

## THE LEGITIMATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A RIGHT OF CITIZENSHIP

### *A LEGITIMAÇÃO DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL COMO DIREITO DE CIDADANIA<sup>1</sup>*

### *LA LEGITIMACIÓN DE LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL COMO DERECHO DE CIUDADANÍA*

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**ABSTRACT:** This text, anchored in the Historical-Cultural perspective in Psychology, aims to discuss the importance of the constitution of Early Childhood Education as a right of citizenship. This study is justified by the need to reflect on the field of educational policies aimed at this stage of Basic Education in our country. To understand the historical evolution of this advance, we resort to the main researches that have been carried out in the Brazilian territory. We used the literature review method described by Gil (2002) and Hohendorff (2014). To endorse our reflection, we also present the legal frameworks that substantiate Early Childhood Education as a right and place it within the scope of educational policies. The study noted that the laws already achieved represent important gains for children, however, they need to guarantee the right to quality education for all children and according to their specificities.

**KEYWORDS:** Early childhood education. Educational policies. Right.

**RESUMO:** O presente texto, ancorado na perspectiva Histórico-Cultural em Psicologia, tem como objetivo discutir a importância da constituição da Educação Infantil como direito de cidadania. Este estudo justifica-se pela necessidade de refletir sobre o campo das políticas educacionais voltadas para essa etapa da Educação Básica em nosso país. Para compreender a evolução histórica desse avanço, recorreremos às principais pesquisas que têm sido realizadas no território Brasileiro. Utilizou-se do método de revisão de literatura descrito por Gil (2002) e Hohendorff (2014). Para endossar nossa reflexão, apresentamos também os marcos legais que consubstanciam a Educação Infantil como direito e a situam no âmbito das políticas educacionais. O estudo observou que as legislações já conquistadas representam ganhos importantes para a infância, contudo, precisam garantir o direito à educação de qualidade de todas as crianças e de acordo com suas especificidades.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação infantil. Políticas educacionais. Direito.

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**RESUMEN:** Este texto, anclado en la perspectiva Histórico-Cultural en Psicología, tiene como objetivo discutir la importancia de la constitución de la Educación Infantil como derecho de ciudadanía. Este estudio se justifica por la necesidad de reflexionar sobre el campo de las políticas educativas orientadas a esta etapa de la Educación Básica en nuestro país. Para comprender la evolución histórica de este avance, recurrimos a las principales investigaciones que se han realizado en el territorio Brasileño. Utilizamos el método de revisión de la literatura descrito por Gil (2002) y Hohendorff (2014). Para respaldar nuestra reflexión, también presentamos los marcos legales que sustentan la Educación Infantil como un derecho y la ubican en el ámbito de las políticas educativas. El estudio señaló que las leyes ya logradas representan importantes avances para la niñez, sin embargo, es necesario garantizar el derecho a una educación de calidad para todos los niños y niñas y de acuerdo a sus especificidades.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación infantil. Políticas educativas. Derecho.

## Introduction

According to Dourado (2011), thinking about education in the 21st century, especially in Latin America, requires an analysis of the significant transformations caused by capitalist social relations, technological advances and the globalization of capital and work, factors that condition teaching work and the quality of teaching in Brazilian schools. Based on this observation, it is necessary to reflect on the meanings that have been built over time about the school and the role that education plays in modern society.

Dourado (2011) points out that, from the last decade of the 20th century, changes are observed in the social role of education throughout Latin America. In Brazil, the most expressive results of these changes takes effect from the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988) and the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education - LDB, Law n.º 9.394/96 (BRAZIL, 1996). According to the current LDB (BRAZIL, 1996), teaching is now structured in three modalities, namely: Early Childhood Education, Basic Education and Higher Education.

This new paradigm redirects education in the country, since Early Childhood Education requires the public authorities to promote public policies for their implementation and financial investment. However, that was not quite what happened. For a long time, schools continued to function in the same way, with a large number of classes in Basic Education and, at most, one or two classes in Early Childhood Education, which, in a timid way, supported their pedagogical practice, following the same proposal as the Fundamental years.

In Brazil, the right to education is guaranteed in the Federal Constitution (BRAZIL, 1988) and for children it is effective from entering Early Childhood Education, offered in day care centers, for children from zero to three years old and preschools, or schools for children from four to six years. In these spaces, Early Childhood Education is institutionalized and this requires practices that welcome and respect children in their singularities and development rhythms.

