



Love me, love me not: Child, Childhood and Early Childhood Education¹

Bem-me-quer, malmequer: Criança, Infância e Educação Infantil

Me quiere, no me quiere: Niño, Infancia y Educación Infantil

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to investigate the historical trajectory of childhood and Early Childhood Education in order to provoke reflections for those who dedicate themselves to the first stage of basic education in contemporary times, as we believe that this immersion in the past allows the understanding of many aspects of the present and highlights the need for a pedagogical-educational construction aimed at more humanizing actions towards childhood. The methodology of the work is a qualitative approach, based on bibliographical research. The theoretical foundation is based mainly on the literature of Ariès (1981), Priore (2010) and the Brazilian Legislation. Thus, the movement of analysis suggests that Early Childhood Education has made some advances, but the interpretation of history demonstrates that this evolutionary line is ambiguous, unequal, exclusive, supported by a dark past that, in many cases, is still genuine.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Infancy; Child

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Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é investigar a trajetória histórica da infância e da Educação Infantil a fim de suscitar reflexões para aqueles que se dedicam a primeira etapa da educação básica na contemporaneidade, pois acreditamos que, esta imersão ao passado, permite a compreensão de muitos aspectos do presente e coloca em evidência a necessidade de uma construção pedagógica-educacional voltada às ações mais humanizadoras para com a infância. A metodologia do trabalho é de abordagem qualitativa, embasada em uma pesquisa de caráter bibliográfico. A fundamentação teórica está alicerçada principalmente nas literaturas de Ariès (1981), Priore (2010) e na Legislação Brasileira. Assim, o movimento de análise sugere que a Educação Infantil, apresentou alguns avanços. Porém, a interpretação da história demonstra que esta linha evolutiva é ambígua, desigual, excludente, amparada por um passado sombrio que, em muitos casos, ainda se faz genuíno.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil; Infância; Criança.

Resumem

El objetivo de este artículo es indagar en la trayectoria histórica de la infancia y la Educación Infantil con el fin de provocar reflexiones para quienes se dedican a la primera etapa de la educación básica en la contemporaneidad, pues creemos que esta inmersión en el pasado permite la comprensión de muchos aspectos del presente y destaca la necesidad de una construcción pedagógico-educativa encaminada a acciones más humanizadoras hacia la infancia. La metodología del trabajo es de abordaje cualitativo, a partir de una investigación bibliográfica. La fundamentación teórica se basa principalmente en la literatura de Ariès (1981), Priore (2010) y la Legislación Brasileña. Así, el movimiento de análisis sugiere que la Educación Infantil ha hecho algunos avances, pero la interpretación de la historia demuestra que esta línea evolutiva es ambigua, desigual, excluyente, sustentada en un pasado oscuro que, en muchos casos, sigue siendo genuino.

Palabras Clave: Educación Infantil; Infancia; Niño.

Introduction

This article is an excerpt from a research whose object of study focused on the interactions established between children and Early Childhood Education educators. It was constructed through a narrative that seeks to provoke reflections through the analogy between children and plants. The idea arose from a vegetable and flower cultivation project that was developed simultaneously with the ongoing research into the topic.

We can say that with plants we learn that if we are careless in dealing with them, we will be subjecting them to possible diseases. They suffer from lack of water or supplies, from excessive exposure to the sun or lack of it. We understand that some species require greater attention and are more fragile, while others are known for their resilience. Thus, the necessary care such as irrigation, pruning and nutrition are determined by the peculiarities of each one. Children are not plants, nor are the beauty of flowers, the perfume, the aroma of vegetables considered scientific factors. They are commonly found in the fields of arts, literature and poetry. So, how could this experience have inspired and contributed to this research?

We answer by paraphrasing Rubem Alves (2004): this writing carries two boxes, one with tools and the other with toys. The toolbox represents science, in its compartments are arranged books, other authors, observations and results of the methodological path taken. The toy box symbolizes aesthetic principles, creativity and playfulness. It contains flowers, spices and teas, which personify beauty, joy, affection and poetry. The two boxes are inseparable and indispensable when considering childhood education.

The title *Love me, love me not: Children, Childhood and Early Childhood Education* alludes to the daisy, a flower, graceful and strong, that inspires play (a game, whose objective is to discover by plucking the flower) reciprocity or lack of affection. This leads us to think about the itinerary of childhood and takes us to the phases defined by Frabboni (1998): denied childhood, industrialized childhood and childhood with rights. It also leads us to Ariès (1981) and his assumptions that in the Middle Ages childhood was ignored.

The child in the figure of the little daisy is afflicted over time, by the misunderstanding of a society that takes it as a game, a pampered, forgotten, exploited, abandoned child, a child with rights... what will it be? When will it be? Where it will be? Who will it be with? When will this game end? This ambivalence is common when the dialogue involves childhood, children and the guarantee of rights. The situations experienced by children in different social situations will define concepts and determine the place that each child occupies in this time called childhood.

In this way, the intention is to draw attention to the history of childhood and Early Childhood Education and the close relation that is established between these two aspects, as, in different historical periods, different representations and meanings were constructed that, commonly, end up having repercussions on the conception and organization that we have today.

Some authors, such as Rousseau², Pestalozzi³, Fröbel⁴ and Montessori⁵, throughout their studies about childhood, attribute to the child the figure of a plant, a wild flower, whose

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) In his conception, man is born good and, therefore, it is necessary to start from the child's natural instincts to develop them (FERRARI, 2008a).

³ Father of modern psychology, he directly inspired Fröbel and other thinkers of the time. His name is linked to all education reform movements of the 19th century (SOËTARD, 2010).

⁴ Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) founded the first kindergarten in the German city of Blankenburg (HEILAND, 2010).

⁵ Maria Montessori (1870–1952) She was the first woman to graduate in medicine in Italy. She developed work with children with intellectual disabilities. She created the *Casa dei Bambini* (Children's House), (FERRARI, 2008b).

gardeners (teachers) are responsible for fertilizing the soil, with extreme zeal, offering the resources necessary for their growth and development. In this job, affection, protection and technical expertise are essential for the healthy growth of flowers (children).

