

Teacher training in Early Childhood Education within the National Commitment to Child Literacy: contested meanings of quality¹

Formações de professoras da Educação Infantil no âmbito do Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada: sentidos de qualidade em disputa

Formaciones de profesoras de Educación Infantil en el marco del Compromiso Nacional Niño Alfabetizado: sentidos de calidad en disputa

Juliana Diniz Gutierrez Borges²
Federal University of Grande Dourados

Liziana Arâmbula Teixeira³
Federal University of Grande Dourados

Abstract: This article analyzes the conceptions of quality in Early Childhood Education within the scope of the Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education Project developed in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (LEEI/MS), as action of the National Commitment for Literate Children (CNCA). The qualitative research examines formative documents and records of teacher education actions, aiming to understand the disputes that permeate training practices. Inspired by the approaches of Stephen Ball (1994, 2001) and Ernesto Laclau (2006, 2011), quality as an empty signifier in dispute is conceived, and in the contributions of Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2019), advocates the situated construction of meanings. The analysis highlights that the LEEI/MS operates as a field of tensions and resignifications. The results indicated that the quality claimed in the formative actions is anchored in the valorization of the multiple languages, culture and the experiences of children and teachers, resisting trends towards curricular standardization and the anticipation of literacy.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Public Policy; Teacher training; Educational quality; National Commitment to Child Literacy.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa os sentidos de qualidade na Educação Infantil, no âmbito do Projeto Leitura e Escrita na Educação Infantil, desenvolvido no estado de Mato Grosso do Sul (LEEI/MS), como ação do Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada (CNCA). A pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, examina documentos formativos e registros de ações de formação docente, buscando compreender as disputas que permeiam as práticas formativas. Inspirada nas abordagens de Stephen Ball (1994, 2001) e Ernesto Laclau (2006, 2011), concebe-se a qualidade como um significante vazio em disputa, e nos aportes de Dahlberg, Moss e Pence (2019), defende-se a construção situada de significados. A análise evidencia que o LEEI/MS se constitui como um campo de tensões e ressignificações. Os resultados apontam que a qualidade reivindicada nas ações formativas está ancorada na valorização das múltiplas linguagens, da cultura e das experiências das crianças e professoras, resistindo às tendências de padronização curricular e antecipação da alfabetização.

¹Bruna Milano Schepers, Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: brunamschepers@gmail.com.

²PhD in Education. Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), Brazil. E-mail: julianadinizg@gmail.com; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/4620372286527455>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5765-0181>.

³PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Education. Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), Brazil. E-mail: lizianateixeira@hotmail.com; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1278900483874784>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6207-6287>.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil; Políticas Públicas; Formação de professores; Qualidade educacional; Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza los sentidos de calidad en la Educación Infantil en el marco del Proyecto Lectura y Escritura en la Educación Infantil, desarrollado en el estado de Mato Grosso do Sul (LEEI/MS), como una acción del Compromiso Nacional Niño Alfabetizado. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo, examina documentos formativos y registros de acciones de formación docente, buscando comprender las disputas que atraviesan las prácticas formativas. Esta investigación, apoyada en los enfoques de Stephen Ball (1994, 2001) y Ernesto Laclau (2006, 2011), concibe la calidad como un significante vacío en disputa; y, con base en los aportes de Dahlberg, Moss y Pence (2019), defiende la construcción situada de significados. El análisis pone en evidencia que el LEEI/MS se constituye como un campo de tensiones y resignificaciones. Los resultados señalan que la calidad reivindicada en las acciones formativas se fundamenta en la valorización de los múltiples lenguajes, de la cultura y de las experiencias de niños, niñas y profesoras, resistiendo a las tendencias de estandarización curricular y anticipación de la alfabetización.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil; Políticas Públicas; Formación de profesores; Calidad educativa; Compromiso Nacional Niño Alfabetizado.

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Introduction

The discussion about the role of literacy in Early Childhood Education has been one of the most persistent and controversial topics in the Brazilian educational scene, gaining renewed intensity with the National Literacy Policy (PNA, 2019–2023)⁴, which included preschool teachers in training programs focused on learning reading and writing, such as “Tempo de Aprender”⁵ and “ABC na Prática”⁶. Although the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI)⁷ and the National

⁴The National Literacy Policy (PNA) was established by Decree No. 9,765, dated April 11, 2019. Available at: http://portal.mec.gov.br/images/CADERNO_PNA_FINAL.pdf.