The understanding of childhood and education in this text is anchored in the assumptions of the Historical-Cultural Theory in Psychology, which understands that the human being is constituted in the relationship with the other, based on social interactions. The Historical-Cultural Theory, especially that of Vigotski (2016), provides founding elements for teacher education so that they perceive those social interactions act on the child, allowing the development of higher psychological functions.

According to Mello (2015, p. 1-2) (Our translation):

The main contribution of the Historical-Cultural Theory to early childhood education – and to education, in general – was to present a theory that proposes to explain the discussion about who the human being is, how he develops, how he learns and how it humanizes. By doing so, it made it possible to understand how this process happens in childhood: how the child learns, how he develops and forms his psychic abilities, that is, how he forms thought, speech, voluntary memory, how he learns to control his will, how it forms capacities, abilities and aptitudes, how it forms its feelings, its morals, its ethics, in short, how it constitutes its intelligence and how it forms its personality.

The following text is organized into four sections. In the first section, the methodology, the literature review method and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the studies are presented. In the second section, an overview of the historical course of educational assistance in early childhood education is outlined. We present the main educational policies in Brazil that deal with the subject and we seek to understand the aspects that involve quality in Early Childhood Education in the third section. Finally, in the final considerations, fourth section, we take stock of the research and reaffirm the importance of quality Early Childhood Education as a right of citizenship.

## **Method**

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2012) describes literature review articles as critical evaluations of materials that have already been published, considering the progress of research on the topic addressed. According to Hohendorff (2014), literature

review articles - ARLs aim to organize, integrate and evaluate relevant studies on a given topic.

For Gil, (2002, p. 44) (Our translation)

The bibliographic research is developed based on material already prepared, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. Although in almost all studies some type of work of this nature is required, there are studies developed exclusively from bibliographic sources.

In the present text, guided by a qualitative approach research, we present studies that deal with the subject of Early Childhood Education in Brazil and the public policies that were conquered to guarantee this right. The article presented here has its origins in a master's research developed within the scope of the XXX Graduate Program in Education. The review and updating of research, including those published after the defense, favors the expansion of the discussion to the area. Throughout the text, we also dialogue with authors whose research endorses the findings of the literature. The bibliographic search procedure included official documents from the Ministry of Education, printed books and scientific articles.

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies from the national literature were: (a) to include scientific articles and research published in the last two decades (2000-2020); (b) include publications in Portuguese; (c) restrict the survey to studies that investigate policies aimed at Early Childhood Education; (d) exclude works that are not in line with the educational policies that guide pedagogical work in Early Childhood Education.

The databases Scielo, Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) and PsychINFO were used and the terms used to search for research were: a) educational policies for early childhood education; b) children's rights and education; c) child care and education; d) quality in early childhood education.

### **Historical path of educational assistance in Early Childhood Education**

In this session, we present a historical review of studies that allow us to understand how the care of children in early childhood educational institutions began.

According to Moraes (2011), phenomena such as the abolition of slavery, the migration of the rural population to urban areas in large cities and the Proclamation of the Republic, as a form of government, created a climate of demand for social rights in the country. Faced with this new political and ideological scenario, conceptions of care for young children were also redefined. The author emphasizes that the expansion of industrial activities

favored the emergence of movements organized by women who began to demand from the State the creation of day care centers and nursery schools.

As Moraes points out (2011, p. 97) (Our translation):

In this extremely important political moment, in 1922, in Rio de Janeiro, the First Brazilian Congress for the Protection of Childhood took place, in which topics such as moral and hygienic education and the improvement of race were discussed, with emphasis on the role of women as caregivers. In this context, the first regulations for the care of children in nursery schools and kindergartens emerged.

In this new historical context, after the Proclamation of the Republic, as highlighted by Vieira (2016), the existence of day care centers was a “necessary evil” to face the problem of infant mortality that was worsening in large urban centers. As the author describes, this understanding of day care as a “necessary evil” “was disseminated in Brazil by the National Department for Children, created in 1940, within the scope of the Ministry of Education and Public Health – MESP” (VIEIRA, 2016, p. 165) (Our translation).

The creation of this policy in the national territory favored the emergence of the Brazilian Legion of Assistance - LBA (1942), responsible for the implementation of maternity wards, day care centers and children's support houses. However, according to Vieira (2016), it was the National Department for Children DNCR, as a regulatory body, that was responsible for determining the proper functioning of daycare centers, in terms of their functioning, organization of services, objectives, preparation of the responsible staff and aspects architectural features of the facilities.

