

EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICIES: CHALLENGES FROM THE CHILD AND ITS SPECIFICITIES

POLÍTICAS DE EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: DESAFIOS A PARTIR DA CRIANÇA E SUAS ESPECIFICIDADES

POLÍTICAS DE LA PRIMERA INFANCIA: DESAFÍOS DE LOS NIÑOS Y SUS ESPECIFICIDADES

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ABSTRACT: Early childhood education, the first stage of basic education, has early childhood education from 0 to 5 years and acquired an educational character with the concepts that emerged from the Federal Constitution of 1988. On the other hand, historically childhood is seen as a period of fragility and dependence, however, the Sociology of Childhood sheds light on a new vision of children and childhoods, perceiving them as active. This article aims to analyze the legislation that serves as a basis for implementing policies for early childhood education, seeking to understand the concepts of child(ren) and childhood(as) present there. Based on the epistemological assumptions of the Sociology of Childhood, we sought to identify the social recognition of childhood and to measure the main legal and guiding acts for carrying out Early Childhood Education in Brazil, delimiting the challenges for carrying out work in early childhood education.

KEYWORDS: Public policies. Childhood. Childhood sociology.

RESUMO: *A educação infantil, primeira etapa da educação básica, tem a finalidade de cuidar e educar de crianças de 0 a 5 anos e adquiriu caráter educativo com as concepções que emergiram da Constituição Federal de 1988. Por outro lado, historicamente a infância é vista como período de fragilidade e dependência, porém, a Sociologia da Infância lança luz a uma nova visão das crianças e das infâncias, percebendo-as como ativas. O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a legislação que serve como base para a realização de políticas para a Educação Infantil, buscando perceber os conceitos de criança (s) e infância (as) ali presentes. Partindo dos pressupostos epistemológicos da Sociologia da Infância buscou-se identificar o reconhecimento social da infância e dimensionar os principais atos legais e norteadores da Educação Infantil no Brasil, delimitando os desafios para a realização do trabalho na educação da primeira infância.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas públicas. Infância. Sociologia da infância.

RESUMEN: La educación infantil, primera etapa de la educación básica, tiene el propósito de cuidar y educar a los niños de 0 a 5 años y adquirir un carácter educativo con los conceptos que surgieron de la Constitución Federal de 1988. Por otro lado, históricamente la niñez, se ve como un período de fragilidad y dependencia, sin embargo, la Sociología de la Infancia refleja luz sobre una nueva visión de los niños y de la infancia, percibiéndolos como activos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la legislación que sirve de base para la implementación de políticas de Educación Infantil, buscando comprender los conceptos de niño (s) y niñez (as) allí presentes. A partir de los supuestos epistemológicos de la Sociología de la Infancia, se busca identificar el reconocimiento social de la infancia y dimensionar los principales actos jurídicos y retores de la Educación Infantil en Brasil, delimitando los desafíos para el desempeño del trabajo en la educación infantil.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Políticas públicas. Infancia. Sociología infantil.

Introduction

It can be said that the recognition of young children as deserving of quality education is recent. Historically, the emergence of institutions that assisted young children was marked by an assistencialist bias, aiming to meet the needs of mothers rather than children.

In Brazil, since the promulgation of the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education, Early Childhood Education has come to be seen as an important moment for the development of children aged 0 to 6 years, being recognized as the first stage of Basic Education. Important recognition, because for a long time the education of young children was considered the responsibility of families and the care provided by existing institutions was limited to an exclusively welfare assistance, offered to poor families as a means of meeting their needs as working mothers and fathers.

Such alterations can be understood as a result of the change in the way of seeing childhood and its potential. The child is seen as a being of capabilities and potential. Not as a being-to-be, but as someone who already is. Who is able to learn and contribute to their own development much more than previously imagined.

In this sense, the Sociology of Childhood points to a conception of the child that perceives it as an integral part of society, possessing a role never imagined in the Modern Age, when it can be said that the perception of the child as someone who had peculiarities had its beginnings. This is the concept of child that has been indicated as the central point of educational and school concerns and actions. Thinking about educational institutions for young children from this concept onwards means bringing new proposals for the organization

and development of educational activities. Activities that consider the potential of children and their basic needs for their effective physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.