The gardener/teacher, aware of his role, monitors and stimulates, through access to the world of culture, the plant's development process. However, it is the child who determines what care they can or cannot receive, as each flower/child is unique; some require more attention, are more delicate, others are stronger, with different times to blossom, with needs specific to their species. The environment around you and external factors, such as light, climate and soil, also need to be considered. Excess or lack of zeal are worrying factors, as they can significantly harm their development. The gardener is responsible for cultivating gardens (classrooms), that is, building linguistic, symbolic and cultural pathways that allow children greater vivacity and breadth, so that they can express their beauties, colors and perfumes.

It is thus, in this analogy with the practice of gardening and care, that we build beds, knowledge and explore the movements of childhood and educational processes aimed at serving this public, as over the years, the stories of these elements intertwine, having been marked by factors that directly implicate the notion of childhood and the Early Childhood Education proposal that we have today. This foray into time clarifies how some concepts were socially instituted, in addition, seeking to understand the “historical trajectory of our children’s behaviors, ways of being and thinking is also a way of loving them all, without distinction, better” (PRIORE, 2010, p. 17).

Not everything is rosy: trajectories of childhood and Early Childhood Education

Faced with the social and cultural transformations experienced by a society that bears the scars of inequality, it is up to us to ask: has the way we think and treat our children always been the same? And if it changed, why did it change? Where? For what purpose?

The flower, popularly known as daisy, has the scientific name *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*, coming from the Latin *margarita*, meaning “pearl”, and symbolizes simplicity and innocence (EITERER, 2007). The tiny flower daisy is confusing due to its appearance, because anyone who sees it, so fragile, cannot imagine that it is capable of adapting very easily, to different types of soil. It closes at night and opens its petals again every morning to embrace the rising sun. So beautiful, so simple, so delicate, that it suggests a joke, becomes a game, love me, love me not; and ends up deflated, to prove what? What's the point? What is the reason? What kind of joke is this that destroys the flower to talk about love?

The terms simplicity, innocence, adaptation could lead us to the idea that the arrival of children into the world of culture would be just a stable continuity of the latter, or even that a biological, hereditary essence defines the former. However, children's relation with culture is always a dynamic, ambivalent and dialectical relation. Childhood is never outside of history, imaginaries and social practices, in the same way that culture is not something finished, closed, which only serves to format and manufacture man's humanity.

Vygotsky (2007), contributed significantly to our understanding of this debate about the relation between children and culture. For him, child development is intrinsically linked to the cultural and historical context. Each culture provides a unique set of values, beliefs and practices that shape the way children think and develop. Thus, childhoods are never given, but constructed, just like culture and society; complexity, criticality, intervention, therefore, are the dialectical pairs of the terms simplicity, innocence, adaptation.

The expressions children and childhood are usually used as synonyms, however, they differ in meaning. The Houaiss dictionary (2001)⁶ specifies that “*criança*” is a word that

⁶ Online version.

comes from Latin, derives from *criar* + *ança* and means creation. Etymologically, childhood comes from the Latin *infantia*, giving a meaning of difficulty in speaking, which is new or new. For the Child and Adolescent Statute — ECA (BRASIL, 1990), a child is a person who is under 12 years of age.

In the Middle Ages, the word childhood was used to designate children up to 7 years old, it was believed that, from then on, they were able to understand adults' speech and what they said. According to Ariès (1981, p. 6), “[...] the first age is the childhood that plants teeth, this age begins when the child is born and lasts until the age of 7, and at this age what is born is called *enfant* (child), which means non-speaking [...]”. In this sense, childhood was closely linked to the social condition of children. Those born to rich families received different care than children of the common people, since poor children did not have the same opportunities.

From another perspective, DeMause (1991) presents a psychogenetic interpretation of the childhood history. For him, the evolutionary process was much more linked to the dynamics of parental practices and family interactions, than to economic issues. His theory of psychohistory emphasizes that the way children are treated in a particular culture or time has a significant impact not only on individuals, but on the development of society as a whole. The author points out that progress in the treatment of children, throughout history, has moved from more abusive and negligent practices towards more empathetic and caring approaches, as a result of humanity's moral and psychological progress.

Thus, we consider that childhood⁷ needs to be thought of from plural meanings in relation to historical, cultural and social parameters, it is important to consider the reality to which childish subjects are subjected. Investigating childhood requires a social analysis that encompasses components capable of attesting to the concreteness of life, thus constituting a political act that testifies to veracity and seeks to repair and recover what has been denied, neglected or forgotten.

Understanding the concept of childhood as a socially contextualized socio-historically-culturally construction, it opposes the hypothesis of universal childhood, signaling the complexity faced by the delimitation of terms or definition of concepts related to children and childhood. Participating in this debate requires at least consideration regarding the following questions: What child/childhood are we talking about? From what time, place, social condition? Who was not included? Yes, because when we address a single reality, we suppress another and the discourse ends up being directed. Hence the importance of situating our speech, so that the narrative is not empty and devoid of meaning.

Ariès (1981) defends the thesis that the concept of childhood is socially elaborated, therefore, it undergoes changes that are governed by advances and setbacks in forms of social organization. The historical plot proves that children have always existed; Childhood, on the other hand, is conditioned by the way of being a child, and, therefore, in many cases it ends up unviable. In this paradox lies the main difference between the concepts. In the Kuhlmann's (1998) words, childhood concerns the child's condition in the face of a set of experiences that they experience on a geographic, historical and social level. In summary, the concept of child comprises a historical and cultural being, while the conception of childhood covers a phase of life that will be defined according to the possibilities offered or experienced by the subjects who pass through it.

The researches about childhood demonstrates progress and achievements both in the scientific sphere and in the field of legal rights. However, there is still a lot of ground to be leveled, a lot of land to plow, in order to green gardens that can be admired, there are still roads to be covered, especially with regard to the effective guarantee of rights for children from

⁷ In this article we will deal with childhood and childhoods as synonymous terminologies. It is worth highlighting, therefore, that we recognize it as plural, because, when thinking about childhood, we must consider the conjecture and the place that children occupy.

popular settings. There are many invisible childhoods, forgotten children, not considered in terms of a dignified and free life, there are many silenced speeches in the face of historically accumulated inequalities, inert conjectures, shaped by idealizations and far from the commitment to the lives of those who have less and the commitment to social justice. In this way, studies that focus on the theme of childhood need to overcome homogeneity and transform themselves into clashes where everyone is respected in their pluralities so that the guarantee of rights transcends welfare.

