

Circle of Intellectuals: Memories of the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro

Roda de intelectuais: memórias do Fórum Permanente de Educação Infantil do Rio de Janeiro

Rueda de Intelectuales: Memorias del Foro Permanente de Educación Infantil de Río de Janeiro

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Abstract: This article analyzes the trajectory and role of intellectuals in the founding of the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education of Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) and its significance as a space for political praxis in the defense of the children's right to early childhood education. The article is based on a collective interview, held as a discussion group, which constituted one of the research strategies developed with the founders of the Forum. The investigation considered their academic paths, activism, and contributions to public policies on early Childhood Education in Brazil. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Gramsci and Bakhtin, the study discusses the role of organic intellectuals in the educational field, as well as the function of the Forum as a collective intellectual. The findings underscore the importance of the articulation between intellectuals and social movements in consolidating policies aimed at early childhood.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Intellectuals; Public Policy; Social movement.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a trajetória e o papel da/os intelectuais na fundação do Fórum Permanente de Educação Infantil do Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) e sua importância como espaço de práxis política na defesa do direito à Educação Infantil. O artigo se baseia em uma entrevista coletiva, realizada como roda de conversa, que constituiu uma das estratégias de pesquisa desenvolvidas com fundadoras e fundadores do Fórum. A investigação considerou sua trajetória acadêmica, militância e contribuições para as políticas públicas da Educação Infantil no Brasil. A partir das perspectivas teóricas de Gramsci e Bakhtin, a investigação discute a atuação das/os intelectuais orgânicos no campo educacional, bem como a função do Fórum como intelectual coletivo. Os resultados apontam para a relevância da articulação entre intelectuais e movimentos sociais na consolidação de políticas voltadas à infância.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil; Intelectuais; Políticas Públicas; Movimento social.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la trayectoria y el papel de los intelectuales en la fundación del Foro Permanente de Educación Infantil de Río de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ), destacando su importancia como espacio de praxis política en la defensa del derecho a la educación infantil. El artículo se basa en una conferencia de prensa, realizada como grupo de discusión, que constituyó una de las estrategias de

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investigación desarrolladas con los fundadores del Foro. La investigación consideró su trayectoria académica, militancia y contribuciones a las políticas públicas de Educación Infantil em Brasil. A partir de las perspectivas teóricas de Gramsci y Bakhtin, el estudio discute la actuación de los intelectuales orgánicos en el campo educativo, así como la función del Foro como intelectual colectivo. Los resultados señalan la relevancia de la articulación entre intelectuales y movimientos Sociales em la consolidación de políticas dirigidas a la infancia.

Palavras chave: Educação Infantil; Intelectuais; Políticas Públicas; Movimento social.

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Introduction

The consolidation of Early Childhood Education as a constitutional right under the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Statute of Children and Adolescents of 1990 led to the establishment of state forums and social mobilization. The Permanent Forum for Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) was established and organized during the 1990s by educators, researchers, and activists with the objective of articulating theories and practices in defense of the right to quality early childhood education.

The FPEI-RJ positions itself as a space for resistance and political advocacy, promoting debates, developing proposals, and demanding public policies from agencies such as the Ministry of Education (MEC) and municipal secretariats—and in its ability to move between different spheres of power without losing autonomy.

The present article is founded upon the findings of doctoral research completed on the subject of the Rio de Janeiro Forum (Siqueira, 2024). The research presents the context and narratives of eleven of its founders, who were interviewed individually and in a group interview. It also provides insights into the internal organization and main strategies of FPEI-RJ, reflecting on its legacy and current challenges. The present article focuses on the group interview that was conducted after the individual interviews³.

Organic and collective intellectuals: contributions from Gramsci and Bakhtin

The theoretical contributions of Antonio Gramsci and Mikhail Bakhtin formed the analytical framework that allowed us to both consider the founders of the Rio de Janeiro Forum as organic intellectuals and to assess their role in consolidating the struggles for early childhood

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education in Brazil. According to the theories of Gramsci (1978; 2002; 2017), organic intellectuals emerge from social demands, technical knowledge, and political commitment to the construction of culture. Within the framework of the FPEI-RJ, it is evident how their engaged practices metamorphose into strategies for institutional advocacy and popular mobilization. The Bakhtinian perspective on language and social interaction highlights the dialogical and polyphonic character of conversation circles, thereby enabling the identification of the Forum as a "collective intellectual" where plural voices intertwine to produce meaning for shared political action. Gramsci's framework elucidates the organicity and militancy of the subjects, while Bakhtin's (1993, 1997) contributions illuminate the communicative processes that imbue the Forum with its dynamics of listening, creative tension, and collective construction of knowledge.

The study was based on oral history methodology, a qualitative approach that sought to understand the experience of the founders of FPEI-RJ through their narratives recorded in individual and collective interviews, with a semi-structured question script, allowing us to learn about their academic trajectories, political engagement, and contributions to the formulation of policies for Early Childhood Education. The utilization of oral history methodologies rendered feasible the documentation of the voices of the movement's proponents, the exposition of subjective and collective dimensions of activism, and the institutional transformations that transpired over the years. Moreover, it facilitated the discernment of the trajectories of the intellectuals involved in the establishment and advancement of the Forum, in addition to their political and academic endeavors in the defense of Early Childhood Education. The data revealed how this space consolidated itself throughout the 1990s, bringing together social movements, academic institutions, and government policies to promote the inclusion of early childhood education in the public agenda.