This article aims to analyze the legislation that serves as a basis for the implementation of policies for Early Childhood Education, specifically the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009) and the National Common Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2017), seeking to understand the concepts of child(ren) and childhood(s) present there and the way in which this concept may impact the performance of the pedagogical work.

In this sense, the text is divided into three parts. In the first part, the description of the concepts of childhood(s) and child(ren) is made from the theorists of Sociology of Childhood, Willian Corsaro (2011) and Jens Qvortrup (2011), in the second part an analysis of the National Curricular Guidelines of Early Childhood Education (DCNEIs) and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and in the third, the discussion about the challenges posed to early childhood education is established based on the questions presented.

Views on child and childhood from the perspective of sociology

Influenced by Psychology and Philosophy, education has historically attributed a negative meaning to childhood, being considered a period of lack, fragility, dependence and negativity. Under this bias, the child is considered not for what he is, but for what he can become, the “come-to-be”, and for such a situation to be achieved, under the proposed perspectives, the school would be essential.

From this point of view, the standard is the adult, he is the model to be followed by the child and education is the process that can contribute to achieving this goal. It will serve as a means of civilization or purification from that state of underage. Regarding this issue, Kramer (1995, p. 21, our translation) demonstrates that, from this point of view, the child is considered as a being who is not yet social and who has a secondary role in social relations, “both in relation to production material goods, and in relation to participation in decisions”. The author shows that child development is perceived as a cultural development of their natural childlike possibilities, rather than socially determined and conditioned by their social origin.

Kramer also warns of the danger of thinking of a universal child based on the concept of childlike nature. The problem is that this view, based on the idea of childish nature, hides the power exercised by the adult over the child in an ideological way, since it treats as natural

a “superiority” that was socially established. A social dependence of the child is created and maintained, which “is transformed into a natural dependence, being absolutely justified by the adult” (KRAMER, 1995, p. 21, our translation).

In this social context, there is a concept of abstract child, of "humanist nature", which is opposed to a concept of unique child, which is intended as scientific, establishing a false opposition, which can be considered as such, since in both children are seen as ahistorical and as if their social role and development are independent of the living conditions, social class and cultural environment of their family (KRAMER, 1995).

From the sociological conceptions of Childhood, children begin to be considered an integral part of society, starting to consider that they are not only influenced, but also exert influence over everything that surrounds them. From this perspective, children are no longer seen as those who should be socialized by the family and the school to be perceived as beings inserted in the culture that relate to it, bringing their contributions equally.

Children are not limited to imitating and internalizing the world around them, but begin to interpret, make sense of and participate in culture, as in the process of attributing meaning to the adult world, they begin to collectively produce their own worlds and culture. Corsaro (2011) develops the idea of peer cultures which, according to him, are not phases that each child goes through, but they produce and actively participate in these cultures, the productions being incorporated into their web of experiences. These lived experiences are not abandoned as they mature or develop but remain part of their stories as active members of their culture.

This idea expands from the conception of the Norwegian sociologist Jens Qvortrup. This author defends the notion that childhood is a category of social structure, being fully integrated into society. To prove this theory, the author presents nine theses, among which, the conception that childhood is a particular and distinct form in any structure of society, which, however, is "exposed (economically and institutionally) to the same social forces that adults, albeit in a particular way” (QVORTRUP, 2011, p. 207, our translation).

According to the author, everyone is exposed to broader events that occur beyond the "microcosm" and children, in turn, will be less able to resist such events and influences, mainly due to the conditions they are subjected to as children by the network to which they are linked. Thus, society places them in a subordinate role that in itself would hamper their power of action.

The author shows that children are categorized as a minority group, thus defined from the idea of the dominant group, which presents itself as adults, possessing higher social status

and greater privileges. It is a group considered apart from society, having an unequal and differentiated treatment due to their physical or cultural characteristics, and we add that in different situations or convenient to the adult group, they are disregarded and even disrespected. Thus, it is clear that children are treated in an unequal and subordinate way with the excuse of their fragility and incapacity only when it is convenient for the adult universe.