When reflecting on the history and policy of children's rights to Early Childhood Education, Filho and Nunes (2013) point out that advances in children's education in Brazil are part of the country's redemocratization process. The authors argue that Early Childhood Education is not only a child's right, but also extends to the figure of the working mother.

In an analysis of the research work developed by Maria Machado Malta Campos, one of the forerunners and main researchers in the field of childhood, Rodrigues (2015), makes a detailed study of the production of Campos e Campos (2012) and points out that for the author, the creation and maintenance of day care and preschools was not only an achievement acquired through the articulation of women, but also a right of children to education.

Guimarães (2011), makes a distinction between day care and preschool. The author clarifies that in addition to the age group and full or part-time attendance, the day care center was created with the aim of welcoming the children of former slaves and, later, the children of

domestic and factory workers. “Preschools were created for the elites, in public schools across the country, also in the early 20th century.” (GUIMARÃES, 2011, p. 39) (Our translation).

According to Machado and Paschoal (2009), the first Early Childhood Education institutions in Brazil emerged with an assistentialist character, with the objective of helping women who worked outside the home and those who were helpless widows. In this scenario, the work carried out by religious and philanthropic institutions that fostered their expansion with the purpose of welcoming abandoned orphans stood out.

Machado and Paschoal (2009, p. 82) (Our translation) point out that:

Factors such as the high infant mortality rate, generalized nutrition and the education of domestic accidents, made some sectors of society, including the religious, the significant number and the number of entrepreneurs, begin to think about a space for child care outside the family scope.

In addition to this charitable feeling, we must also consider that, at the beginning of the 20th century, a patriarchal family model prevailed, in which men did not assume the paternity of children who were born out of wedlock, usually children who ended up in orphanages. So, we can understand that the logic of the emergence of these institutions was also associated with the interests of men, many of them politicians and businessmen who did not want to assume their children with women considered to be of “low morals”, who “[...] were always children of women of the court, because only these had to be ashamed of and reason to discard the unwanted child” (MACHADO; PASCHOAL, 2009 apud RIZZO, 2003, p. 37) (Our translation).

In these institutions, the care given to children was restricted to domestic care, safety, food and hygiene. Throughout the 20th century, some rearrangements were carried out, however, the care model of day care was still closely associated with social and economic relations. Kuhlmann Jr. (1999), denounces that this welfarism also educated, but for submission (submission and maintenance of the lower classes).

As Rosemberg (2002, p. 32-33) points out,

Until the end of the 1960s, there was a shared base between developed and underdeveloped countries, roughly following (with national variations) two institutional models: that of day care centers and similar ones, institutions that exclusively or mainly shelter poor children; the kindergarten, not especially intended for poor children.

Based on Rosenberg (2002), it is noted that not only in Brazil, but also in other countries, the emergence of comprehensive care institutions for young children was closely associated with social and economic conditions. In them, the idea of the need for care was very present, since the feeling prevailed that the abandoned child, or the one who stayed in the day care center while the mother worked, had emotional needs. Studies show that “historically, daycare centers were primarily concerned with providing food, hygiene and safety (as well as compensating for deficiencies arising from a supposedly unstructured family environment), with a care-custodial character” (MARTINS; PASQUALINNI, 2008, p. 74) (Our translation).

As Francischini and Silva (2012) point out, Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century faced serious problems due to the disorderly growth of cities. The lack of basic sanitation gave space for the growth of medical intervention and the hygienist movement, with a view to greater control of the problems of the urban population and “Children were present in this context and themes such as infant mortality and crime, as well as the places where the children were (streets, factories, nursing homes)” (FRANCISCHINI; SILVA, 2012, p. 262) (Our translation).

The idea present in the hygienist movement was to control and intervene as much as possible in everything that jeopardized the physical and moral well-being of the population. In this context, no type of education was provided that was related to the development and learning process of children welcomed by charities. In this perspective of social hygiene, “the State only looked at children who, in some way, represented a danger to society” (FRANCISCHINI; SILVA, 2012 p. 263) (Our translation).

Regarding the profile of the institutions that welcomed children with the support of the State, Francischini e Silva (2012, p. 262) (Our translation) emphasize that:

Institutions for the care of children had a preventive and recovery character for poor children, considered dangerous for the future of a promising nation. The focus of care was not on the child, but on what was classified as a minor, abandoned minor and delinquent minor.