⁵“Tempo de Aprender” is a literacy program that provides pedagogical training actions for teachers and managers, as well as the provision of materials and resources based on scientific evidence for students, teachers, and educational managers. Available at: <https://alfabetizacao.mec.gov.br/tempo-de-aprender>.

⁶The online course Science-Based Literacy is the result of an international partnership with Portuguese institutions. In Brazil, the Ministry of Education (MEC), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), and the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) participated. Available at: <https://alfabetizacao.mec.gov.br/cursos/246-curso-alfabetizacao-baseada-na-ciencia-abc>.

⁷The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education are linked to the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education and bring together principles, foundations, and procedures defined by the Basic Education Chamber of the National Education Council to guide public policies and the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of pedagogical and curricular proposals for Early Childhood Education. Available at: http://portal.mec.gov.br/dmdocuments/diretrizescurriculares_2012.pdf.

Common Curricular Base (BNCC) state that it is not the role of this stage to promote literacy, the tension between what is regulated and what is implemented in policies continues to mark the field with intense disputes.

The anticipation of formal schooling proposed by the PNA carries significant risks, as it may turn learning into a mechanical process, disconnected from playfulness and the pleasure of discovering the world through language. These aspects reinforce the discussion about the role of Early Childhood Education in the process of learning written language, highlighting the negative impacts of early literacy and the importance of respecting the specificities of childhood.

More broadly, it can be observed that policies with a neoconservative bias have been promoting the anticipation of school processes in Early Childhood Education, as seen in the controversies related to the PNA itself, the inclusion of preschool in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC)⁸, and the recent direction of the National Textbook and Didactic Material Program (PNLD)⁹, which linked the use of children's literature to instructional content and proposed textbooks also for preschool, expressing an attempt to standardize pedagogical practices and teaching performance.

However, the coordinated response of universities and Early Childhood Education forums has shown that it is possible to resist and reinterpret these policies. Even amid the declared conservative offensives, committed teachers and researchers have sought to reinterpret the national guidelines, safeguarding the principles and specificities of Early Childhood Education. Training reports indicate that teams adapted the content to play-based pedagogies, emphasizing literature and oral language, even when the central policy insisted on decoding. In other words, a "translation" of the policies was carried out: teacher trainers met the official goals (introducing written language experiences) while diluting the technicist bias and reinforcing playful and cultural approaches (Borges, 2022).

⁸The PNAIC – National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age is a formal commitment made by the Federal Government, the Federal District, the States, and the Municipalities since 2012, to meet Goal 5 of the National Education Plan (PNE), which establishes the obligation to "literacy for all children, at the latest, by the end of the 3rd (third) year of elementary school." Available at: <https://www.educacao.df.gov.br/pnaic-pacto-nacional-pela-alfabetizacao-na-idade-certa/>.

⁹The National Textbook and Didactic Material Program (PNLD) is part of a set of actions aimed at providing didactic, pedagogical, and literary works, among other materials to support educational practice, intended for students and teachers in public basic education schools in the federal, state, municipal, and district networks, as well as community, religious, or philanthropic early childhood education institutions that are non-profit and partnered with the Public Authorities. Schools participating in the PNLD receive materials systematically, regularly, and free of charge. Available at: <https://alfabetizacao.mec.gov.br/conteudo-tempo-de-aprender/251-programa-nacional-do-livro-e-do-material-didatico-pnld>.

It is within this context that the Reading and Writing Project in Early Childhood Education of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (LEEI/MS) is situated. This project is part of the actions of the National Commitment to Literate Children (CNCA), a public policy established by the federal government in 2023 (Brazil, 2023), aimed at the training of preschool and early elementary school teachers.

This article aims to analyze the meanings of quality attributed to the teacher training carried out within the scope of LEEI/MS. Considering that the CNCA proposes continuous and coordinated action from Early Childhood Education to the 5th year of Elementary School, the research seeks to understand how this articulation is implemented in the training sessions, especially regarding respect for the principles that govern the first stage of Basic Education. In other words, it is important to investigate how teacher training has ensured (or challenged) the specificity of Early Childhood Education within the framework of a broader literacy policy.