Little sunflowers looking for a place in the sun: the historical construction of the childhood concept

The sunflower is known for being a strong flower, which can withstand any extreme weather condition and has the peculiarity of being heliotropic, that is, it rotates the stem, leaving the flower positioned facing the sun. According to botanist Heike Hofmann, from the University of Zurich (SCHAUSACCES 2015), the sunflower makes this movement to promote photosynthesis and add energy for seed development. Childhood, imitating the sunflower, has the fragility and delicacy of being a flower, but, on the other hand, it is a strong, wild flower that fights for its survival, insisting on the sun, resisting the elements, facing the difficulties imposed throughout life history. Childhood, therefore, is not only adaptable and docile, accepting the misery that is offered to them, but it resists, and insists, on being able to be more. For Priore (2010, p.17),

There are many historians, sociologists and anthropologists who put their sensitivity and talent at the service of these most fragile human beings. From this perspective, Brazil meets with its partners [...] in the search for answers and projects that can guarantee the child population a definitive place in the sun.

In the writing of the aforementioned author, we would also add the teachers who, in their tireless research, studies and movements, intend to understand and bring about improvements in children's situations. In this way, in the following lines we will dedicate ourselves to analyzing the directions, the flowerbeds — not always flowery — of our “sunflower childhood”, which, even in the face of setbacks, sprout, growing awareness of their existence and their rights.

For Frabboni (1998), the history of childhood is divided into three phases: denied childhood, industrialized childhood and childhood with rights. The transition from one phase to another occurs slowly and gradually, favoring the elite classes, since many children, especially those linked to popular territories, have not yet been able to achieve the rights they have achieved, and reveal the impacts caused by negative forms of conceive childhood over the years.

We are talking about a child whose first pages of the family album are stained with certain characteristics of “negative identity”, namely: the identity of the child-adult and the identity of the child-child-student. Only in the pages of the album corresponding to the 20th century does childhood recognize the identity of a social subject, a subject of rights (FRABBONI, 1998, p. 64).

Denied childhood was established in the Middle Ages, until the middle of the 15th century, when, according to Ariès (1981), the figure of the child had no social recognition.

During this period, the child was ignored, did not have their own identity, was considered a biological being only, without autonomy, unimportant and easily replaceable. The author (1981) demonstrates, in his studies, that the works of art from this period ignored childhood; children were rarely represented, and, when this happened, the images created denoted a lack of peculiarities. They were portrayed as adults, distinguished only by their height.

Children were treated with a superficial feeling, called “pampering”, linked to childish grace. There was no moral or educational commitment; They played a minimal social role, being considered at the level of pets. The rule was not to get too emotionally involved, as the high indicators of infant mortality showed that it would be difficult for the child to survive this phase. “The child never left a kind of anonymity” (ARIÈS, 1981, p. 4).

Ariès (1981, p. 99) maintains that the feeling of childhood is being constituted, influenced by the circumstances that occur over the years. He states that this is not an emotional issue; does not mean the same as affection for children: [...] “corresponds to the awareness of childish particularity, that particularity which essentially distinguishes the child from the adult, even a young one. That awareness didn’t exist.” When they reached seven years of age, they were introduced into an adult context so that they could take on different work activities by gender. Boys learned trades and arts of war; girls were instructed in domestic activities, weaving and spinning.

The feeling of childhood is being discovered timidly, through Christian thought. For Barbosa (2006, p. 103), it is from the Renaissance “with the review of the experiences of the Primitive Church, that childhood was rethought and began to be associated with elements such as purity, the need for love, the naivety of the heart, malleability and fragility”. Religious people began to defend that children had souls and to recognize some characteristics specific to the childhood phase. It is through this feeling of childhood that adult life and childhood life are distinguished and delimited. One can only effectively talk about childhood when children are separated from adults and categories are established.

The second phase, considered the phase of industrialized childhood (FRABBONI, 1998), begins from the 16th century to the middle of the 18th century, marked by a slow and gradual change in attitude towards the child's understanding, primarily covering boys from upper classes and, over time, other social classes and girls were also included.

In the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution disseminated the image of the child as a productive being, with a utilitarian function, and childhood as an object of manipulation of social interests, proving the neglect experienced by those from poor families, who started working at the age of six and were subjected to deplorable conditions, with working hours of 12 hours to 16 hours a day, 6 days a week, in unhealthy places and extremely precarious situations (APOLINÁRIO, 2007).

From the beginning of the new industry, children were employed in factories. (...) The high mortality rate found among the children of workers, especially factory workers, is sufficient proof of the unhealthy environment in which they spend their first years of life (ENGELS, 2008, p. 187).

From another perspective, the Industrial Revolution is a decisive factor in consolidating the perception of childhood. The emergence of industries delimits the zone between family and work, organizing the home for the family nucleus and the factory structure for the world of work. This separation caused the closure of the family nucleus and boosted a very strong feeling of affection, until then not considered important in established relationships, thus forming the conception of the modern family. In this sense, Kramer (1987) highlights that what is new is the feeling of family that emerges intrinsic to childhood.

In this reconfiguration of the roles of children and families in industrial society and, with the popularization of reading and writing, the urgency of teaching young people to read and write becomes evident, which has boosted the expansion of children's access to schools. Surveillance and extreme physical punishment, however, appear as main characteristics of the established school system. This understanding of the teaching method led to the spread of different and antagonistic practices, which are still reflected today in many educational contexts. We can say that the child conquered his identity, but not his autonomy. It differed from adults by some characteristics, but remained *infantia* (a being that does not speak) and, consequently, could not be heard. Regarding the schooling process, Ariès (1981, p. 5) states:

School has replaced learning as a means of education. This means that the child is no longer mixed with adults and learns about life directly, through contact with them. Despite many reticence and delays, the child was separated from the adults and kept at a distance, in a kind of quarantine, before being released into the world. This quarantine was at school, college. Then began a long process of confinement of children (such as the insane, the poor and prostitutes) that would continue to this day, and which is called schooling.

The reduction in mortality and birth rates was also a determining factor in promoting the childhood feeling. The figure of the child is, little by little, being rethought, given new meaning and constituted, as well as their role in the social scenario. Changes in the way of thinking and seeing childhood are being conceived, however, not in a linear and fair way, but as a privilege for the few, when the underprivileged continue to be unassisted and ignored.