What can be seen is that the interest of the State was aimed at preventing poor children from developing behaviors and attitudes considered delinquent in the future and that would jeopardize the order and well-being of society. Kuhlman (1999) develops a historical analysis of Early Childhood Education institutions and concludes that child care has always been associated with the articulation of political, business, legal, medical, pedagogical and religious forces. “Therefore, pedagogical interests were intertwined with medical and religious interests

in the constitution of the child and the institutions to serve them.” (GUIMARÃES, 2011, p. 38) (Our translation).

### **Early Childhood Education and Educational Policies in Brazil**

It is argued here that the central objective of Early Childhood Education is the integral development of the child. In other words, schools and day care centers are important spaces for social interaction, a source of curiosity in which the affectivity and autonomy of the child, little by little, gain space under the supervision of a qualified adult: the teacher. Starting from the perspective defended by Guimarães (2012), in which educating and caring are inseparable and complementary actions in the daily life of Early Childhood Education, we understand that we cannot lose sight of the fact that educating has a political dimension, guaranteeing rights and the integral well-being of children. children, guaranteeing them equal access to historically accumulated knowledge.

For Corsino (2020), a number of factors must be considered in order to achieve quality Early Childhood Education. The author highlights the impact of public policies and stresses the importance of the physical conditions of equipment, educational materials and teacher education.

Vasconcellos (2015) presents an overview of educational policies for children aged 0 to 3 years in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Juiz de Fora and Niterói. The focus of the study is on public policies for Early Childhood Education between 2009 and 2013 and the tensions involved between the text of policies and everyday practices.

According to Vasconcellos (2015, p. 69) (Our translation):

Its contribution is to offer subsidies to analyze the texts of the policies, their productions and the reinterpretation, confrontation and recreation of the policies by the subjects who experience them in day care centers, since their inclusion in the education system until the present moment.

For Gomes and Aquino (2019), children should be the center of political and pedagogical work. The authors argue that the Brazilian Early Childhood Education school is of enormous importance for children and point out that daycare and preschool are spaces for human production, socialization and childhood care and performance.



As stated by Gomes and Aquino (2019, p. 13):

It is through and at school that they have access to the cultural heritage produced by humanity and to its values and social norms. It is also in this institution that, when they are transformed with children – between adults and small children – and with them, they contribute to the maintenance of their aspects of culture and are also transformed into other ideas, discourses and practices. Therefore, the experience of participating in groups is not something new for children; what is new is the possibility of constituting their own group and their own culture, even if they are organized within an already structured social structure – the school.

We understand, then, that Early Childhood Education is the space for the introduction of the child into the world of knowledge historically accumulated by human beings. However, we also recognize that, in Early Childhood Education, there must be a systematization of pedagogical work in order to allow children access to learning in line with their development, which is understood here in a concrete way.

For Aquino and Vasconcellos (2012), the recognition of Early Childhood Education as the first stage of Basic Education contributed to give some visibility to children and their education in the Brazilian scenario. The promulgation of the 1988 Constitution (BRAZIL, 1988) inaugurates a new phase in Brazilian politics and is the result of the mobilization of various sectors of society in defense of citizenship. With regard to Early Childhood Education, this became the right of the child and day care was recognized, alongside preschool, as an educational institution.

Continuing with a project for the redemocratization of society and in line with article 227 of the Federal Constitution, Law 8.069/90 – Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) (BRAZIL, 1990) was approved in Brazil, an important document for the construction of a new way of understanding the child as a subject of rights.

According to Nunes and Filho (2013, p. 73) (Our translation):

By the ECA, the child is considered a subject of rights. Right to play, to want, not to want, to know, to dream, to have an opinion; right to affection. The Statute also contains important provisions for early childhood education: the definition and criteria for applying the principle of absolute priority; child and adolescent rights councils; the Children's and Adolescents' Rights Fund; the rights guarantee system.

The enactment of the Law on National Education Guidelines and Bases (LDB), Law no. 9,394 on December 20, 1996 (BRAZIL, 1996) represented a great advance in the field of educational policies. According to this LDB (BRAZIL, 1996), the education of children, for

the first time, came to be considered as the first level of school education (Title V, Chapter II, Section II, art. 29) divided into daycare centers (*creches*) (for children aged 0 to 3 years) and preschools (for children aged 4 and 5).