The analysis is primarily guided by the theoretical contributions of Stephen Ball and Ernesto Laclau. From the perspective of the policy cycle, Ball (1994, 2001) proposes understanding educational policies not as linear or neutral documents, but as dynamic processes of production, translation, and recontextualization, marked by disputes, resistances, and resignifications. This approach allows for a critical examination of how the meanings attributed to literacy and the quality of Early Childhood Education are constructed, negotiated, and enacted in different contexts involving LEEI/MS.

At the same time, the contributions of Laclau (2006, 2011) help to understand the notion of *quality* as an empty signifier - a term that does not have a fixed meaning and that, precisely because of this, is able to bring together different social and political demands. Thus, quality in Early Childhood Education presents itself as a field of symbolic struggle, in which different political projects attempt to hegemonize diverse meanings around formative and pedagogical practices. The analysis therefore assumes that what is at stake is not only the establishment of a policy but the struggle over the definition of what is understood as quality education for young children.

Among the questions guiding the analysis, the following stand out: which conceptions of reading and writing are mobilized in the training activities of LEEI/MS? What practices and strategies are valued in the training of Early Childhood Education teachers? And how do these elements contribute to (re)shaping the meanings of quality in education at this stage?

To situate the main theoretical contributions of the ongoing investigation, three main fronts are highlighted: (1) the refusal to treat writing as a teaching object in Early Childhood Education, in favor of recognizing multiple languages as the focus of pedagogical practices aimed at young children (Cunha; Carvalho, 2017; Albuquerque; Barbosa; Fochi, 2013;

Edwards; Gandini; Forman, 2015); (2) the opposition to technicist approaches in teacher education, valuing the knowledge and experiences of children and teachers (Cunha; Carvalho, 2017; Borges, 2022); and (3) the resistance to curricular standardization processes, which tend to ignore the plurality of contexts, childhoods, and teaching practices (Dias, 2008; Lopes; Macedo, 2011; Frangella, 2021). These forms of resistance serve to challenge perspectives that reduce Early Childhood Education to a preparatory stage for Elementary School, reaffirming the need for policies and practices that respect the uniqueness of this educational stage (Santos; Tomazzetti; Mello, 2018).

Adopting a qualitative approach (Cellard, 2008), the research analyzes how the training activities have been conducted in the current context of neoconservative shifts in educational policies. Data production, focusing on the contexts of influence and text production, was carried out through documentary analysis, considering documents made available on the Ministry of Education's website, pedagogical materials used in the training sessions, as well as content published by the Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education Project (LEEI/MS) on its YouTube channel (@LEEIMS2024) and Instagram page (@leei.ms.ufms).

The recordings of the online training sessions were fully transcribed and analyzed based on three thematic axes: (1) conceptions of reading and writing in Early Childhood Education as insertion into the written culture; (2) continuing education and the appreciation of Early Childhood Education teachers; and (3) the integration of science, art, and life as a guiding principle of the training activity. These axes made it possible to map both the content conveyed in the training sessions and the participants' modes of engagement, which were also observable through the interactions in the comments and the reactions to the speeches of the trainers and guest speakers.

The analysis of Instagram posts complemented this mapping, making it possible to observe how the institutional discourse is constructed and performed also through the visual and affective language of social media. The page's content includes the promotion of training events, records of in-person and remote activities, as well as reflections on the role of literature and oral language in Early Childhood Education.

Quality of education as an empty signifier: contributions from Stephen Ball and Ernesto Laclau

Understanding the dispute over the *quality of education* requires abandoning an essentialist and fixed conception of this term. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Stephen Ball (1994, 2001) and Ernesto Laclau (2006, 2011), it is possible to interpret quality

not as a universal essence, but as an empty signifier, capable of articulating different demands and shaping hegemonic projects.

According to Ball (2001), educational policies are neither closed texts nor univocal discourses. They are constituted as open texts and contested discourses, resulting from the interaction among multiple contexts - of influence, production, and practice - and the different actors involved in their recontextualization (Ball; Bowe, 1992). Thus, educational policy is not merely the product of governmental will; it emerges from a process of negotiations, resistances, and resignifications in diverse social arenas.