In this sense, the adult world is much more likely to keep them alienated and prepared to remain in their "childhood" state, in the sense of lack, dependence and fragility than to offer them the means to have their possibilities of acting in society recognized, although in some social classes this has to happen for reasons of the adult's own needs.

Thinking about an educational institution that overcomes these issues that are so deeply rooted in society is a constant challenge, as it implies calling into question the view of adults, of the educators themselves and the parents of the children served by this school institution, who often prove to be extremely conservative and unwilling to discuss new views related to child protagonism. Thus, many of these ideas related to childhood are still not fully presented within institutions and classrooms, requiring in-depth discussion. Although so many studies are carried out to think about different pedagogies and methodologies, the institution and its actors are exposed to the system's requirements, which are imposed on everyone, relegating to the background what should be its priority: the child.

Early childhood education in Brazil and legislation

In 2009, Constitutional Amendment no. 59 made Basic Education from four to seventeen years old mandatory and free, that is, Early Childhood Education is now mandatory for children aged four to five years old. This amendment contributes to the expansion of access and democratization of the offer of this Teaching Stage.

In the same year, the new National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009) were approved, which brought new concepts to the work to be carried out in Early Childhood Education by bringing conceptions of childhood, child, curriculum, pedagogical proposal, development, learning and the teaching action, which should have interactions and play as guiding curricular axes, considering the child as

Historical and rights subject, who, in the interactions, relationships and daily practices he experiences, builds his personal and collective identity, plays, imagines, fantasizes, desires, learns, observes, experiences, narrates, questions and builds meanings about nature and society, producing culture (BRASIL, 2009, art. 4, our translation).

The Guidelines break with previous official guidelines, enabling an educational practice centered on the child and on their relationships. According to Dantas (2016, p. 179, our translation), “The document also highlights the attention to diversity, the specificities of small children and babies and the relationship with the family”.

Given the above, it is observed that the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009), represented a great advance in the quality of education offered to children. Despite a long history of struggles for political and legislative recognition, the bitter roots of an education aimed at meeting the demands of the capitalist market, as well as the conception of a generalized and abstract childhood, were embedded in educational curricula. And when it comes to education, no change takes place in an immediate bias, many years are needed to glimpse any harbinger of change. Thus, Early Childhood Education happened and still happens in different ways, following different paths.

Gradually, with the development of society, the system of labor production modes, linked to economic development and the exploitation of Capital, give rise to the precariousness of work. In this sense, Antunes (2018, p. 120, our translation), asserts that

Thus, in the midst of the computerization of work in the machine-digital world, a contradictory process has also been taking place, marked by the informalization of work (workers without rights), present in the expansion of outsourced/subcontractors, flexible workers, part-time workers, teleworkers, exponentially enhancing the universe of precarious work.

In this new scenario of working conditions, as throughout history, education is forced to mold itself to favor the new market demand. With the fragmented labor relations, what kind of education is necessary to offer? What kind of individual is it necessary to form?

Eight years after the publication of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, on 22 December 2017, Resolution CNE/CP no. 2 was published, which institutes and guides the implementation of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) for Early Childhood Education and Elementary School.

In its text, the BNCC defines it as a normative document that “defines the organic and progressive set of **essential learning** that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education” (BRASIL, 2017, our translation).

About essential learning, the document indicates that, throughout the course of Basic Education, these must ensure students develop ten **general competences/skills**, which embody, in the pedagogical scope, the rights to learning and development. In this sense, the document defends competences such as the "mobilization of knowledge (concepts and

procedures), skills (practical, cognitive and socio-emotional), attitudes and values to solve complex demands of everyday life, the full exercise of citizenship and the world of work" (BRASIL, 2017, our translation).