The qualitative approach, oral history, and documentary analysis provided a rich and detailed understanding of the trajectories and experiences of the intellectuals involved in the Forum. The triangulation of sources—individual interviews, roundtable discussions, documents (meeting minutes, manifestos, open letters, official publications related to the Forum)—ensured greater rigor and depth in the interpretation of the data.

The analysis of individual and group interview statements was conducted in light of Antonio Gramsci's (2002) theory of the organic and collective intellectual, which recognizes the role of individuals engaged in the construction of new social and political paradigms. Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1997, 1993) theories of language and social interaction were employed to comprehend the evolution of the discourses and practices of these intellectuals and to analyze how these discourses and practices transform over time.

The interviewees' reports demonstrate that the FPEI-RJ functions as a conduit for dialogue between diverse sectors of civil society and academia, thereby fostering discourse on

Early Childhood Education in Brazil. The activities of the Forum are indicative of the concept of collective intellectual endeavor, as it integrates social practices and academic knowledge in defense of children's rights.

The research demonstrated that the Forum's mobilization played a pivotal role in facilitating discussions on public policies with a focus on Early Childhood Education, particularly during periods of legislative changes and institutional challenges. The interviews indicated that the Forum functions as a milieu of active resistance, wherein educators, researchers, and education professionals collaborate to enhance the visibility of issues pertaining to childhood and to exert influence on political decisions.

Early childhood education, historically relegated to a secondary role in educational policies, began to receive greater recognition and investment thanks to the resistance efforts of FPEI-RJ. Consequently, an evaluation of the Forum's endeavors not only facilitated the preservation of its memory and legacy but also provided an opportunity for reflection on the present and future challenges of the struggle to guarantee the right to early childhood education in Brazil.

The history of FPEI-RJ, as relived through the accounts, perspectives, and perceptions of its founders, provides a profound understanding of the significance of intellectuals' involvement in the development of early childhood education in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Oral history and conversation circles: methodological approaches to research

The research focused on the historical and political trajectory of the development of early childhood education in Brazil, highlighting the consolidation of this stage as a social right from the end of the 20th century onwards. In particular, the research focused on the role of social movements, intellectual actors, and legislation that transformed daycare and preschool from welfare practices into public policies anchored in the recognition of children as subjects of rights.

To this end, a range of methodological procedures were adopted, including biographical surveys of the founders, documentary research in conference proceedings and specialized journals, consultation of the websites of organizations belonging to the Brazilian Interforum Movement for Early Childhood Education (MIEIB), individual interviews with a semi-structured question script, and a roundtable discussion with the group of intellectuals who formed the founding nucleus of FPEI-RJ. The documentary analysis and exploratory research carried out before the interviews with the Forum's collegiate body contributed to identifying the group that constituted the corpus of the investigation.

The FPEI-RJ is a social movement that plays a fundamental role in promoting Early Childhood Education in the State of Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil. Its history is

characterized by actions, debates, and opportunities for listening, dialogue, and mobilization, which are recognized for contributing significantly to the development and consolidation of public policies, as well as to pedagogical practices aimed at defending and guaranteeing the rights of young children.

In the initial phases of the research, conducted during and following the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, which resulted in widespread social isolation measures in various regions of the world, including Brazil, due to the high prevalence of infection and mortality. Given this context, interviews were conducted using remote access technology, respecting the instability of health conditions and the choice of participants. Thus, both remote and face-to-face interviews were conducted.

The interviews were carried out with the objective of encouraging intellectuals to recount their personal histories, understood in a dialogical manner, with a view to constructing and reconstructing meanings. While the interviews, issues such as training, experience, and recollections of professional activity at the Permanent Forum for Early Childhood Education in the State of Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ), with the guidance of a script that included the following: the professional and academic trajectory of the subject is outlined, as is the permanent forum for early childhood education. The history of the subject as an intellectual and activist is also outlined, as are their actions and institutional relations.

The research corpus is formed because of the narratives of the Forum's founders, with oral history as the central methodology, anchored in the studies of Alberti (1996; 2008), which warn of the need for rigor in oral history, articulating historical research, ethnography, and sociological sensitivity, that is, the construction of a relationship of sensitivity and rigor with the research subjects, a relationship of "controlled complicity" (Alberti, 2013, p. 21). In the domain of oral history, the subjectivities of the researcher and the narrator often coexist. The researcher, being both involved and situated, participates in the investigative process in an active and reflective manner.

The eleven interviews, conducted on an individual basis, facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences, choices, and personal and professional trajectories. The following individuals were interviewed: Aristeo Gonçalves Leite Filho, Deise Gonçalves Nunes, Edson Cordeiro dos Santos, Maria Dolores Bombardelli Kappel, Maria da Luz Fernandes Perim, Marinez da Silva Vicente Simões, Maria Fernanda Rezende Nunes, Maria Luzinete de Martins Pereira Moreira, Maurício Camilo da Silva, Sonia Kramer, and Yvone Costa de Souza⁴.

⁴ All research participants authorized the use of their real names.