Laclau's contribution complements and deepens this perspective. For the author, political discourses are constructed from chains of equivalence between unmet demands which, when articulated, form contingent hegemonic projects. At the center of these articulations are empty signifiers - terms capable of gathering different meanings and social demands without being fixed to a single content (Laclau, 2011).

Quality of education operates as one of these signifiers. In a context where no one publicly defends poor-quality education, quality becomes a seemingly consensual banner. In practice, different actors - governments, multilateral organizations, teachers, unions, social movements - project specific and often contradictory demands onto this term: improvement of infrastructure, results in standardized assessments, strengthening of local cultural practices, development of skills for the labor market, among others.

The interpretation of quality in education based on Ball's theories leads to the understanding that quality is not a fixed or technical concept, but rather a social and political construction, subject to disputes and negotiations among various social actors. This approach allows us to understand that the definition of *quality* is not something that applies universally, but rather is constructed through different perspectives, interests, and values at stake in educational policies and practices.

Thus, as pointed out by Dias, Abreu, and Lopes (2012), the boundary between what is projected as innovation and what is intended to be overcome is constructed based on the representation of an antagonism: the opposition to a school without quality - although this enemy is always a discursive construction rather than an objective entity.

In this sense, investigating public policies in Early Childhood Education involves understanding how different actors - governments, universities, trainers, teachers - participate in the struggles over the definition of the meanings of quality. Moreover, it involves understanding how these struggles not only reflect but also constitute curricular practices, guiding training, content definitions, pedagogical priorities, and assessment methods.

Within the context of the Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education Project, part of the National Commitment to Literate Children, teacher training is deeply influenced by this dynamic. While it mobilizes discourses valuing multiple languages and the specificity of childhood, it can also be challenged by the pressure of performance targets linked to literacy. In this arrangement, the quality of Early Childhood Education is not a fixed measure but a contested field where differing views on childhood, curriculum, and assessment confront each other.

Therefore, inspired by Stephen Ball and Ernesto Laclau, this study understands that the analysis of teacher training policies for Early Childhood Education requires attention both to the discursive strategies that seek to fix meanings of quality and to the resistances that, by resignifying practices and priorities, make visible the contingency and constitutive struggle of these policies.

The discussion about quality in Early Childhood Education can also be enriched by the perspective proposed by Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2019), who argue that quality is not a fixed essence or universally recognizable concept, but a situated social and political construction. The authors warn that the search for a single, objective definition of quality tends to reinforce normative, standardized, and exclusionary practices, obscuring the diversity of contexts, cultures, and ways of being a child. Instead of adhering to a normative conception of quality, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence propose shifting the debate toward the construction of shared meanings in specific contexts, recognizing that Early Childhood Education should be a space for listening, dialogue, and negotiation of meanings - not for reproducing previously established standards.

In this sense, the contributions of Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2019) directly resonate with the analysis developed in this article: quality in Early Childhood Education cannot be reduced to measurable performance parameters but must be understood as the possibility of creating sensitive, culturally situated pedagogical practices committed to the collective construction of meanings. By examining the formative actions of LEEI/MS, it becomes clear that, even while operating in a context of tensions and disputes, the formative proposal seeks to affirm an idea of quality anchored in valuing multiple languages, recognizing the experiences of children and teachers, and rejecting uniform models of curriculum and assessment.

Disputes around the meaning of *quality* in teacher training at LEEI/MS

The analysis of the LEEI/MS materials shows that quality is not a stable or consensual concept. On the contrary, it functions as a connector of different - often contradictory - demands that coexist within the same public policy, capable of bringing together diverse expectations, practices, and meanings around Early Childhood Education. This connection is built within a discursive field where commitments to written culture coexist with resistance to early literacy, creating tensions in how quality is enacted in the formative actions.