The investigation of the theme of childhood moves between two extremes considered by Ariès (1981): “pampering and moralizing”. One presupposes education as a preponderant factor in containing children's impulses, anchored in austerity, order, aiming at spiritual aspects and the salvation of the child's soul, using as a method the creation of guidance manuals for parents, which explained how to educate children using, including, physical punishments. The other considers the child to be fragile, and therefore dependent, cute, therefore praiseworthy, a small toy with the ability to entertain bored adults, and therefore worthy of being promoted.

one considers the child naive, innocent and cute and is translated by the “pampering” of adults; and the other appears simultaneously to the first, but opposes it, making the child an imperfect and incomplete being, who needs “moralization” and education provided by the adult (KRAMER, 1987, p. 18).

Society is gradually succumbing to the new statement of childhood. Children begin to be portrayed in works of art and photographic records. Adults adapt what was previously only their domain for children, for example, children's stories, which are reinterpretations of popular tales and emerge with educational purposes. Faced with the emergence of the feeling of protection for children, the rightful childhood emerges, articulated with a redefinition of the figure of the child, who starts to be thought of as an active being, with specificities and needs specific to their age profile, also with the capacity to produce, to create, and, most importantly, she will be recognized as a subject of rights. This phase began in the 18th century and continues to this day (FRABBONI, 1998). It was strongly influenced by the emergence of human sciences, especially pedagogy and psychology, rejecting the view of child education within the private sphere, as exclusive to the family, starting to understand it as a social and collective responsibility.

When we say that the concept of childhood is historically constructed, it means that it undergoes changes, and that it was not always the way it is stated. The concept we have today is based on a localized conception; it is a context, a reality, which leads us to assume that, not only in other historical moments, but also in our contemporary moment, as well as in other territories, other cultures, there are other ways of being a child, of looking at, understand and live childhood. Even in the present, there are manifestations typical of times past. While theory protects childhood, practice is subject to the culture and socioeconomic context in which the child is inserted. Kuhlmann (1998, p. 20) highlights six ways of relating to childhood, which would be:

Infanticide, from Antiquity to the 4th century AD; the Abandonment, from the 4th to the 13th century; Ambivalence, from the 14th to the 17th century; the Intrusion, in the 18th century; Socialization, from the 19th century to the mid-20th century; and Support [...], started in the middle of the 20th century.

The words childhood and child have gained new interpretations, however there are still gaps between research about childhood and what is experienced in many children's realities. Research and academic productions, as well as social and political struggles, reveal that it is necessary to continue seeking to understand more deeply everything associated with childhood in order to legitimize the child as a subject of rights.

Kuhlmann (1998) warns that a certain amount of care is necessary when faced with this statement of progressive improvements, so that the contradictions and setbacks that still occur today are not minimized, and also so that, based on it, there is no false connotation that all problems related to childhood have been left in the past. "If currently, on the one hand, we have experienced demonstrations of recognition of children's rights at different levels, on the other, we continue to witness massacres of children and young people, exploitation, sexual violence, hunger, mistreatment in educational institutions" (KUHLMANN, 1998, p. 21).

We need to go further in the face of propositions aimed at childhood, in order to extrapolate the academic field and overcome the obstacles imposed by our own experience, culminating in effective actions that contribute to the development of children and respect for their distinctions, transcending authoritarianism and elements that they dehumanize childhood, as well as the idealization of adults who possess the truth and children as ignorant. Children do not know less, they just have different knowledge, the meaning of which is constituted in their interaction with the world and their own surroundings.

Diversity in childhood experiences is an undeniable phenomenon, reflecting the complexity of social, family and educational structures around the world. Many children experience non-normalized paths, shaped by a variety of factors ranging from family dynamics to socioeconomic contexts. This multifaceted scenario has given rise to "childhoods" that demand special attention and guidance, both in the care and educational spheres. Additionally, some children have access to high-quality educational opportunities, while others face challenges such as a lack of resources, poor schools or language barriers. Disparity in access to education often creates inequalities that directly impact child development.

In the social aspect, cultural, ethnic and gender diversities contribute to unique socialization experiences. The need for acceptance and understanding differences can influence children's emotional and psychosocial development, making it essential to promote inclusive and tolerant environments.

The emergence of "childhoods" requiring special guidance reflects the need for a more personalized approach to providing care and education. Children who face specific challenges, such as physical, mental or emotional disabilities, require tailored interventions to ensure their

potential is fully realized. Furthermore, children living in situations of social vulnerability, such as those affected by extreme poverty, also need specialized support to overcome obstacles and achieve healthy development.

Society must recognize the diversity of childhood pathways and work to create robust support systems that meet each child's specific needs. This includes public policies that promote equal access to educational resources, mental health services and social assistance. Building a solid foundation for all children, regardless of their circumstances, is fundamental to creating a more just and inclusive society.

Kindergarten: Contextualizing Early Childhood Education

The expression Early Childhood Education refers to educational institutions aimed at serving children from zero to 5 years of age. It is characterized as a recent term, which was established in Brazil from the 1988 Federal Constitution, as well as normative documents, such as Law 9,394/96. It is well known, however, that children's schools have been established since the end of the 60s in Europe and North America and the 70s in Brazil.

Given the analysis already carried out, we can state that, like the perception of childhood, educational trends are also a result of the historical moment experienced. In Antiquity, according to Cambi (1999, p. 176), school was the privilege of a few and only elite young people had access. During this period, children's education was centered on the family.

In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church exercised a monopoly on thought, and also on culture, which directly affected the education model of the time. Schools were linked to religious institutions and the subjects studied were decided by the Church. Initially, the schools operated as shelters, boarding schools, and their purpose was to instruct clergy; later, they began to include educated lay people. The school functioned as a technical course, welcoming, without any distinction, different age groups, but childhood education was not thought of, especially for those who belonged to the nobility. Peasants' children, as they did not have financial resources and were tied to menial obligations, were unable to access school education, leaving them illiterate for life. Later, with the growth of commerce, the need for reading, writing and calculations emerged for the emerging bourgeois class. Secular schools were then born (FRABBONI, 1998). For Andrade (2010, p. 128), the origin of schools for children,

relates to the emergence of school and modern thought [...]. It also responds to new educational demands resulting from productive relations arising from industrial society. The historical context of the emergence of these institutions is also marked by changes within the family organization, which assumes the nuclear model, and the development of theories aimed at understanding the children's nature marked by innocence and an inclination towards bad behavior.