This group consists of a diverse array of intellectuals who have been influenced by political activism, community engagement, and academic work in the field of children's rights. The articulation of this collective resulted in the creation of a political space for resistance and social mobilization in defense of public, democratic, and quality early childhood education. The Forum's founders represent a diverse array of professional disciplines, including social work, education, psychology, statistics, and nutrition. These disciplines have their historical roots in popular experiences, social movements, and institutional spaces dedicated to training and research.

Aristeo Gonçalves Leite Filho initiated his professional journey in the field of popular education during the 1970s, undertaking initiatives pertaining to adult literacy and the training of educators. He founded and currently serves as the director of the Oga Mitá School. In addition to his role at the Oga Mitá School, he has also held positions at the Ministry of Education (MEC), the National Foundation for the Well-being of Minors (FUNABEM), and has chaired the Rio de Janeiro section of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP). He was a central figure in the coordination of the National Preschool Education Program of the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL). He currently serves as a faculty member at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RIO). Deise Gonçalves Nunes, a trained social worker, served as a professor in the Department of Social Work at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). She also served as the coordinator of the Center for Research and Extension on Public Policy, where her research focused on early childhood education, political culture, and social movements. Edson Cordeiro dos Santos is a researcher and educator with a multifaceted background and a commitment to Early Childhood Education that led him to join the founding group of FPEI-RJ, which has a strong presence in Baixada Fluminense and in policies for children. Maria Dolores Bombardelli Kappel was employed as a researcher at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) before transitioning to the field of education, with the objective of conducting a critical evaluation of social and educational indicators. She obtained a master's degree in education and further refined her critical analysis of educational data, integrating statistical production with the reality of public policies concerning early childhood education. Maria da Luz Fernandes Perim, a nutritionist and educator, played a pivotal role in OMEP-Brazil and in the international coordination for Early Childhood Education. Maria Fernanda Rezende Nunes is a Professor of Early Childhood Education in the Department of Didactics at the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO). Demonstrating a profound dedication to the training of popular educators, she orchestrated a multifaceted endeavor encompassing research, activism, and community engagement, thereby fostering her evolution as a militant intellectual.

Maurício Camilo da Silva, a prominent educator, established community daycare centers; including Casa da Mãe Trabalhadora (The Working Mother's House) and Creche do Salgueiro (Salgueiro Daycare Center). He was instrumental in the organization of educational activities and emerged as a prominent proponent of rights in the domain of early childhood education. Yvone Costa de Souza, a social worker, has been involved in the field of childcare and social movements since her youth. She has contributed to the consolidation of the Forum from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) Daycare Center, where she continues to play an active role today, coordinating institutional policies and pedagogical practices aimed at guaranteeing children's rights. Sonia Kramer, professor emeritus at PUC-RIO, psychologist, and educator, has a long history of involvement in early childhood education and social movements. She has integrated theoretical frameworks and methodologies with prominent social movements, early childhood education centers, and academic institutions engaged in community-oriented initiatives. Her contributions have been instrumental in establishing and solidifying the Forum as a venue for political praxis.

The collective is completed by Maria Luzinete de Martins Pereira Moreira, an educator, community leader in São Gonçalo, coordinator of public policies focused on community daycare centers, and Marinez da Silva Vicente Simões, a social worker and activist from Baixada Fluminense founder of the community daycare network. Simões played a prominent role in the training of community educators and in the organization of the Forum at the regional and national levels.

These trajectories, both individual and collective, shape FPEI-RJ as a space for political and pedagogical construction, an expression of a collective intellectual committed to children's rights and the democratization of public policies for Early Childhood Education.

The interviews facilitated the collection of firsthand accounts that offered unique insights into the experiences of the pioneers in the field of Early Childhood Education in Brazil. These accounts served to substantiate the initial hypothesis of the research, which posited that the collaborative efforts of the founders of FPEI-RJ resulted in a transformative movement that exerted a significant influence on the decision-making processes and the outcomes of educational initiatives. Thematic analysis of the interviews yielded three overarching dimensions: the following three factors must be considered: (I) the personal and academic trajectory of the subject; (II) the subject's relationships with Early Childhood Education; and (III) the mobilization of issues. The narratives facilitate comprehension of the development and efficacy of intellectuals, their conceptualizations of society and education, and the enduring nature of their principles.

Each interview contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the history of FPEI-RJ by recognizing the subjects as narrators of themselves and the world, according to the perspective of Bakhtin (1993, 1997), for whom consciousness is constituted in dialogue. The collective interview was initiated by one of the interviewees, who proposed a meeting

that would convene all the research participants. The proposal was endorsed by the interviewees and implemented with the objective of fostering dialogue among the founding group, facilitating the exchange of memories, and conducting a collective analysis of the events that transpired during the organization of the Forum. The group interview, which was meticulously planned and executed in person following the pandemic, bore a striking resemblance to a conversation circle in terms of its atmosphere, flavor, and energy.

While the discourse within the conversation circle expanded beyond the initial objectives of the research (Siqueira, 2024), it serves as a valuable source for recollecting the narratives recounted and experienced. The invitation, conveyed via telephone and WhatsApp, was met with enthusiasm, and ten of the eleven guests attended the meeting. Five researchers affiliated with the Childhood, Education, and Culture Research Group (INFOC) also attended as observers.