In the text of articles 29 and 30 of LDB n. 9,394 (BRAZIL, 1996), Early Childhood Education is considered as the first stage of Basic Education and its purpose is the integral development of children up to five years of age, in their physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, being the responsibility of daycare centers, or equivalent entities, serve children up to three years of age, and from preschools, children aged four and five.

Didonet (2014), proposes an analysis of the changes in Early Childhood Education operated in LDB n. 9,394 (BRAZIL, 1996) after 2007. The author pays special attention to Law n. 12,796/2013 (BRAZIL, 2013), document whose origin is the Bill n. 5,395/2009 (BRAZIL, 2009), whose objective was to change art. 62 of the current LDB (BRAZIL, 1996). The main changes concern the consideration of ethnic-racial diversity. In other words, the different manifestations of Brazilian and universal culture must be worked on in Early Childhood Education, give a better wording to article 4, which starts to consider Basic Education compulsory, from 4 to 17 years old, in three stages: preschool, elementary and high school. Also, in item III of article 4, the wording changes from “students with special needs” to “students with disabilities” and adds students “with global development disorders and high abilities or giftedness”.

In item VIII, it expands the coverage of didactic material, transportation, school meals and health care to all stages of Basic Education. Article 5 declares that access to compulsory Basic Education is a subjective public right, until then restricted to Elementary Education, by law the school census that covers Basic Education from birth, through preschool and all Basic Education. It becomes the duty of parents to enroll children as soon as they turn 4 years old. It made preschool mandatory, guided Early Childhood Education curricula to have a common national base and a diversified part, among other actions.

Didonet (2014), also lists other laws that changed the LDB (BRAZIL, 1996) in the Early Childhood Education stage, Law n. 11,700 of 2008 (BRAZIL, 2008): Art. 4, X of the LDB (BRAZIL, 1996) which determines that the State guarantees families a place in the public school of Early Childhood Education closest to their residence. Law no. 11,769, of 2008 (BRAZIL, 2008) which makes the teaching of music mandatory in the field of the arts. Law no. 12,013, of 2009 (BRAZIL, 2009) which defines that Early Childhood Education establishments must inform the father and mother or the legal guardian about the attendance of their children or dependents, as well as about the execution of the Pedagogical Proposal of

the day care center or pre-school. school, Law no. 12,287, of 2010 (BRAZIL, 2010) which explains that the teaching of art, a mandatory curricular component, must express mainly regional expressions.

In the midst of these discussions, it is also important to present the propositions presented in Bill n. 13.005/2014 (BRAZIL, 2014) establishing the new National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024, an important part of yet another chapter in the history of the process of consolidation of Early Childhood Education in our country. The government proposal expressed in goal 1, intends to universalize Early Childhood Education in preschool for children aged 4 and 5 years by 2016 and expand the offer of Early Childhood Education in daycare centers, in order to meet at least 50% of the population of children up to 3 years old by 2024.

According to Gomes (2017, p. 18) (Our translation):

Even recognizing the progress of having early childhood education among the twenty most important goals of Brazilian education for the decade, it is imperative to recognize that the PNE did not innovate in determining the universalization of school attendance for the population aged 4 and 5, it only reaffirmed the text Constitution (Amendment No. 59/2009). As for the day care center, there was also no legal innovation in terms of quantitative target, since Law nº 10.172/2001, which approved the previous PNE, already established the target of 50% of attendance of children from 0 to 3 years old in early childhood education establishments.

When making a historical analysis of public policies for Early Childhood Education in Brazil, Carneiro (2020), highlights that these have been incipient, however, he recognizes that the emergence of some of them improved the situation of children in the theoretical scope and in the ways of understanding the childhood. However, it emphasizes that these policies and practices must ensure the rights already guaranteed in Brazilian legislation.

Another document that legislates on Early Childhood Education in Brazil is the National Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI), prepared by the Ministry of Education MEC, with the objective of offering a common national basis for curricula, although it is not mandatory (BRAZIL, 1998). According to this, Early Childhood Education should provide the integration between caring and educating. From this perspective, education means the intersection of development and learning.

According to Brazil (1998, p. 23) (Our translation),

Educating, therefore, means providing care situations, games and learning oriented in an integrated way and that can contribute to the development of children's abilities of interpersonal relationship, of being and being with

others in a basic attitude of acceptance, respect and trust, and children's access to broader knowledge of social and cultural reality.