Schools organized based on rigid methods had the doctrine of knowing to correct. Physical punishments, commonly used, denoted the intention of training children for the future, just that, inhibiting their nature, training them mechanically, as if they were things, so that self-centered objectives would be successful. For poor children, education could not be equated with that provided for the well-born; for those with low income, education for blue-collar work and in a spirit of piety was enough (OLIVEIRA, 2007).

Rousseau, a precursor and visionary in Pedagogy, contrary to the austerity ideas of the time, will influence many educators with his way of thinking. He stated that childhood occurred in different stages of development, and proclaimed that the child should be educated in freedom. Also, he took a critical stance against traditional teaching, where, in the name of civilization,

only the intellect was valued to the detriment of physical, social, emotional aspects, among others. He opposed the method of memorizing and repeating content, opting for more natural ways of educating children (FERRARI, 2008a).

According to Soëtard (2010), in the 18th century, the Swiss educator Henri Pestalozzi, strongly influenced by Rousseau, proposed the creation of spaces for childhood education, with the aim of developing, mainly and, innate capabilities, through a differentiated methodology based on affection. The proposal valued integral education, committed to intellectual, physical and moral training. He understood that learning took place from the inside out, contradicting the perspective of teaching as transmission, deposit of information in children.

By creating schools and acting as an educator, Pestalozzi brought his theories to life. Committed to social justice, “[...] he sought the reform of society through the education of the popular classes” (GADOTTI, 1997, p. 91). The first school he founded was in his own home to serve poor children. He later organized school for war orphans. His pedagogy consisted of lovingness, at a time when whipping students was normal. Its main pedagogical objective was to provide improvements in the living conditions of underprivileged children.

The term kindergarten, until recently, was widely used in early childhood education settings. This originated from Pestalozzi's propositions, which equated the teacher's work with that of the gardener, in order to provide the best external conditions for plants and children to develop naturally. Fröbel, inspired by this vision, conceived and founded in June 1840 the first Kindergarten, a kindergarten which soon spread throughout the world, valuing playfulness, toys, the child's natural interests and the idea that you learn by doing.

A perfect education is symbolized for me by a tree planted near fertilizing waters. A small seed that contains the tree's germ, its shape and its properties is placed in the ground. The entire tree is an unbroken chain of organic parts, the plan of which existed in the seed and root. Man is like the tree. In the newborn child, the faculties that will unfold during life are hidden: the organs of their being gradually form, in unison, and build humanity in the image of God (PESTALOZZI apud GADOTTI, 1997, p. 98).

In this way, many pedagogical techniques, still used today in Early Childhood Education schools, are inspired by Fröbel's principles, which encouraged self-taught training, stating that subjects learn more efficiently when the objects of study are linked to their fields of study interests and through practical activities. The success achieved by the pedagogical program of Fröbel's kindergartens was justified by the lack of institutionalized places that corresponded to current demands and the spirit of the time.

His kindergarten pedagogy combined the socio-pedagogical aspect of reception and elementary education through play, thus preparing the child for the later stage of schooling without imposing excessive intellectual efforts. But Fröbel's kindergarten program is still a tributary of neo-humanist theories: his ideal as an educator is to form human beings, and not to manufacture “useful” citizens (HEILAND, 2010, p. 38).

Although it may seem repetitive, it is essential to highlight that the public served at Kindergarten came from the middle and upper classes, even though the original proposal was aimed at the inclusion of different social groups. Thus, at the end of the 19th century,

Volkskindergarten (popular kindergarten) were created, with the intention of meeting the specific needs of workers' children, and preparing them with manual skills for industrial work (BARBOSA, 2006). Redundancy belongs to history, corroborating the thesis that the least favored are always left aside, in general, marginalized and oppressed.

Barbosa (2006) demonstrates that in Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the number of children abandoned by their families increased. They were housed in institutions such as hospitals, hospices, begging homes, prisons or circles. When childhood was legitimized as an age group different from adults, multiple environments serving children emerged. Thus, child care institutions are strengthened, meeting social demands with welfare purposes, focused on health, care, food and hygiene, in the style of the *salles d'asile*, which emerged in France in 1826. In the approach of Kuhlmann (1998), the kindergartens established by Fröbel were recognized as a model of excellence in the educational field, while daycare centers and other child care establishments similar to the French *salles d'asile* were given the nickname of merely providing assistance, with no educational intention.

From this perspective, daycare centers and preschools were spread to serve children from lower income classes. While the kindergartens were intended for the rich, the asylums — which later came to be recognized as nursery schools (french *écoles maternelles*) — were for the poor, having as their pedagogy a proposition of submission, assistance and prejudice, which generated dependence and humiliation.

In Australia and Germany, mainly, Kindergartens are still considered an institution beyond the reach of the popular classes; these take their children to nursing homes, which keep them during the day, and are more concerned with religious propaganda. The middle and upper classes, on the contrary, send their children to institutes maintained by associations or hire women who educate the children at home, in accordance with the precepts of the system (...) (BANDEIRA apud KUHLMANN 1998. p. 84).

Early Childhood Education institutions emerged at the end of the 18th century (BARBOSA, 2006) and were disseminated, acquiring new formats, different styles and nomenclatures, gaining space and creating new perceptions. Thus, it becomes relevant to consider that many terminologies — daycare centers, kindergartens, kindergartens — and concepts, still used today, were constituted in Europe and served as examples, being incorporated and, often given new meanings, motivating the institutionalization of Education Children on Brazilian soil. The Chart 1 presents a summary of what has been exposed here.

Chart 1 – First early childhood education institutions

FIRST CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	
Nomenclature: Knitting School (<i>École à tricoter</i>) Period: 1769	First institution focused exclusively on children. Served from 2 years old. The “knitting school” was created in France by pastor Jean Frederick Oberlin. Method: physical exercises, games, crafts and teaching about nature, they learned to spin, sew and knit. They received notions of morals and religion. The caregivers knitted while talking to the children.
Nomenclature: <i>Salles d’asile</i> Period: 1801	Asylum rooms emerged in France to care for the children of working women and collect children from the streets, protecting them from surrounding dangers; later they dedicated themselves to the work of caring for them, also providing moral and intellectual education. It was modeled after English institutions and brought together the work of religious women and society ladies. Gradually they were taken over by the State. In 1881, they were renamed <i>écoles maternelles</i> (nursing schools).
Nomenclature: Infant School Period: 1816	Robert Owen founded the <i>Infant Schoolem New Lanark</i> in Scotland, which aimed to serve the children of factory workers and contribute to the formation of good habits. The method used was contrary to punishment and the activities were carried out outdoors. Several units emerged in Europe and the United States, however, by 1830, almost all American children’s schools had closed their doors.