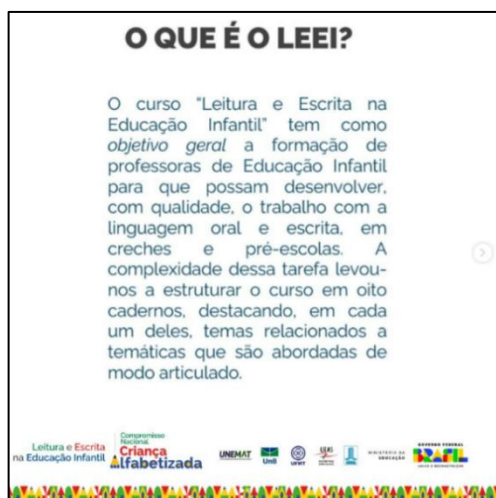
In the first meeting, for example, quality is directly linked to teacher training, institutional management, and structural conditions:

The main effort of this action is the desire to become an Early Childhood Education teacher. But it's not enough just to want to be an Early Childhood Education teacher: it is necessary to recognize oneself as an Early Childhood Education teacher. And here we always need to pursue one of the major goals of educational policy, which is the achievement or realization of quality. And this quality undoubtedly involves the quality of teacher training, the quality of management at the Early Childhood Education center, the resources, and their availability. Because the manager is the professional who works at the institution and provides conditions for the teacher to carry out their practice, a practice with quality. (1st Meeting: Opening live session, broadcast live on 28 May, 2024).

This conception of quality, linked to management, structural conditions, and teacher training, shows that the term functions as a connector of multiple expectations. On one hand, there is a commitment to the structural and institutional aspects of educational provision; on the other, a concern emerges with the pedagogical and formative dimension of practices in Early Childhood Education. This intertwining reinforces the polysemy of the term *quality* and reveals that, within LEEI/MS itself, disputes over its meaning manifest in different layers of educational action.

In this context, ensuring quality practices also involves rethinking the ways children are introduced to the culture of writing and the role of reading and writing in Early Childhood Education. The training sessions promoted by LEEI/MS emphasize reading and writing as social and cultural practices, recognizing them as fundamental dimensions of the child's experience from the earliest years of life. This perspective contrasts with technicist and school-centered approaches to literacy, rejecting the logic of early advancement to Elementary School. This orientation is made explicit in the project's own institutional material, published on its official Instagram page:

Figure 1 – Institutional presentation of the course



Source: @leei.ms.ufms, 2024

The post also highlights that the complexity of this task led to the organization of the course into eight thematic booklets, whose contents are addressed in an integrated manner, demonstrating the effort to combine teacher training with the appreciation of multiple languages.

This formulation of the course objective is confirmed in the online training sessions. In the first meeting, the coordinator of LEEI Centro-Oeste, and in the second, the coordinator of LEEI Mato Grosso do Sul reaffirmed that the course aims “to train Early Childhood Education teachers so they can carry out quality work with oral and written languages in Early Childhood Education institutions,” reinforcing the coherence between the course materials and their discursive performance.

In the opening live session, one of the trainers states: “Reading and writing in Early Childhood Education is not an anticipation of Elementary School. [...] It is about recognizing the creative potential of our children, who, living in a graphocentric, writing-based society, can experience the culture of writing from an early age” (1st Meeting: Opening live session, broadcast live on 28 May 2024). Rather than preparing children for future schooling, the training emphasizes their right to engage with language from infancy, through meaningful and culturally mediated practices.

The analysis of the transcripts from the training sessions shows that the advocated reading and writing practices are shaped by aesthetic, emotional, and cultural dimensions, in contrast to instrumental or purely technical approaches to literacy. This perspective is summed up in the closing statement of the seventh training: “Because it is not about teaching to read and write, but about working on how the child learns to read and write, mediated by culture.” (7th Online LEEI/MS Training, broadcast live on 22 November 2024).

This passage makes explicit the commitment of the training sessions to culturally situated literacy practices, where access to written forms goes beyond decoding and expands to significant practices of appropriation of meaning. There is, therefore, an emphasis on *reading* as a sensitive and shared experience; *writing* as a process of authorship and expression; and *culture* as both the means and the goal of pedagogical work with language. In this sense, it reflects an approach that understands language in its plurality of uses and meanings, recognizing children as readers and producers of language.

The discussions promoted by LEEI/MS reaffirm that reading and writing in Early Childhood Education are not limited to mechanical learning but constitute social, cultural, and symbolic experiences, realized through orality, listening, storytelling, imagination, and engagement with various written materials. Among the recurring themes in the training sessions is the emphasis on valuing orality and sensitive listening as foundational language practices, recognizing the role of narrative in the construction of thought and in children's organization of the world. Added to this is the importance of pedagogical mediation in literary reading, understood as an aesthetic and emotional experience that contributes to expanding children's cultural repertoire.