The National Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education, RCNEI, has been, since its elaboration, the target of severe criticism by researchers in the area who have taken a position against the document. In the opinion of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education ANPEd, prepared in 1998, in response to the consultation carried out by the MEC, the main criticisms are highlighted: a) a more or less schooled conception of education for the range from 0 to 6 years, b) organization of the areas of knowledge in a uniform way for the 0 to 3 and 4 to 6 age groups, c) oscillation in the way of approaching the younger child, sometimes suggesting an integrated pedagogical concept, sometimes the predominance of an approach one-dimensional, d) a psychologizing bias pointing to the early adoption of a traditional teaching-learning model, e) use of terminology borrowed from Elementary School, which reinforces the idea that the document advocates schooling, f) evaluation approach in which the List of objectives relating to learning and skills are assessed by standards-based criteria.

The opinion of the ANPEd (1998), in line with the LDB (BRAZIL, 1996), recommends that the evaluation of children at this stage be carried out through records and monitoring of their progress without any purpose of promotion or retention. Finally, the opinion concludes that the Referential is not in line with the other MEC publications published until that moment focused on Early Childhood Education and a perspective more focused on the proposals developed for Elementary School.

In a critique of the RCNEI volumes, Cerisara (2002), highlights that volume 1 presents a conception of Early Childhood Education much closer to that of Elementary School and the two other volumes, organized in a common structure, explain the ideas and practices related to the axis, to the child and the curricular components, which in the author's words show a subordination to the perspective of Elementary Education and reveal “the first conception of this RCNEI, in which the specificities of children from 0 to 6 years old end up being diluted in the document when they are submitted to the school version of work.” (CERISARA, 2002, p. 337) (Our translation).

The conception of the child defended in this article reiterates the criticisms listed and is in line with what the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education in Brazil (2010, p. 12) (Our translation) say:

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.

According to Aquino and Vasconcellos (2012), two central documents in the discussion and curriculum guidance for Early Childhood Education are: “Daily practices in early childhood education” (BRAZIL, 2009) and resolution n. 5 of the Basic Education Chamber (CEB do CNE, which instituted the new DCNEI in 2009) (BRAZIL, 2009).

For Aquino and Vasconcellos (2012, p. 73) (Our translation):

Both the text of the DCNEI/2009 and the material resulting from the MEC-UFRGS/2009 survey are marked by the care in producing them based on several consultations and debates with researchers and early childhood education professionals from all regions of the country. A common feature of these documents is the recognition of the child as a social and cultural subject, which refers to the condition of a subject of rights, including the right to education.

From this perspective, when we deal with human development, we are always dealing with a development that takes place in a specific place and time. Therefore, when we refer to the main aspects of child development in Early Childhood Education, it is important to emphasize that this process is marked by the historical and cultural environmental conditions encountered by the child from the moment of his birth, within his family, culture, region, social group, country and historical period, as well as depending on school mediation.

About this implication between childhood, development, history and society, Trindade (2011, p. 67-68) (Our translation) adds that:

We believe that overcoming spontaneous and naturalizing conceptions on issues concerning childhood, its development and educational needs is possible as long as human development is strongly connected with education and the society in which the child is inserted.

In the light of the Historical-Cultural Theory, which understands the human being from its sociocultural relationships, we perceive the child as a social and multi-determined being. Based on this premise, and based on the thinking of Aquino (2015), we argue that education and Early Childhood Education should prioritize this conception of the child and bring to the debate issues that go beyond school content.

## Quality in Early Childhood Education, beyond the logic of expansion

According to Nunes and Corsino (2013), the expansion of Early Childhood Education cannot do without the quality of the service provided to the population. The authors carried out a detailed study on the report “Inequalities in schooling in Brazil” (SCDES, 2009) and concluded that low quality in Early Childhood Education is mainly associated with poor infrastructure in schools, the devaluation of the teaching profession, teachers and the educational fragility of many municipalities.

Campos and Campos (2012), point out that the approval by the National Congress of constitutional amendment n. 59/2009 (BRAZIL, 2009), produced significant changes in the management of Basic Education and Early Childhood Education. In the text of the law, Basic Education becomes mandatory and free from 4 (four) to 17 (seventeen) years. The authors warn about the care and challenges relevant to the universalization of Early Childhood Education and emphasize that it is important to consider quantity and quality as inseparable dimensions that guide an educational policy, since “the expansion of access alone does not express how fair an educational system is” (CAMPOS; CAMPOS, 2012, p. 16) (Our translation).