In the context of Early Childhood Education, the document brings the same definition of child as found in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, as well as reaffirming interactions and games as structuring axes of this teaching stage. From this perspective, the document establishes six learning and development rights to ensure the effective conditions of the teaching and learning process, namely: *Living together, Playing, Participating, Exploring, Expressing yourself and Knowing yourself*. Thus, it can be analyzed that the Base's suggestion is to systematize the methodology so that all children learn homogeneously, not considering that learning takes place in a heterogeneous way, it also proposes a work centered on the development of the curriculum, not prioritizing the development of the child in its multiple potentials.

The Curriculum Base, as well as the Curriculum References, brings in its scope the idea of a fragmentation of the curriculum, stipulating learning and development objectives divided into five fields of experience. In this way, the document subdivides these objectives according to the age of the children, being, Babies (zero to one year and six months), Very small children (1 year and 7 months to 3 years and 11 months) and Small children (4 years old to 5 years and 11 months).

In this sense, the early schooling of children gains strength, instituting what and when to learn. According to Monteiro *et al.* (2018 p. 207, our translation) "Based on the objectives defined in the document, we consider a silencing not only of children, but of teachers as enhancers and creatives".

Considering the autonomy of public and private institutions, the Base presupposes the construction of different curricula, according to the characteristics, realities and needs of the students, as long as such proposals are adequate to those established by the Base itself.

In this bias, one can observe the dichotomy between the theoretical and practical dimensions of the document. By composing an educational policy linked to census assessments on a national scale and without an epistemological and theoretical foundation, it allows each institution, system and state to establish its own curriculum, however it imposes that all children will be assessed based on national assumptions. Social and cultural diversities are disregarded, producing a standardized view of children and results-based learning.

When discussing the curriculum proposed by the BNCC, Marsiglia *et al.* (2017, p. 108, our translation) announce that if, on the one hand, the "working class struggles for the

democratization of access to knowledge produced by the whole of humanity throughout its history, the bourgeoisie seeks to make schools secondary, emptying it". Also, according to the authors, this version was devoid of "scientific, artistic and philosophical content, [having been given] [...] emphasis on methods, procedures, skills and abilities aimed at adapting the individual to the interests of big business" (MARSIGLIA *et al.*, 2017, p. 109, our translation), which demonstrates the strength of the business class in the process of drafting the document.

Given the above, the educational reform brought about by the implementation of the Base, leads to a curriculum that favors the development of skills and competences necessary for insertion in a precarious and fragmented labor market. The integral formation of the individual and the recognition of the specificities of the different childhoods that make up the corridors of educational institutions remain only in the discourse.

The Challenges of Early Childhood Education

As explained above, public policies for children in Brazil are marked by a journey marked by many struggles, achievements, impasses and challenges. Kramer (2007, p. 2, our translation), highlights that "today, we live in the paradox of having an advanced theoretical recognition of childhood, while we watch with horror at the inability of our generation to deal with children and youth populations".

How to educate children in this context? What is the ideal curriculum for meaningful education in and for childhood? What is the way forward? Between the walls of Early Childhood Education, the impasses and challenges of the political aspect for the composition of a quality curriculum have often taken away the children's voice.

In the daily life of early childhood education, it is possible to witness the performance of activities out of context, focusing on the memorization of letters and numbers, routines that determined the time to study, time to sleep, time for this, time for that, but which never considered the opinion and the will of the most interested: children. Early schooling introduces the idea that children need to prepare as soon as possible for elementary school, develop skills and competences to become good citizens and suitable for society. In the institutional routine, the child is still seen as a being in the process of becoming, moldable who needs to learn, learn, learn.

In the corridors of schools and early childhood education institutions, the world presented to children is fragmented and limited. Without experiences, without sharing,

without feeling, childhood is registered in the countless activities that fill the portfolios seen now and then by the parents.

There is an urgent need for work to be carried out in a "perspective of humanization, of rescuing the experience, of conquering the ability to read the world, to write collective history, appropriating the various forms of cultural production" (KRAMER, 2007 p. 7, our translation).