The conversation circle as collective praxis: Shared memory and dialogical listening

On a sunny spring afternoon on November 28, 2023, in the Department of Education at PUC-Rio, we gathered in a circle to listen and share memories, stories, and experiences. The purpose of the roundtable was threefold: first, to share the history of FPEI-RJ; second, to collectively discuss the main aspects of these stories; and third, to identify and deepen reflection on gaps or ambivalences between the stories told. The circle was led and mediated by the authors of this text.

During the conversation circle, the stories intertwined between memories and forgetfulness. According to Kramer (2007, p. 73), the dynamic and interactive nature of collective interviews is emphasized, wherein participants adopt various roles, thereby facilitating a rich and spontaneous exchange that involves "questions being asked, places being changed, and roles being taken on, such as interviewer." This methodological strategy enabled the exploration of attitudes, opinions, and contexts that, through interaction, highlight and problematize the object of the research (Kramer; Nunes; Corsino, 2005).

The analysis of the conversation circle reports was carried out through thematic categorization, which identified structural components that guide the construction of the Forum and its primary actions. The challenges confronted and the strategies employed by intellectuals to ensure the consolidation of Early Childhood Education as a fundamental right were considered.

The reports highlight challenges faced, such as resistance from some sectors to recognize community daycare centers as part of the educational system and the constant need to pressure public authorities to ensure the continuity of achievements.

Another relevant aspect identified was the impact of FPEI-RJ's work in training new education professionals. The exchange of experiences and the production of collective knowledge led to the strengthening of a network of educators committed to defending children's rights. This dynamic underscores the significance of spaces for activism in promoting democratic and inclusive early childhood education.

During the discussion, specific agendas and achievements emerged that highlight the role of FPEI-RJ in coordinating various social actors, its influence on public policies, and the consolidation of early childhood education as a constitutional right. Among these achievements are: 1. The inclusion of children aged zero to five in the IBGE Demographic Census of the 2000s is a significant development in the field of population studies. The guarantee of funding for community daycare centers is also a crucial aspect of early childhood education, as it ensures the availability of resources and infrastructure necessary for the effective functioning of these centers. The "Fraldas Pintadas" (Painted Diapers) movement, which ensured the inclusion of Early Childhood Education in the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of the Teaching Profession (FUNDEB) in Brazil in 2006, is a noteworthy example of community mobilization in the pursuit of educational equity. Moreover, the Forum served to reinforce the training of educators and to increase the visibility of Early Childhood Education on the political agenda.

The following items are intended to develop and analyze the statements and comments of the interviewees.

The genesis of the Permanent Forum: between memory, activism, and social mobilization

Established in the 1990s, the Permanent Forum for Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) emerged as a space for collective mobilization and political advocacy in defense of early childhood education as a right for all children. Since its inception, the Forum has articulated demands to public authorities, expanding the participation of various social actors and consolidating itself as a legitimate forum for dialogue between civil society and the State.

During the conversational roundtable, references were made to the Forum not as the result of one person's individual will, but rather because of the socio-political context of the period of re-democratization:

The Forum emerges within this specific context, not as the conception of a solitary individual. The Forum is the sociopolitical context of a society that is becoming more democratic and that has this space for civil society. It will be the voice of civil society because it is not represented on the councils (for law or policy). It is civil society discussing and making itself present on the

councils. In this regard, the Forums emerge as a pivotal element (Deise Nunes, Conversation Circle, 2023).

This statement reinforces the collective, horizontal, and democratic nature of the Forum, which was created in line with other social movements of the 1980s, in the context of the 1988 Constitution. This momentous event is regarded as a pivotal turning point in the incorporation of Early Childhood Education within the Federal Constitution:

In 1985, Ulisses Guimarães called on society to participate in the Constituent Assembly, and this movement, involving more people, helped to write a new Constitution. As children had not been mentioned in the Constitution, they did so. Because there was Sonia, Solange Jobim. They started this movement, and the "Children in the Constituent Assembly" movement emerged. From this debate, the term Early Childhood Education entered the Constitution and will only be regulated in the Law of Guidelines and Bases (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

This mobilization led to the incorporation of Early Childhood Education into the constitutional text; however, its subsequent regulation did not occur until years later, with the enactment of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) of 1996. The Forum, as Luzinete Moreira noted, played a pivotal role in this process, stating, "The Forum was initiated in 1993 by a small group of individuals who convened to deliberate on Early Childhood Education and exerted pressure on the Ministry of Education."

Since that time, the FPEI-RJ has maintained an identity marked by non-institutionalization. The primary concept that emerges is that of non-institutionalization. It has been observed that other Early Childhood Education forums have a CNPJ (Corporate Taxpayer Identification Number) and an accountant. This phenomenon is unprecedented in our movement's history, and it is emphatically not something we desire. It has been three decades since the last instance of institutionalization" (Aristeo Leite Filho, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

The Rio Forum's decision to refrain from legal institutionalization signifies its preference for a more autonomous and critical organizational structure, one that maintains a distance from bureaucratic constraints and is open to a diverse range of participants. This approach is consistent with the Forum's original character as a social movement, as established during its inception. Among the activists who constitute the Forum, it is possible to identify, in Gramsci's (2002) terms, the so-called organic intellectuals. These politically engaged individuals articulate production and social action in the practical life of social groups. They organize and disseminate worldviews, mobilize individuals around political, social, and cultural projects, act as articulators of collective meanings, and transcend the role of specialized technicians.