Source: The authors based on Gomes (1986), Spodek and Saracho (1998), Spodek and Brown (2002), Kuhlmann (1998).

The spaces dedicated to childhood education and care aimed to meet a social demand, based on philanthropic and religious principles that are gradually being associated with technical and scientific knowledge, demonstrating concern with the training of subjects in the moral, intellectual and in their preparation to face or accept the conditions imposed either for today's experience or future expectations.

Schooling, which began in Europe in the 14th century and was carried out by educators and priests, Catholics and Protestants, provoked a metamorphosis in the moral and spiritual formation of children, as opposed to medieval education carried out only by learning traditional techniques and knowledge, at most sometimes taught by adults in the community. The Modern Age begins to prepare future adults in schools. The child [...] is seen as the unborn adult. Concomitantly with this change, the family also underwent a profound transformation with the private life emergence and a great appreciation of the intimate sphere. The arrival of these two new developments would have accelerated, in Ariès' opinion, the overvaluation of children (PRIORE, 2010, p. 9-10).

Likewise, the project of a nation with more advanced men instigated the New School Movement, in which Modern Pedagogy educators were confident that, through education, it would be possible to think of a more egalitarian and democratic society, capable of doing justice to society forgotten childhood. This thought resonated around the world, and in 1920 they began to influence the educational field in Brazil.

Early Childhood Education in Brazil — a fertile soil, but not always cultivated

The first educational institutions in Brazil were founded by the Jesuits who arrived in the country in 1549, with the aim of catechizing and indoctrinating indigenous peoples in the principles of Catholicism. The priests soon discovered that the indigenous people would not convert to Catholicism without being taught how to read and write. In this way, education was a tool for religious dominance and the dissemination of European culture, aimed especially at

young people and children, as they were more prone to change. They created *bê-á-bá* houses, elementary schools, seminaries and colleges, with a methodology supported by a study plan known as *Ratio Studiorum*.

Even though the Society of Jesus was born, [...] as an essentially missionary order, it was gradually transformed into a teaching order. In fact, the Jesuit order little by little oriented its efforts towards taking care of the formation, not only of its own members, but also of youth, which corresponded to the desire to train young people in letters and virtue, in order to make them to propagate themselves, in the world where they lived the values defended by the company (CHAMBOULEYRON, 2010, p. 56).

The Jesuits waged war in opposition to the registration of behaviors such as polygamy, cannibalism, nudity, pagan rituals and other local customs. Schools were means for these objectives to be achieved. The scene was religious, surrounded by songs, prayers and Bible studies. Students learned to play instruments and memorization and interpretation were valued. Priore (2010) also highlights that aggressiveness was not known by the natives as a disciplinary practice, however the Jesuit priests spread this idea, stating that correction was also a form of love.

The concern about the nomadic customs of the indigenous people encouraged the creation of Jesuit reductions, where the natives were organized around work and religion, as the priests feared that migration from one region to another would intensify the risk of abandoning the faith, to return to their origins. The fast growth and enrichment of missions began to attract interests and provoke conflicts; then, with the new definition of Portuguese colonial guidelines, the end of the Jesuits' activities in Brazil was established. They were expelled in 1759 and Marques do Pombal⁸ ordered the closure of all schools that were under Jesuit control, including libraries and convents. With this, we experience a historical rupture in a method already consolidated as an educational reference. Education is separated from the Catholic Church and becomes the responsibility of the Portuguese State, if the perspective of public and secular education is disseminated.

It is known that in Brazil different childhoods lived and live together: the childhood of the *curumins*, who were catechized to become Christians, and the childhood of the black kids and tomboys who belonged to the white *sinhozinhos* and *sinhazinhas*, this is a history of social inequalities, of difficulties, but also a history of games and social recognition (BARBOSA, 2006, p. 82).

For Silva and Bolsanello (2002, p. 32), it was in the imperial period that the first children's establishments in Brazil, with the aim of supporting children abandoned on the streets of cities, in orphanages, asylums for the poor and also the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia*. At the time of Colonial Brazil, and persisting in Empire Brazil, many children were abandoned. The literature shows that this was a common practice, when children were left at residential doors or commercial establishments, also in churches and even in dumpsters or on the streets for different reasons, such as lack of financial resources and children outside of marriage, in large part, arising from the union (not always consented) between masters and their slaves. To solve this problem, the imperial court established the *Santas Casas de Misericórdia*, with a

⁸ Prime Minister of Portugal from 1750 to 1777

philanthropic function, along the same lines as those implemented in Europe. Then, the circle of those exposed emerged, an official mechanism aimed at protecting abandoned minors that was, for many years, the only child assistance entity in Brazil. The slaves called this apparatus the wheel of hope, as they saw the likelihood of freeing their children from the slavery regime. Rizzo (2010, p. 37) counters that “[...] It cannot be accepted that this was a child protection policy; nor assistance to the woman-mother”, as it reinforced the proposition of normality in the face of child abandonment, and also demonstrated the fragility of women in the face of established machismo and the discrimination suffered as a “single mother”.

In the 19th century, hygienists criticized these institutions, attributing responsibility for the high rates of infant mortality to them. The circles are closed and the children return to the streets. In 1964, the military government established several units of the *Fundação do Bem-Estar do Menor* (Febems) throughout Brazil. Priore (2010) warns that children in Brazil are subordinated to violence and force coming from parents, teachers, masters and bosses. In this perspective, child support institutions, legislation and the operating economic system acted to prematurely transform children into grown-ups.

European immigration to Brazil, industrialization and labor movements ended up encouraging female labor, instigating their entry into the field of labor activities, especially in factories, and provoked demands for the creation of daycare centers in the country, sparking discussions among State on the matter. The first kindergarten in the country was founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1985, aimed at serving children aged 3 to 7 years, males and from wealthy families, taking as a reference the institutions created by Fröbel, in Germany. Later, other kindergartens were created, and, even though they were public, they served the children of the bourgeoisie (KUHLMANN, 1998).