The qualified use of the literary collection is identified as a means to ensure access to written culture in its diversity, respecting the unique ways children appropriate language. The training sessions also advocate for the promotion of experiences that engage with the literacy process without anticipating it, respecting the timing, the ways of being and imagining of childhood.

Another strongly emphasized aspect is the pedagogical intentionality in organizing daily routines, with a focus on interaction and play as structuring pillars of the curriculum. Within this set of guidelines, it is clear that the reading and writing practices promoted by LEEI/MS are committed to an inclusive and democratic perspective, reaffirming children's right to language in its multiple expressions and to the construction of meaning in the context of Early Childhood Education.

The continuing education of teachers reveals itself as a privileged space of dispute over the meanings attributed to quality in Early Childhood Education. Although LEEI/MS presents a broadened approach to language and childhood and the curriculum content has included discussions about babies as readers, the very structure of the National Commitment to Literate Children (CNCA), of which the course is part, is limited to teachers working with 4- and 5-year-old children enrolled in preschool. This age restriction is not neutral. By limiting the program's actions to the years immediately preceding the literacy cycle, the policy

renders babies and very young children invisible, relegating them to a peripheral position in defining what constitutes quality Early Childhood Education.

This tension is expressed in a sensitive and critical way in the invitation to the 8th In-Person Training of LEEI/MS, published on the project's Instagram page:

Figure 2 – Invitation to the 8th In-Person Training of LEEI/MS



Source: @leei.ms.ufms, 2024

The material invites the reflection: “When does the story of being a reader begin?”, evoking birth as the starting point of the relationship with the world of language. The text acknowledges that, even without mastery of speech, babies already create meaning, communicate through gestures, expressions, and sounds, and build bonds through communicative experiences: “You’re hungry, aren’t you?”, “Do you want to play with mommy?”, “Calm down, I’ll pick you up soon.” The invitation highlights that the word emerges as a bridge between child and world, and that this cultural and symbolic experience does not begin at age four but from the very beginning of life.

The evocation of language from the earliest affective bonds of childhood reiterates that quality in Early Childhood Education must also be evident in the care for babies. However, the fact that no specific training action within the National Commitment to Literate Children (CNCA) is aimed at this age group reveals a process of exclusion that compromises the full realization of the right to education for all children from 0 to 5 years old. This omission

challenges the very idea of universalizing quality and exposes the disputes surrounding what is considered essential in teacher training for Early Childhood Education. It is in this context that the LEEI/MS proposal stands out by integrating, in its training conception, the principles of science, art, and life. In the third online training session, for example, this integration is explicitly presented as the central axis of the training proposal:

Reflecting on the relationship between science, art, and life is the central theme of this training process. Reflecting on the fact that children are subjects of rights. Reflecting on our commitment, as we have already said and now reaffirm, the commitment to literate children. This means that we are assuming a commitment in Early Childhood Education that involves understanding that children have the right, when they reach the first or second grade, to acquire this very specific knowledge related to oral and written language. But, from the very beginning, we understand that it is in Early Childhood Education that the conditions are created for them to appropriate this framework. (6th Meeting: 3rd Online LEEI/MS Training, broadcast live on 16 August 2024).

This approach challenges teacher training concepts grounded in transmissive, instrumental, and decontextualized logics. In contrast to models that reduce teaching to techniques to be applied, the training promoted by LEEI/MS invests in valuing experience, listening, and creativity as fundamental elements of professional knowledge. It is a movement that shifts the focus from training centered on measurable outcomes to the construction of pedagogical practices that are culturally situated and sensitive to childhoods, including those of babies.

This conception is expressed, for example, in the statement by the project coordination in the Central-West region, emphasizing the centrality of children as the reference point of the training process: “Ensuring that teachers effectively have access to quality training and that this training has children as its reference” (1st Meeting: Opening live session, broadcast live on 28 May, 2024). In the same vein, the state coordinator reinforces this commitment by emphasizing: “[...] We want to empower them so that this work has a quality that meets the interests and needs of the children of Mato Grosso do Sul” (2nd Meeting: 1st Training of Municipal Trainers – MS, broadcast live on 07 July 2024).