The actions of intellectuals at the intersection of theory and political action, in this case in the fight for children's rights in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the ideas that shape their

positions, confirm the understanding of "[...] the functioning of an intellectual society with the characteristics of a historical and conjunctural moment" (Silva, 2002, p. 12).

In the process of performing a role that articulates theory with political practice, this intellectual "understands the contradictions but places himself as an element of the contradiction, elevating this element to a principle of knowledge and, consequently, of action" (Gramsci, 2017, p. 204). As articulated by Antonio Gramsci in Notebook 11 §12, the philosophy of praxis is predicated on action, eschewing both the contemplative and mechanical conceptions of knowledge. The scope of its influence extends beyond the confines of academic and intellectual circles, encompassing a proactive engagement with popular struggles and demands. It is entrusted with the responsibility to disrupt the prevailing cultural hegemony, to identify avenues for enhancing awareness and mobilizing the subaltern classes, and to foster the development of a critical consciousness and the pursuit of social transformation.

Beyond the imperative of universalization, it was crucial to ensure the quality of care and reduce inequalities, ultimately guaranteeing the right of children aged zero to six to an excellent public education. The circle's emphasis on the academic backgrounds of numerous Forum activists served to fortify their capacity for advocacy:

In fact, many of these community [daycare centers] already received funding from public agencies [...] so many of these people went on to study, pursue specializations, master's degrees, and doctorates, and this changed the way the Forum influenced public policy (Edson Santos, Roda de Conversa, 2024).

All this coordination between technical knowledge, practical experience, and political mobilization was decisive for significant achievements, such as the inclusion of the zero to three age group in Fundeb. The statements also reveal that the actions of the Forum's activists were directly linked to the formation of regulatory frameworks that increased the visibility and rights of young children.

The participants in the roundtable discussion were in agreement that the Forum has always been a distinctive and impactful experience of collective construction, in which listening, critical training, knowledge production, and activism are intertwined in the uncompromising defense of childhood as an absolute priority. The participants' connection, reflection, and action had direct impacts on their work with children.

Impacts and contemporary relevance

The Forum's trajectory demonstrates its continued importance as a space for struggle and resistance. The narratives exchanged during the discussion circle underscore its function as a site of

resistance and collective strategy formulation. The Forum was characterized by its political nature, eschewing partisanship. It was recognized and acknowledged, and it possessed a voice. The call for discussion of these issues was made by all parties involved" (Sonia Kramer, Discussion Circle, 2023). This institutional acknowledgement proved to be instrumental in enabling the Forum to exert its influence on the formulation of public policy.

Furthermore, an analysis of the testimonies indicates that organic intellectuals fulfill a strategic role in mediating between academic knowledge and everyday educational practice. This interaction led to the formulation of novel proposals for the domain of Early Childhood Education, which were integrated into educational policy guidance documents. However, participants highlighted the difficulties faced over the years, including the need to overcome bureaucratic barriers and institutional resistance to the implementation of the policies advocated by the Forum.

Thus, investigating this group of founding intellectuals meant recognizing that their ideas and trajectories constitute privileged testimonies of the various educational projects in dispute, which outline the direction of the educational processes of new generations. "Their trajectories are privileged testimonies of the various educational projects that mark the disputes surrounding the direction of the educational processes of new generations," as it "creates its own identity as they take on a specific social responsibility, function, or mission" (Vieira, 2001, p. 57).

Impact on public policy: daycare centers, IBGE, and the Fraldas Pintadas movement

In line with the international movement in defense of Early Childhood, FPEI-RJ contributed to agencies such as MEC and IBGE beginning to collect and disseminate specific data on school attendance for children aged zero to five.

[...] political and social movements advocating for the prioritization of early childhood development have prompted the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) to incorporate more detailed information regarding school services for children aged 0 to 6 into their data surveys and results disclosures. This information contributes to the knowledge and monitoring of policies implemented in relation to children aged 0 to 6 in our country (Dolores Kappel, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

These novel statistical data began to support the evaluation and formation of strategies for expanding services, especially for children aged zero to five, who had previously been almost invisible in official surveys. It was noted that, based on the living standards survey conducted in 1995 by the IBGE, in partnership with university research teams, the institute collected data on early childhood education for children aged zero to five for the first time.

After three years of fieldwork, the 2000 Census was the first to systematically incorporate this age group, enabling sectoral surveys by municipality and even by neighborhood. This achievement not only gave visibility to the needs of young children, but also provided the Ministry of Education with essential subsidies to plan the provision of places and resources, consolidating the logic that the IBGE determines the demand for education and the Ministry of Education provides the supply of places and resources, solidifying the logic that 'the IBGE determines the demand for education and the Ministry of Education provides the service (Dolores Kappel, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

The pioneering spirit and activism of intellectuals and professionals in their institutions seem to have been strengthened by their active participation in the Forum and by the Forum's collective action.

The fight for community daycare centers funding

FPEI-RJ functions as a pivotal platform for coordination and mobilization, integrating diverse social actors to promote children's rights. The organization plays a crucial role in coordinating political advocacy strategies, facilitating knowledge production, and fostering mutual support among public institutions, community movements, and academic entities.

