social inequality and diversity that characterizes them (ARRABAL, 2019). Extensively, the extension of compulsory schooling time is justified by greater opportunities to learn, however, it is not effectively more years of school that guarantee this, but rather, the practices implemented, how it is taught, what is privileged with the children. Campos (2010, p. 300, our translation) calls attention to understand that "[...] the expansion of access by itself does not express how fair an educational system is", being important to broaden the look to social contradictions and focal social policies, common in dependent countries.

The author emphasizes that the debate does not diminish or make judgments about the relevance of compulsory education, but should focus on the democratization of basic education, which needs to consider a universalization that includes and preserves the right to education, not only of access, but of permanence in the institutions. Pinto and Alves (2010) point out that the expansion of compulsory education for 4- and 5-year-olds represents a challenge that requires planning by managers, with desirable coordination between the federated entities. In this sense, considering the larger number of enrollments, it is important to ensure a minimum investment per child, because if the available resources are not increased, they will prove insufficient to meet the expansion.

Moreover, the pedagogical practices developed with children, depending on how they are organized and proposed, contribute to mark the ambivalence of the definition of what would be pedagogical (FRANGELLA, 2009), running the risk of misinterpretations marked by the anticipation of preparatory models. With the obligation, pedagogical practices that anticipate typical processes for older children, with the filling of handouts and xero copied sheets, were intensified (DEUS, 2019), neglecting play as the axis of pedagogical work. There is a prevalence of 'chore-based' activities, to fill folders, and with little child participation. In practical terms, the documents anchor the arguments of the changes, forwarding different action strategies and implications. It is important to pay attention to the implementation of the policy as a way to recognize how it was interpreted and materialized in different contexts.

The expansion of compulsory education to part of early childhood education, preschool, produced a set of effects that impact different actors, with importance to the recognition of the foundations and principles that supported such indication and to think about the tensions and challenges involved in its implementation. Therefore, it is worth asking: What is the obstacle for the children? The understandings evidenced in this process impact on the conception of child and early childhood education built and defended by the area, especially present in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRAZIL, 2010). From the research already produced, can we evaluate that the implementation runs the risk of putting into practice deleterious experiences for children? In an attempt to answer these questions, several researches have been conducted (LIRA; DREWINSKI, 2020; LIRA; MACHADO, 2019; CAMPOS; BARBOSA, 2016).

The intentionalities and arrangements of neoliberal government lead us to recognize the phenomena of domination, analyzing them and showing their logic. Neoliberalism reshapes the role of the state and transforms subjectivities through multiple mechanisms of power: "Power runs through individuals and normalizes them. In Foucault, one does not see the techniques of neoliberal power as an exception. On the contrary, there is a modification in the type of subjectivation claimed [...]" (LAVAl, 2020, p. 72, our translation).

In addition, it has become standard practice for increasing the number of vacancies to attend children in pre-school classes in elementary school institutions and on a part-day basis, which, from the families' point of view, creates the need to find another form of care or people to stay with the children while the guardians are at work (LIRA; MACHADO, 2019).

The inadequacy of the physical space and pedagogical practices for the preschool age group, added to the fragility of the professionals' training, makes it clear that children are the target of power, which is anchored in a discourse that praises them, but that, in the effectiveness

of policies, establishes conditions and undertakes routes to govern them, producing secondary effects that compromise their rights.

Final remarks

The questions raised do not cover the complexity of the discourses and their effects, but analyzing the documents, recognizing their intentionality and the rationalities that support them, allowed us to problematize the foundations that support the expansion of compulsory education for preschool. In reviewing how educational policies have historically included 4- and 5-year-old children, we identified that they reflect the intentions of international agencies that place children at the center of the discourse and that promote a pre-school with a preparatory tendency. Paying attention to the foundations that sustain the Brazilian legislation, it was also possible, based on studies already published, to recognize the implications and challenges arising from the implementation of compulsory education for part of Early Childhood Education, which impact institutions as well as professionals, children and their families.

The texts of the documents resulting from the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, in 1990, and the World Summit on Education for All, held in Dakar in 2000, put childhood on the scene and highlight the necessary investment in its education as a way to mitigate inequalities and prepare citizens for productivity. Under the argument of education for all, they echo the idea of the child as the future, and the importance of early education as preparation for the elementary school years, supporting and forwarding preparatory practices in pre-school. The Education for All in Brazil Report explains how these precepts were appropriated by the country and materialized in educational policies, including the extension of compulsory education indicated by the EC no. 59 (BRAZIL, 2009) and by Law no. 12.796 (BRAZIL, 2013). It points out advances and challenges, explaining that we have not yet treated early childhood education as a right for all children, with consistent and comprehensive public policies for the entire child population, especially the poorest.

From what we have analyzed of the conceptions and propositions of the UNESCO documents we recognize that the expansion of compulsory education to pre-school is committed to a conception of early childhood education as preparatory, which, if on the one hand, sought to be overcome by some national documents, on the other hand, appears largely in the process of implementing the Law.

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