This formative perspective aligns with the resistances identified by Santos, Tomazzetti, and Mello (2018), who highlight how Early Childhood Education professionals have historically developed counter-hegemonic practices that challenge standardized curricular policies. Within the context of LEEI/MS, there is a clear rejection of systematic writing instruction as a subject to be taught prematurely, instead emphasizing the value of multiple languages as the foundation of pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the rejection of

the technician logic of training is expressed through the emphasis on teachers' situated knowledge, recognition of territorial diversities, and opposition to curricular uniformity. This appreciation of local contexts is thus reaffirmed by the trainers themselves:

We are not starting from nowhere; we are starting from knowledge that each of you has already appropriated in your municipalities, and this is an essential starting point for our work. In addition to that, we bring all the themes that discuss important issues such as childhoods, children, oral language, writing, written culture, literature, and all this theoretical framework so necessary for our studies and for carrying out quality work in and for Early Childhood Education. (6th Meeting: 3rd Online Training, broadcast live on 16 August 2024).

By engaging this field with training proposals that recognize the uniqueness of childhood and teaching practice, LEEI/MS promotes a redefinition of the national literacy policy. The selection of training topics, the valuing of multiple languages, the promotion of experiences with literature and orality, as well as the collective construction of training content, all represent a reinterpretation of the national policy. This approach fulfills official goals while preserving the foundations of Early Childhood Education. In this context, the *quality* being claimed is not tied to the anticipation of results but rather to the creation of meaningful experiences of language, culture, and care. As one of the coordinators stated in the second meeting:

[...] you can be sure that, together, we are committed to delivering quality training, which is what our children deserve. [...] All children in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul deserve quality Early Childhood Education. They not only deserve it but have the right to quality Early Childhood Education. (2nd Meeting: 1st Training of Municipal Trainers – MS, broadcast live on 07 July 2024).

The inclusion of cultural moments featuring songs inspired by Brazilian poets highlights the attention given to the aesthetic and sensitive dimension of the training, connecting art, childhood, and education. Choosing to begin the first meeting with a cultural presentation of Márcio de Camilo's project "Crianças" brings forward an integrative perspective of poetic language and affection, engaging the aesthetic dimensions of childhood: "The boy and the river [...] My backyard is bigger than the world" (1st Meeting: Opening live session, broadcast live on 28 May 2024). The musicality and poetry evoked in the songs emphasize childhood's centrality as a place of creation, sensitivity, and belonging, aligning with the conception of reading and writing as broad and meaningful cultural practices.

Additionally, the records of the training sessions - such as online training recordings, slides, and posts on the project's Instagram - show that the training is not limited to simply

reproducing guidelines. It also serves as a space for memory, debate, and the construction of teaching narratives. In these spaces, policy is reworked, and the *quality* being claimed ceases to be merely a national goal to become a situated experience, built within local contexts.

With this focus, the quality of teaching in Early Childhood Education is represented throughout the training sessions as an articulation between science, art, and life, where theoretical knowledge is interwoven with aesthetic sensitivity, everyday experiences, and political commitment to childhoods (Corsino, 2015). This formative conception aligns with what García (1999) calls “pedagogical isomorphism,” a concept referring to the coherence between the principles guiding teacher training and those expected to underpin pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education institutions. Within LEEI/MS, this coherence is reaffirmed from the very first training session, both in the oral presentation and in the materials shared with participants. One of the slides from the initial presentation states:

Figure 3 – Presentation slide



Source: LEEI/MS, 2024

The slide highlights the emphasis on “working with process homology=pedagogical isomorphism.” This pursuit of homology between training and practice is also evident in the encouragement to use tools such as the class diary, the life book, and inventories, which connect reflection and daily practice, establishing the training process as an extension of the pedagogical practices desired for Early Childhood Education. This perspective is reiterated by different trainers throughout the sessions through the choice of methodologies that value play, orality, literature, and aesthetic experience as ways to promote children’s engagement with written culture, respecting their timing and uniqueness.

The LEEI/MS Instagram page reinforces this vision through posts highlighting the in-person training sessions. For example, the post from August 28 documents the second in-

person training of municipal trainers from Mato Grosso do Sul, accompanied by the comment: “This has been a course of great importance for all of us!” In addition to receiving expressions of satisfaction from participants in the form of comments, the post garnered the highest number of likes on the page, demonstrating its impact and engagement. By aligning continuing education with the effective everyday practices of Early Childhood Education, LEEI/MS shows that it recognizes and legitimizes the knowledge teachers build through their daily experience.