It was recalled in the circle that in the 1990s, the group was already actively participating in international seminars and debates on the regulation of early childhood education, directly influencing the LDB and Resolution No. 231 of the Rio de Janeiro State Board of Education, which established the rules for the operation of early childhood education institutions in the state (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

Historically formed in contexts of state absence and led primarily by women, community, philanthropic, and religious institutions were legitimized and strengthened by the Forum. The Forum guaranteed resources and visibility to community-based daycare centers. For instance, in 2012, the Manifesto in Defense of Community Daycare Centers in Baixada Fluminense brought to the attention of municipalities the pressing need to renew agreements and transfer funds. This pluralistic action transformed Early Childhood Education "from a favor granted to a recognized right" (Deise Nunes, Roda de Conversa, 2023). The Forum's success in securing financing for community daycare centers, despite the presence of intense debates and resistance, can be attributed to its inclusive approach, which sought to engage the voices of various stakeholders.

Moreover, the decisive moment for community daycare centers transpired in 1998, when the Forum compelled the State Board of Education to re-evaluate its decision and

formally acknowledge community, religious and philanthropic daycare centers within the state education system (Edson Santos, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

Consequently, the Forum emerged as a prominent authority on public policies concerning early childhood education in numerous municipalities across Rio de Janeiro, thereby fortifying the network of community daycare centers. Moreover, the Forum provided substantial support to training programs, including the Fiocruz daycare course and the Specialization Course in Early Childhood Education at PUC-Rio. These programs began to prioritize public and community institutions, a shift that can be attributed to the tangible support and increased visibility provided by the Forum.

The Forum [...] provided support for this Fiocruz course, which was offered voluntarily and comprised classes, lectures, and seminars intended for the entire state of Rio de Janeiro. The Forum's support manifested in two primary forms. Firstly, it provided a platform for the dissemination of information regarding the aforementioned struggle, including the efforts undertaken at the daycare center. Secondly, it facilitated the establishment of a forum for the discussion and implementation of public policies, thereby offering a venue for the promotion of children's well-being. [...] This Forum has historically endorsed and continues to endorse numerous practices and actions. In collaboration with the Forum, we have broadened the scope of reception, extending it to the state level and facilitating national discourse (Yvone Souza, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

The Forum was distinguished by its integration of diverse voices, its strategic management of conflicts, and its historical articulation between community action and institutional influence. However, the presence of a diverse array of actors was not the sole factor contributing to this phenomenon. Furthermore, the circle underscored the participants' shared responsibility. In this sense, despite their different institutional ties, whether to the public, private, or community network, there was an understanding among the Forum's activists that community daycare centers played an important role in the face of the public sphere's omission, taking the place of the state. This diversity facilitated direct dialogue in various spheres of the executive and legislative branches, ranging from the Ministry of Education to the Senate, and the articulation of agendas such as the Daycare Center in FUNDEB⁵.

The Forum's strength lay in its ability to articulate different academic, political, and community perspectives, which gave it legitimacy with councils, legislative chambers, and executive bodies. According to the interviewees in the circle, this recognition appears to have been the result of the diversity of social positions of the Forum's members. The "dual insertion of leaders who

⁵ FUNDEB and Constitutional Amendment (EC) No. 53, in 2006, (Brazil, 2006) were created with the aim of expanding and strengthening the distribution of resources for Basic Education throughout the country, daycare, i.e., children aged zero to three, were not included, despite replacing the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Primary Education and Valorization of the Teaching Profession (FUNDEF) and expanding the scope to include Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education.

moved between the MEC, community institutions, universities, and popular movements, bringing diverse experiences" was highlighted (Aristeo Leite Filho, Roda de Conversa 2023).

This dual insertion—combining ties to the state (MEC, IBGE) and community origins—provided the Forum with a distinctive degree of legitimacy. It did not function exclusively as an NGO, nor did it solely collaborate with public agencies. Rather, it served as a hybrid space for resistance and proposals, demonstrating the capacity to transform social mobilization into concrete public policies.

“Even though there were differences” (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023), the Forum welcomed diverse identities without dissolving its common principles. The conflicts that arose were of a productive nature. As documented by the circle, Forum participants adopted a unified stance against the low-cost programs proposed in the 1980s and 1990s by the MEC itself. This stance included the operation of daycare centers and preschools within schoolyards, with mothers volunteering in a rotational manner. The Forum anticipated debates about the tension between welfare initiatives and the right to quality public early childhood education. Despite its plurality, the Forum defined non-negotiable principles, namely public, universal early childhood education provided by the state.

We had principles. In addition, we didn't give up on certain principles. It's important to emphasize this because it wasn't a case of “everyone comes together, each with their ideas.” No. We welcome everything and welcome the whole, but it was something we had. We were careful about this (Deise Nunes, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

Thus, the Forum was not only advisory in nature but also represented an active voice in defining policies, regulations, and funding, becoming a national reference in the defense of Early Childhood Education. The strength of FPEI-RJ lay and continues to lie in the combination of a plurality of actors, productive use of conflicts, prolonged political-academic articulation, and commitment to continuing education. This set of attributes ensured an active voice in the construction of public policies for early childhood education and the legitimization of childhood as a constitutional right.

Childhood Education at FUNDEB

Securing funding for early childhood education emerged as a pivotal issue that FPEI-RJ prioritized. In the initial proposal for FUNDEB (Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Valorization of Education Professionals), guided by Constitutional Amendment No. 53 of 2006 (Brazil, 2006) to replace FUNDEF (BRAZIL,

1996) and broaden the scope to encompass early childhood education, elementary school, and high school, the age group of 0 to 3 years was excluded.