When analyzing the dimension of quality in Early Childhood Education, Correa (2003) presents the results of a study that investigated the way services are offered in schools. The research was based on the definition of minimum standards in Early Childhood Education and discussed the relationship between supply and demand, the adult/child ratio and the dimension of care in the work to be carried out at this stage of education. When making a historical analysis of the concept of quality in Early Childhood Education, this quality is associated with the notion of rights and claims that these are equal for all children, because “thinking about quality in child care is related to the idea of guarantee and enforcement of their rights, already universally consecrated and, from a legal point of view, well defined” (CORREA, 2003, p. 91) (Our translation).

In order to contemplate a discussion that is very present in the field of Early Childhood Education, the author problematizes the issue of care. As already seen here, Early Childhood Education institutions were restricted to the care and protection of the child, because “the dimension of care, as something relevant to the understanding of the work carried out in early childhood education, only starts to gain prominence in Brazil from the 90s” (CORREA, 2003, p. 103) (Our translation).

Correa (2003) also highlights that every relationship between child and teacher implies the dimension of care and warns that this should not be understood as something that is typical of female work. Making a dialogue with Psychology, we can understand the concept of care beyond the excessive protection of children, but as one of the means that the teacher can find to establish healthy attachment relationships and collaborate in the children's development process.

For Montenegro (2005), among those involved with Early Childhood Education there is no consensus on the concept of care. According to the author, Brazil lacks research that deals with professional training to care for a child and even when these refer to care, they do not discuss their possible meanings and the impact on the education of teachers.

When dealing with the relationship between educating and caring in Early Childhood Education, Guimarães (2012), understands care in a broader way, as an ethical posture, attention to the other and the practice of freedom with the “perspective of enabling the invention of an alternative world of being with children, noticing and affecting them.” (GUIMARÃES, 2012, p. 43).

Costa (2020), drawing on the ontology of Martin Heidegger and the authors of Early Childhood Education, invites us to think about care as an ontological dimension for children. By defending the pedagogical character existing in care relationships, the author understands the concept in its formative dimension and defends the consolidation of the care/education binomial. More than that, Costa (2020) proposes to understand care as an ontological dimension, as a disposition of the beings that we are and that we also transform through care and argues that Early Childhood Education schools should be caring environments that provide coexistence and contact, indicating constitutive paths of being-in-the-world.

In a more complete definition, “caring and care is not restricted to instrumental actions of the adult towards the child, but concerns the creation of practices of the adult towards himself, which produce an atmosphere of attention, listening and availability in the day care center as a whole” (GUIMARÃES, 2012, p. 49) (Our translation). However, returning to Correa (2003), care in some situations is denied or seen as unprofessional and commonly associated with the female or maternal condition. According to the author, “care is understood not as a characteristic or professional attribute typical of those who work with children, but rather as a domestic characteristic, situated within the scope of private life and, above all, associated with the female condition” (CORREA, 2003, p. 106) (Our translation).

Also, according to Correa (2003, p. 106) (Our translation),

It is also important to pay attention to the necessary historicity with which the concept of care needs to be seen in order not to run the risk of hasty assessments and interpretations that, among other things, can lead to a “naturalization” of the relationship between care and female work.

These considerations lead us to believe that every educational relationship is marked by care, as long as it offers the necessary conditions for the child to feel welcomed and develop their potential. Furthermore, “care” also concerns the way adults relate to children at school, making it necessary, therefore, to take the child himself as the center for the organization of the educational process (CORREA, 2003, p. 109, author's emphasis).

It is important here to highlight something that concerns the differences that must be observed in the care provided in daycare centers for children from 0 to 3 years of age and in preschools for children between 4 and 6 years of age. It is observed that even those who defend a more educated concept for children in the grades/years closest to entering the nine-year Elementary School agree that children need more flexible, open and non-schooled models of care, which functions of caring and educating are integrated. When it comes to children aged 4 to 6 years, who attend Kindergarten full-time, there is also a consensus that it is necessary to guarantee, throughout the day, spaces and free time, for rest, play, care activities and food.