In this sense, when observing the importance of Early Childhood Education, it is necessary to look at how this stage is organized, how teachers, educators and the management team understand childhood, what concepts they bring, how they guarantee the right that children have to quality childhood, because

The Early Childhood Education field is undergoing an intense process of reviewing conceptions of children's education in collective spaces, and the selection and strengthening of pedagogical practices that mediate learning and children's development. In particular, priority is shown on discussions on how to guide work with children up to three years old in day care centers and how to ensure practices with children aged four and five that provide for ways to ensure continuity in the learning and development process of children, without anticipating contents that will be worked on in Elementary School (BRASIL, 2009 p. 7, our translation).

In this sense, Mello (2000 *apud* BARROS, 2009, p. 44, our translation) warns us that:

If the conceptions we have are essential in defining the way we act, it seems that we have a strong reason to reflect on how we educators perceive children, how we understand their possibilities and capabilities, the way we think they learn. Such conceptions – the conception of the child, of the knowledge process – and the way we understand the development-learning relationship and the learning-teaching relationship guide our attitude when organizing the pedagogical practice we develop. An analysis of what we are truly doing can start, then, from there: asking ourselves what concept of the child has guided our practice or guides our practices in general, and how this has determined the practices of early childhood education.

In this way, guaranteeing the quality of Early Childhood Education means understanding that it will only happen when childhood is actually recognized and the child is understood as a social actor, capable and interpreter of culture. It is necessary to promote the right of children to be children, to play, dream, question, research, know and understand the world. It is necessary to decentralize and decolonize the adult voice curriculum and let the children themselves be protagonists.

Final considerations

Starting from an abstract and generalized conception of the child, the care provided to children in Brazil was guided by European and North American patterns, and just as in the history of the construction of Brazilian society, the ideal perspective was very different from reality. The curriculum of Brazilian education was colonized to the ideals of a bourgeois elite.

The perception of children within society has gradually evolved as history unfolds. The conception of a being to be, of an adult in miniature, invisible to the social context due to its incompleteness and imperfection, has been modified, giving space to a conception in which the child is seen as a social being, transforming and producing culture. However, this recognition is very widespread in terms of political discourse and in the description of legal texts. The realization of this recognition was neglected due to the lack of resources, deficiency in teacher formation, as well as the systemic stitching of educational assumptions biased to the marketing interests of Capital.

When society's labor organization takes place in a technicist context, according to which, to exercise a function, guarantee a job, the individual must have formation based on specific techniques, education is formatted in the same bias. In a fragmented way, the teaching and learning process focuses on teaching specific content. In the same way, when the market diminishes and informalizes the modes of production and work, society needs citizens with limited skills and competences outlined in this way, education is designed to develop only ten general competences.

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education of 1996, reaffirms and validates the achievement of concern with education assuming the care of children from zero to six years, brought with the approval of the Federal Constitution of 1988. In this context, the child becomes to be seen as a being of rights, which leads to the creation of the Child and Adolescent Statute in 1990.

Early childhood education takes place within institutions designated for this purpose, no longer offering a merely assistencialist service, in favor of an educational proposal. However, Brazil is an extensive country and constituted by a wide social and cultural diversity, in this way, Early Childhood Education happens in different ways in the Brazilian municipalities.

The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009) constitute a great gain for early childhood education, as it provides quality care for children,

realizing this stage of teaching as essential for child development and not just as a preparatory stage for Elementary School.

Considering the child as a historical subject, with rights and a social being, the document presents guidelines for attending to intuitions based on the recognition of the diversities and pluralities of children's dimensions.

With the new reform of Brazilian education and the implementation of the National Common Curricular Base, Early Childhood Education is once again facing new (old) challenges. Children are again silenced and lose the right to a comprehensive education to acquire practical, cognitive and socio-emotional skills and competences in a fragmented, mechanical and alienated way.

Thinking about the quality of Early Childhood Education, recognizing the child as a historical, social subject, producer of culture, who has a voice and a turn and is the protagonist of their learning, configures a struggle that has been going on for a long time and will not end. The lack of quality of care and the negligence in the effectiveness of the legislation, draw the impasses in the composition of a significant and effective curriculum, which guarantees children the right to quality education, the right to integral formation and the right to their own childhood.

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