In light of this omission, the Forum mobilized the "Fraldas Pintadas" (Painted Diapers) movement to apply pressure on Congress and the Ministry of Education. According to one of the interviewees in the circle, "the Fraldas Pintadas movement was one of the Forum's greatest victories, because we managed to ensure that children aged 0 to 3 were included in FUNDEB" (Aristeo Leite Filho, Roda de Conversa, 2023). This achievement stands as the most significant in the history of FPEI-RJ.

The only right we fought for was the Fraldas Pintadas (Painted Diapers) movement. It was transitioning from Fundef to FUNDEB and removed children aged 0 to 3 from Fundeb. That is the movement we joined, and I would say that it was created by the Rio de Janeiro Forum (Aristeo Leite Filho, Roda de conversa, 2023).

This mobilization led to the emergence of the "Fraldas Pintadas" (Painted Diapers) movement in 2005, drawing inspiration from the "Caras Pintadas" (Painted Faces) movement of the 1990s. The "Fraldas Pintadas" movement garnered national attention through the creation of a logo designed by Cláudio Ceccon⁶, and it successfully ensured the inclusion of daycare centers in the Fund through the exertion of significant political pressure.

The inclusion of daycare centers in FUNDEB was the result of intense mobilization by FPEI-RJ, which spearheaded the defense of community early childhood education institutions. In addition to insisting on the inclusion of daycare centers in the new fund, the Forum advocated for the nationalization of the agreements that supported these services, a gesture that vacillated between initial optimism and disillusionment in the face of historical neglect of community initiatives.

Gramsci's philosophy of praxis provides a foundational theoretical framework for critical analysis of this context, conceptualizing theory and practice as intertwined and recognizing subjects as historical and dynamic in their pursuit of social emancipation. In this instance, the substantial mobilization aimed at incorporating daycare centers into FUNDEB (Gramsci, 2017a) exemplifies this dynamic.

This action underscored the Forum's pivotal role in reshaping perceptions of young children as rights holders rather than mere beneficiaries of favors. Through strategic coordination with municipal secretariats and other public agents—facilitated by the fact that the Forum holds its meetings at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education—the debate on daycare and preschool as a field of educational rights has advanced significantly. In addition to fortifying rights, the Forum

⁶ Brazilian cartoonist, architect, journalist, and educator.

has contributed to the enhancement of visibility concerning Early Childhood Education as a domain of rights. Initially, numerous departments lacked the infrastructure of daycare centers and preschools. There was a strong consensus in the Circle regarding the strength of the Forum and its relationship with the public authorities.

The Forum was strategically situated at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education in the state, and the meetings were held in the Cândido Portinari auditorium at the Gustavo Capanema Palace. The municipalities' participation in these meetings constituted a significant political strategy, as it resulted in them being pressured to make offers. This issue pertains to the rights of children, including the right to education, the right to daycare, and the right to preschool attendance (Fernanda Nunes, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

FUNDEB, the result of this broad social movement in favor of Early Childhood Education, ended up incorporating daycare as a fundamental component of its financing proposal—an advance that, according to Nunes, Corsino, and Didonet (2011), represented the most significant improvement of Constitutional Amendment No. 53 (Brazil, 2006, p. 37).

Feliciano and Nunes (2023) analyze the fragility of daycare in the process of inclusion in FUNDEB and point out that:

[...] in the discussions in the House and Senate for the approval of Fundeb 2005/2006, daycare was not mentioned, only preschool. This poses a problem, because in the dispute over resources, daycare represents the weakest link in basic education. The speeches highlighted the power of this space in child development but underestimated its capacity to influence individuals' educational trajectories (p.6).

In previous decades, the Forum had already acted to defend the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) against attempts to reduce rights. For example, the debate on the age of criminal responsibility demonstrated that the Forum's struggle was not limited to educational rights but embraced the entire agenda of comprehensive child protection.

This mobilization, which aims to incorporate daycare centers into the financing of basic education, underscores the strategic aptitude of FPEI-RJ in influencing the formulation of public policies. It also reinforces the pivotal role of social movements in establishing democratic mechanisms for financing early childhood education, thereby ensuring more equitable conditions for the education of Brazilian children.

Militant intellectuals: trajectories and training in the defense of childhood

A pivotal element in the FPEI-RJ's strategic evolution was its instrumental role in shaping policies aimed at educator training. From the outset, the Forum's discussions underscored the necessity for ongoing professional training for Early Childhood Education (ECE) professionals. This emphasis led to the development of programs and courses specifically designed to train teachers. The Forum's inaugural initiative pertained to the domain of training. This topic has been previously explored in Sonia Kramer's book⁷, which I currently have in my personal collection. (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023). Moreover, the discussions at the Forum were instrumental in the Rio de Janeiro State Board of Education's review of deliberations that initially excluded community, religious, and philanthropic institutions from educational regulations, ensuring their recognition within the education system.

As early as before the LDB, the issue of training was already being discussed (Edson Santos, Roda de Conversa, 2023). This process was experienced in practice by interviewees whose careers began in the 1980s, or even earlier, with the mobilizations surrounding the 1988 Constitution, which brought together public institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community institutions from different municipalities.