In this scenario, in which we cannot neglect the children's right to a quality education, we must also think about the conditions of teacher training of Early Childhood Education teachers. In a criticism of the curriculum project of the Pedagogy course, Drumond (2018), states that it currently trains teachers to work in Early Childhood Education and in the early years of Elementary School. The author emphasizes the difference in teaching in the two segments, stresses that the specificities of teaching work in day care and preschool are respected and guaranteed. Therefore, it is necessary to be clear that it is about the training of teachers of children and “the knowledge disseminated in the pedagogy course is far from the knowledge and practices that involve the care and education of young children.” (DRUMOND, 2018, p. 290) (Our translation).

According to Drumond (2018), teaching in Early Childhood Education has peculiar characteristics that the knowledge produced about the school cannot explain. The author emphasizes that at this stage the center is the child and her focus of attention is the process that is based on the children's experiences and not on the result. Therefore, being a teacher in Early Childhood Education is different from being a teacher at the school that teaches school content.



For Drumond (2018, p. 289) (Our translation):

Students, future teachers, feel unprepared to work with young children; knowledge about this stage of education is incipient in the courses and the teachers of the training courses themselves do not demonstrate a broad and consistent understanding of teaching work with young children.

Based on these criticisms, the author defends Childhood Pedagogy and highlights the importance of teaching courses aimed at training teachers “to work in day care centers, preschools and in the early years of Elementary School; that is, a training course for teachers of children.” (DRUMOND, 2018, p. 289).

### **Final considerations**

Although recent, research on children and Early Childhood Education in Brazil, arising mainly from graduate programs and research groups, has produced important scientific debates in the field of Pedagogy, Psychology, Anthropology and related areas. Regarding the legal frameworks, we have advanced in important aspects, since the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988), the Statute of the Child and Adolescent promulgated in 1990 (BRAZIL, 1990), the Law of Directives and Bases of the National Education of 1996 (BRAZIL, 1996), the National Education Plan, PNE 2014-2024 (BRAZIL, 2014) and other guidelines approved over the last few years, especially the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, DCNEI of 2009 (BRAZIL, 2009). These legally binding documents have contributed to improving infrastructure, teaching and learning concepts, teacher training, curriculum proposals and teaching methods.

The National Policy on Early Childhood Education (BRAZIL, 2006) points out the different functions that are attributed to Early Childhood Education throughout its trajectory: sometimes exercising a welfare function, sometimes compensatory, sometimes educational. Therefore, “[...] the integration between care and education remains a challenge, having been the subject of extensive debate among researchers and professionals in the area” (TRINDADE, 2011, p. 48) (Our translation).

It is undeniable that throughout a history of struggles, advances and setbacks, Early Childhood Education in Brazil has been legitimized as a social right. These advances, in particular, have materialized, as already mentioned, in the form of educational policies over the last two decades. However, much still needs to be improved. There is a large number of families that cannot find places in day care centers for their children, which in a way reflects

the inefficiency of resources allocated to Early Childhood Education and also the irresponsibility of municipalities in the management and, above all, in the realization of this right.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted concerns the guarantee of the quality of the services that are offered in Early Childhood Education schools, as the research points out, the expansion of enrollments is not enough. Therefore, extrapolating the number of children per classroom without any quality condition violates the principle of equity, it is therefore necessary to provide children with learning and development experiences. As mentioned by Filho and Nunes (2013), unfortunately, the strategies that have been adopted in our country are far from achieving the objectives of providing care that addresses the specificities of children. “Reality seems to be far from consolidating effective democratization in access to fundamental rights” (NUNES; FILHO, 2013, p. 88) (Our translation).

The New National Common Curriculum Base of 2017 (BRAZIL, 2017) reinforces the importance of Early Childhood Education, equates its importance to that of Elementary and High School and emphasizes that the financial resources distributed by the federal government must contemplate this stage of education in an equivalent way to the rest. The document also points out that it is up to Early Childhood Education not only to educate and care, as discussed above in the text, but also to play, which highlights the importance of Early Childhood Education as a privileged space for the child's protagonism, play and children's cultures.

The analysis undertaken here showed that over time and due to organized social movements, the child is no longer seen as a fragile, puerile being who needs care while their mothers need to work. Nowadays, the child is inscribed as a subject of rights. It is also observed that day care centers have been losing the negative character that was previously attributed to them and have been asserting themselves as a legitimate field of access to the right to education and human development not only for the poorest children. Another challenge still at stake in our society is that of considering the child a legitimate social subject in claiming their rights to protection and care, but also to participation.

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