In 1899, two important events occurred that can be considered a milestone for understanding the place of childhood and Early Childhood Education. The first was the founding of the Institute for *Instituto de Proteção e Assistência à Infância*⁹, and the second the installation of the first children's school in recorded in Brazilian history, established to serve the children of factory workers — the daycare center of the *Fiação e Tecidos* Company. Corcovado, in Rio de Janeiro (KUHLMANN, 1998, p. 82).

Early Childhood Education in Brazil was outlined by a welfare vision, intertwined with philanthropic institutions, with religious, legal-police and medical-hygienist influence. This also had broad participation from community movements, such as workers, including the efforts of professionals in the field of education and women's struggle for equal rights, especially with regard to access to the job market and consequently for a place that would welcome their children, while they were carrying out their duties and therefore, far from home and unable to exercise motherhood. The pedagogy of schools for the poor is welfare-oriented, aims at submission and is supported by characteristics that humiliate and oppress, to later offer assistance as salvation, not a right, but a favor. An education that is based on a prejudiced panorama of poverty and that, through a low-quality service, prepares people to remain in the social sphere of origin (KUHLMANN, 1998).

From this point of view, the lack of quality of education was intentional. Intellectual knowledge was the right of only the wealthiest. Along with the spread of daycare centers, the idea of exclusively welfare ambiances, with no pedagogical intention. Kuhlmann (1998) refutes this argument, for him the pedagogical proposal was one of submission, of keeping them resigned to their social condition. The polarization surrounding the debate about Early Childhood Education schools as welfare or educational is a plot that must be analyzed with

⁹ *Instituto de Proteção e Assistência à Infância* (Ipai) founded in 1989, it is considered by Kuhlmann (1998, p. 86), the most important entity of the period. It had offered gynecology services, protection for pregnant women, pregnancy hygiene, home birth assistance, newborn care, which included a milk distribution program, daycare, lactation consultation, early childhood hygiene, examination and certification of wet nurses and vaccinations.

great caution, because the idiosyncrasy of childhood reveals that it needs of education, care and assistance. One factor cannot be privileged over the other. Under the maxim that “what matters is education”, children are linked to conditions that are inadequate to their basic needs for protection, care, food and hygiene care or others. Babies do not have enough autonomy to resolve issues such as changing diapers on their own, they also do not have the maturity to assess risks, possibilities of accidents, dangers to which they may be exposed. On the other hand, the schooling model imposed in this same statement of aversion to welfare is also terrifying, imposing classes, blackboards and literacy devices on nurseries; as if little babies stopped being children and became students. For Kuhlmann (1998, p. 206), this thought only renews the way of providing a low quality education, whether in the care or in the teaching given to low-sufficient children,

the polarization between assistance and education opposes the function of guard and protection to the educational function, as if both were incompatible, one excluding the other. However, observation of school institutions shows that they have as an intrinsic element in their functioning the performance of the function of guarding the children who attend them. Educational institutions, especially those for young children, present themselves to society and families of any social class as responsible for children during the period in which they serve them. Any mother who looks for a daycare or preschool to educate her children will also want to ensure that her child will be safe and protected there.

The welfare, as a practice that violates human dignity, should not take place in areas that prioritize the guarantee of rights and the appreciation of humanity, especially in school institutions. Likewise, knowledge cannot be postponed in Early Childhood Education. Educating and caring need to be treated as inseparable when they refer to the full development of the subject.

Gradually, Early Childhood Education gained prominence in Brazilian public policies, however we emphasize that, even within the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988), the right to daycare is contextualized among social rights. Although many argue that this right is restricted to the educational area, the burden of assistance is evident, as access to Early Childhood Education schools makes it possible for families with low incomes to work. In article 7, item XXV, the right to daycare is set out as a right for workers. In the same way, article 208, section IV (BRASIL, 1988) prescribes: “The State’s duty with education will be carried out by guaranteeing [...] IV — Early Childhood Education, in daycare and pre-school, for children up to 5 years old.” This prerogative guarantees the child's right to education and not just that of working parents. The DCNEIs (BRASIL, 2010) also define education and care as inseparable, as follows:

In order to achieve their objectives, the pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education institutions must provide conditions for collective work and for the organization of materials, spaces and times that ensure: Education in its entirety, understanding care as something inseparable from the educational process (BRASIL, 2010, p. 21).

The text of the Law recognizes education and care in Early Childhood Education, and shows that in this way education will be ensured in its entirety. This understanding breaks with understandings that disregard the educational potential of children, limiting

teaching practice to the task of control and guardianship, but also refutes decontextualized practices, centered on fragmented content and the figure of the teacher. The *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* - BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), in its notebook for Early Childhood Education, confirms that the hypothesis that links education and care has been consolidating, and defends that child care institutions are focused on welcoming experiences and of knowledge constructed by children in the family and community environment, assuming a complementary role to these universes, articulating them in their pedagogical proposals to expand experiences and enhance learning.

In recent decades, the area of Early Childhood Education has been consolidating a new conception of educating and caring for young children in educational institutions, ensuring education in its entirety, understanding care as something inseparable from the educational process. This conception aims to break with two modes of care strongly marked in the history of Early Childhood Education: That which disregards the educational potential of children in this age group, limiting itself to control and custody tasks and, also, that which is guided by decontextualized practices, centered on fragmented content and the exclusive decision of the teacher (BRASIL, 2017, p. 54).

Historically, the Early Childhood Education network was co-financed by the *Fundo Nacional de Assistência Social* (FNAS), which makes the ambiguity in relation to the understanding established about Early Childhood Education evident. In 2007, *Fundeb* Law 11,494 established a standard of financial support for basic education, defining the educational nature of daycare centers and preschools. The Law established a transition period from 2007 to 2009, and, from this period onwards, the entire Early Childhood Education network was taken over by the education system. In 1990, the *ECA*, Law 8069/90, reaffirms the argument of children as subjects of law, as provided in article 4,

the duty of the family, the community, society in general and public authorities to ensure, with absolute priority, the realization of the rights to life, health, food, education, sport, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, family and community coexistence, among others that ensure children and adolescents can develop in the society in which they live (BRASIL, 1990).