Additionally, several critical moments were identified. This assertion is supported by Resolution 231/1998 of the State Board of Education, which disregarded community, religious, and philanthropic institutions. The movement's reaction was immediate: "We [...] drafted the document 'Community Institutions: Daring to Exist'. The document was endorsed by the Forum and subsequently presented to the State Board of Education" (Edson Santos, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

Another account evokes the First Latin American Symposium, held in Brasília in 1993. A significant proportion of the women involved in the movement had not even completed elementary school, and the Symposium's proposal was to discuss secondary education. The interviewee humorously recollects the pivotal moment of their intervention at the Ministry of Education. Whether to demand secondary education becomes particularly salient in contexts where primary education is not guaranteed. (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023). Following their candidacy for the representative position, three Forum activists who were employed in community daycare centers attended the Symposium and committed to disseminating their knowledge to others. The genesis of the Forum coincided with this period of multiplication, with training serving as a fundamental tenet. Concurrently, the Forum engaged in research and discourse concerning teacher training, thereby fortifying the connection between

⁷ Reference to the book *Pré-Escola* (Preschool) by Sonia Kramer.

community practices and academic production. As stated by Luzinete Moreira (Roda de Conversa, 2023), "Training constituted our inaugural political action."

The Forum's contributions extend beyond mere promotion of training; it has also played a pivotal role in shaping a distinct culture within the realm of Early Childhood Education. This social movement has been defined by its integration of thought, knowledge, and social practice. Conflicts were present, yet they functioned as catalysts for advancement rather than impediments. The development of these theses, monographs, and policies was facilitated by constructive dialogue that engaged with divergent perspectives (Deise Nunes, Roda de Conversa, 2023). Another interviewee further elaborates on this sentiment, underscoring the notion that "the movement is embodied by each individual who actively engages with it. These individuals subsequently evolve into hubs and training networks. The Forum is still, essentially, a space for training." (Fernanda Nunes, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

Consequently, it became evident that the movement was influenced by the diversity of voices and conceptions present. This phenomenon exerted a direct influence on the trajectory of policy development.

Gohn's (2011) work contributes to this understanding of the FPEI-RJ's action by highlighting the role of social movements at an operational-proactive level, whose intervention focuses on the planning, implementation, and oversight of public policies. According to Gohn (2011), the principle of belonging is central to the analysis of social movements. Gohn asserts that when social movements engage in actions, they project a sense of social belonging onto their participants. This phenomenon, as Gohn explains, occurs because "those who were excluded begin to feel included in some type of action by an active group" (p. 336).

In response to the demand for formal education, the community movement has implemented specific initiatives. Solidariedade França Brasil, for instance, established the "Back to School" initiative to assist educators in reinstating their formal academic pursuits. In contemporary times, it has become increasingly uncommon to encounter an individual within the movement who does not possess at least a teaching degree. A significant proportion of the population possesses a bachelor's degree, with a notable segment having attained master's degrees as well" (Edson Santos, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

On this subject, one more fond memory: "We always went to Sonia Kramer's lectures. In Leandro's circle, there was coffee, and everyone knew we weren't from the university. One day, I entered as a student, and Leandro Konder joked: 'You here again? You had already attended many classes as an auditor—but now it was for real' (Luzinete Moreira, Roda de Conversa, 2023).

The statements and interactions in the *Roda de Conversa* with intellectuals show how, since its foundation until today, FPEI-RJ has been consolidating itself and acting as a space for professional, political, and institutional training, assuming the role of intellectual or collective subject.

Final Considerations:

The trajectory of Early Childhood Education in Brazil is marked by the influence of social movements, the engagement of intellectuals, and normative evolution. However, the challenge of equity in the implementation of quality remains a salient issue, demanding continuous mobilization and public investment.

The connections and links between different civil society actors, popular groups, academics, and professionals played a fundamental role in the development of a social science of concrete reality in an attempt to understand the uniqueness of early childhood, associated with a social commitment to providing quality education.

The research carried out indicates that the FPEI-RJ has solidified its position as a venue for the implementation of political practice, characterized by the convergence of intellectuals, educators, and activists. This collaborative effort has yielded significant advancements in the realm of Early Childhood Education. The Forum's political praxis is manifested in the collective construction of knowledge, social mobilization, and the proposal of public policies that ensure the right to early childhood education. In the collective endeavor to ensure the realization of rights, the active involvement of civil society is paramount to the influence and transformation of public policies.

The historical evolution of the Forum underscores the critical importance of collective mobilization in ensuring educational rights and fortifying public policies, particularly in circumstances involving regression or threats to previously established rights. The trajectory of FPEI-RJ demonstrates how the organization of intellectuals and activists has facilitated tangible advancements, including the expansion of access to early childhood education and the regulation of the financing of community daycare centers. Moreover, the Forum has established a forum for training and the exchange of experiences, thereby contributing to the qualification of early childhood education professionals and the strengthening of support networks for children and their families.

The research contributes to the appreciation of the history of social movements in education, recognizing their role in building more just and democratic public policies. This underscores the pivotal role that intellectuals play in promoting the importance of quality early childhood education that is universally accessible. Ensuring that the gains made are preserved and expanded for future

generations necessitates the active involvement of intellectuals in the struggle for quality early childhood education. The trajectory of FPEI-RJ serves as a source of inspiration for other initiatives that seek to enforce children's rights and reaffirms the relevance of social mobilization in building a more equitable and inclusive educational system.

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