Figure 4 – Official LEEI/MS Instagram Post – Record of the 4th LEEI Training Session



Source: @leei.ms.ufms, 2024

Teacher training in this context is not limited to the simple appropriation of content and methods. It is a reflective and sensitive construction, supported by an ethics of listening, the valuing of languages and culture, and a broadened view of childhood. This is also reaffirmed in the 3rd Meeting, when one of the trainers revisits the idea that the LEEI materials, especially the training booklets, are not manuals but rather tools that challenge the trainer based on experience, subjectivity, and situated knowledge: “This knowledge is not simply empty or fixed and finished; it is anchored in the reality of each municipality [...] this is science, art, and life.” (6th Meeting: 3rd Online Training, broadcast live on 16 August 2024).

In this conception, teaching assumes a creative and aesthetic dimension, involving choices that respect the ways children are, feel, and live. This connection between art and teaching is also reflected in the trainers’ accounts of the impact that readings and experiences

have on the individuals involved in the training: “Things are because we see them, and what we see and how we see depends on the arts that have influenced us” (quote from Oscar Wilde, shared in the 7th Meeting).

Building on this reference, teaching is understood as a practice that both shapes and is shaped by the arts, language, and culture. Thus, the work of teachers in Early Childhood Education is recognized as world-making, a shared creation of meaning with and by children, within the territories where they live and learn. This perspective also encompasses the social responsibility of educators working in the public system, especially in the face of social inequalities. In her words, the coordinator of LEEI/MS reminds us: “Children from less privileged classes [...] rely heavily on us, on our mediation, not on our knowledge, not on the transfer of knowledge, but on the possibilities we create so that children can access this expanded cultural universe” (7th Online LEEI/MS Training, broadcast live on 22 November 2024).

The analysis of this data shows that, although the word *quality* appears repeatedly in the training sessions, what is actually at stake is the meaning attributed to this term. For some individuals, especially those connected to centralizing educational policy bodies, quality is associated with achieving objective goals, early literacy, and curriculum standardization. For others, such as the coordination of LEEI Centro-Oeste and the coordination and trainers of LEEI/MS, quality is a term anchored in the right to play, experiencing language as a cultural practice, listening to children, and valuing teachers’ knowledge.

Conclusions

In official discourse, there is no explicit opposition to the “quality of Early Childhood Education.” The dispute, therefore, takes place through the construction of a symbolic antagonism, where hegemony is not formed based on objective characteristics but on the representation of what is to be opposed (Laclau, 2006). Thus, the term quality functions as an empty signifier, capable of gathering diverse meanings and, precisely because of that, serving as a point of condensation for symbolic struggles over hegemony. The analysis of LEEI/MS’s actions shows that what is claimed as quality is not the anticipation of measurable results but the children’s right to aesthetic, relational, and meaningful experiences, reaffirming Early Childhood Education as a time of life and creation, not merely preparation.

LEEI/MS assumes language as a fundamental right of the child and as a structuring axis of Early Childhood Education, recognizing its centrality in the constitution of subjects and in the interactions that shape learning and development

processes. The analysis of the materials examined shows that the training sessions promoted within the scope of the CNCA seek to affirm a conception of reading and writing as cultural, sensitive, and socially situated practices.

The training sessions do not merely disseminate content but build collective meanings about teaching in Early Childhood Education, valuing listening, creativity, and belonging as central contributions to pedagogical practice. They highlight the importance of understanding work with language beyond mere decoding, recognizing the significance of children's engagement in diverse social contexts and the relevance of pedagogical practices that value their experiences, knowledge, and unique ways of relating to the world.

Teachers' work is acknowledged as inventive and ethical practice, and the training process as a space for dialogue between science, art, and life. By reaffirming children's right to language in its multiple forms and recognizing educators' power as protagonists of this process, LEEI/MS contributes to consolidating training pathways that respect childhoods and strengthen professional teaching identity. The findings of this research indicate that continuing education can indeed serve as a territory of resistance and the construction of (other) meanings.

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