The *ECA* made it possible to expand the comprehensive protection network for children and intensified the elaboration and supervision of public policies, aiming to prevent violations of rights, with the creation of mechanisms such as the Guardianship Council, whose responsibility is to assist children and adolescents in situations of risks, vulnerabilities or subject to omission by society and the State. In relation to Early Childhood Education, article 54, item IV, establishes the State's obligation to ensure that children from zero to 5 years of age receive care in daycare and pre-school (as amended by Law No. 13,306, of 2016).

The Law 9,394/96 (BRASIL, 1996) also represents an important step towards the organization of institutions dedicated to child care, by claiming the value of children and demanding specific training from professionals. It determines as its main purpose the integral development of the child in its physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, combining the actions of the family and the community. This leads us to think of

education as a continuous process capable of offering possibilities for the child to experience childhood and at the same time, build significant learning. In 2013, we saw the promulgation of Law No. 12,796, which makes Basic Education mandatory and free from 4 to 17 years old. In this way, Early Childhood Education is understood as an integral part of the Brazilian education system and as a child's right, however for the age group from zero to 3 years old, enrollment is optional, which does not deprive the child's right in case of expression of interest from the family. Article 30 of the LDBEN defines that Early Childhood Education will be offered in “Day care, or equivalent entities, for children up to three years of age and preschools, for children from 4 (four) to 5 (five) years of age (BRAZIL, 2013).

In 2014, Law No. 13,005/2014 was approved, which established the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (PNE), which presented guidelines, goals and strategies for a period of ten years¹⁰, aimed at all levels of education and solidified on the premise the right to quality education, through the union of efforts of all federative entities. The Law represents a major step in the consolidation of Early Childhood Education in Brazil.

The United Nations Children Fund (Unicef) published, in 2019, the first global report aimed at Early Childhood Education, in which it denounces that more than 175 million children on the world stage are outside the first stage of basic education, and it shows the idea of neglect and discrimination towards childhood. It also stated that poverty is a determining factor when it comes to school exclusion, as in 64 countries the chances of poor parents of entering Early Childhood Education are seven times lower than for those from a high social class. The factors that most influence are: socioeconomic profile, family education level and geographic location. In relation to Brazil, the report points to an increase in attendance, but highlights the failure to achieve the target for universal pre-school education by 2016, and assesses as difficult the fulfillment of the proposal to reach 50% corresponding to daycare by 2024.

Under the promise of qualifying education, in 2020 the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) comes into force, a document that determines the set of general competencies for basic education students. During this period, the States and Municipalities signed a cooperation regime to prepare the curricula of the territories aligned with the BNCC. For Early Childhood Education, the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) guides the construction and execution of the curriculum with regard to learning objectives, portraying a compendium of knowledge, knowledge and values that all children have the right to access.

Chart 2 - Timeline — Early Childhood Education Legislation

Year	LAWS
1988	Constituição Federal do Brasil
1990	Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA)
1996	Lei de Diretrizes e Bases (LDB)
1998	Referencial Curricular Nacional para Educação Infantil (RCNEI)
2007	Fundo de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Fundeb)
2009	Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil (DCNEI)
2013	Lei 12.796 que altera a LDBEN n.º 9394/1996
2014	Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE)
2017	Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC)

Source: The authors based on National Laws (BRASIL, 1988, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017).

¹⁰ The PNE was established for the period from 2014 to 2024.

The Chart 2 presents a brief summary of legal frameworks for Early Childhood Education, highlighting the rise in recent decades, however “[...] the transition to the educational system does not represent in any way overcoming the social prejudices involved in the education of young children” (KUHLMANN, 1998, p. 186). In this way, we provisionally conclude the reflection on children and childhood. A stage of life that requires more fertilizers so that we can consolidate more flowery gardens of hope, enchantment and synchrony. Construction sites need inputs that are available, however they do not always reach the pre-allocated surfaces. We dare to bet on the new possibilities presented so that the right to childhood prospers!

Final considerations

The research involved the definition of the concepts of childhood and children, as well as presenting a contextualization of the paths of childhood and Early Childhood Education, showing that the study of the past can spark reflections, as it influences many contemporary readings, considering that certain conceptions and educational proposals reflect traces of what has already been experienced and culturally established. In this dimension, it is necessary, first, to understand what was and then to understand what is in place.

Daycare centers and preschools have increasingly occupied a place in the current circumstances, undergoing a process of qualitative expansion since the late 1960s in European countries and 1970s in Brazil, both in the 20th century (KUHLMANN, 1998). This expansion was influenced by popular movements and the new awareness about childhood, where the child assumes the identity of a subject of rights, worthy of care and protection, but also with the capacity to construct meanings, learn, teach and produce culture. The basis of education for children, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, is welfare-based, with discriminatory and compensatory practices. However, this statement brings an ambiguous interpretation, as these spaces were not devoid of pedagogical intention; but provided with an oppressive pedagogy for the poor, which propagated submission, disseminating practices with humiliating tendencies, and whose intention was to maintain the *status quo*.

In Brazil, with the advent of the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988) and the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* — ECA — (BRASIL, 1990), education is established as a right of the child from birth and as a duty of the State. Daycare centers and preschools are beginning to be located in the educational sphere. With the creation of Law 9,394/96 (BRASIL, 1996), Early Childhood Education was established as the first stage of Basic Education. The legal frameworks signal awareness of the meaning of childhood and outline the recognition of the child's right to education, but the paradox between the social and political debate that grants visibility and, simultaneously, exposes an oppressive system is undeniable, to which a significant part of the child population is subjected.

Childhood education in Brazil today is a consequence of what was cultivated, the techniques used, the quality of the seeds, the raw material used, the equipment involved, and also what was left aside, neglected. The rights established so far are the results of social and political struggle. No backyard produces flower or vegetables if it does not receive the necessary preparation, inputs and fertilizers. In an abandoned yard the only thing that grows is weeds. For a bountiful harvest, with regard to the realization of the rights that guarantee free and quality public schools, a broader articulation is necessary, linked to political, cultural and economic transformations. Studies about the reality of Early Childhood Education in Brazil demonstrate the precariousness of a system that functions as an amplifier of inequalities, in

which the majority of poor children remain marginalized, without access to the rights established in laws and decrees.

Childhood deserves this space of recognition. It is the phase of life that projects us to the other stages, and each experience is a milestone for a new possibility of germination. We are made up of the memories of childhood life. Family, school, games and, especially, the endless energy of the search for discoveries and enchantments. The courage to take risks, to dare, to dream, in short, to live life to the full.

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