

Dossier Presentation

Public policies on early childhood education and the historical struggle for access and quality

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Early childhood education, the first stage of Brazilian basic education, has a history marked by a dialectical movement of struggles, sometimes with advances, sometimes with setbacks, since the development of public policies is a field strained by different forces—political, economic, and ideological, and by various players and social groups. In this sense, achievements are not permanent but rather require research on policy implementation, in-depth analysis of these processes, and the involvement of representatives of organized civil society in participatory and democratic spaces. These actions often materialize in battles to defend public schools and against reactionary actions that impede the advancement of rights, especially for infants and very young children.

In light of these considerations, the journal *Educação e Políticas em Debate* presents the dossier "Public policies on early childhood education and the historic struggle for access and quality." The objective of this dossier is to broaden the debate by promoting the sharing and dissemination of research that analyzes state initiatives. This research addresses the advances, setbacks, intentions, and disputes regarding access to and quality of early childhood education. The present dossier, meticulously organized by a prominent group of scholars, namely, Menissa Cícera Fernandes de Oliveira Bessa, a professor at the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT); Leonice Matilde Richter, a professor at the Federal University of

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Uberlândia (UFU); and Jocicleia Souza Printes, a professor at the State University of Amazonas (UEA), has succeeded in mobilizing scholars from all five major regions of Brazil. This collective endeavor has led to a significant advancement in the analysis of the social phenomenon under scrutiny, namely, the historic struggle for access and quality in Early Childhood Education.

The provision of education for children, the target audience of the first stage of basic education, was established through a process of struggle for/with children, involving women, families, teachers, researchers, and activists from social movements that defend the causes of early childhood in Brazil, given that this age group has specific needs. Consequently, the dialectical tension between expanding access and ensuring quality in early childhood education has been, and continues to be, a hallmark of this process, in which significant historical events have shaped this field.

In a dialogue with Severino (2006, p. 310), it is evident that "a critical analysis of the historical experience of Brazilian education shows that, in each of its temporais scenarios, it performed the function of reproducing ideology, thereby contributing to the reproduction of the social relations prevailing at each moment." Consequently, Brazilian society observed the federal government's apparent lack of dedication to preschool policies during the 1960s, a period marked by the establishment of the initial Law on Guidelines and Bases for National Education (Brazil, 1961). The aforementioned measure was approved without any indication of responsibility or funding for the provision of preschools and daycare centers. A decade later, Law No. 5,692, which established the Guidelines and Bases for Primary and Secondary Education (Brazil, 1971), similarly failed to allocate resources or assign responsibility to any federal entity for preschools and daycare centers.

The achievement of the right to education by young children was subsequently elevated with the redemocratization of the country and the promulgation of the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988) on October 5, 1988. The latter document stipulates in Article 227 the responsibility of the family, society, and the State to ensure that children have

[...] absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community life, in addition to protecting them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression (Brazil, 1988).

In terms of educational developments, this period marked a significant shift from previous exclusionary practices, marking the advent of a new age in which fundamental rights were being actualized. This transition entailed a systematic augmentation of the legal framework, complementing the Federal Constitution with a series of protective policies. A

notable example is the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) (Brazil, 1990), which was designed to reinforce both access to and the quality of educational systems. Similarly, Law No. 9,394 was enacted on December 20, 1996, thereby establishing novel Guidelines and Bases for National Education (Brazil, 1996a). In this legislative act, Early Childhood Education—comprising preschool and daycare—became an integral component of the Brazilian educational structure, aligning with Elementary and High School Education. This development marks a historic advancement in the nation's educational framework, as it is the first time that Early Childhood Education has been formally integrated into the Basic Education structure. It became imperative to discuss this organization in the context of the late 1990s, incorporating the analysis of its contributions to educational initiatives for children up to the age of six.

The Ministry of Education (MEC) subsequently assumed the role of promoting public policies and, based on debates, studies, and institutional actions throughout Brazil, created and implemented guiding documents for the curriculum for the first stage of Basic Education. This process was characterized by numerous conflicts and disputes surrounding the concepts of childhood and early childhood education. A notable development was the 1998 release of the Referencial Curricular para a Educação Infantil-RCNEI (*Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education*) (Brazil, 1998), a document that provided guidelines. In 1999, the Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil-DCNEI (*National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*) (CNE, 1999) were approved and published as a Resolution, thereby acquiring normative force and implementation character, and subsequently reformulated in 2009 (CNE, 2009). Thereafter, in 2018, the Base Nacional Comum Curricular-BNCC (*National Common Core Curriculum*) (CNE, 2018), was endorsed, constituting an executive decree. This was conceptualized within a political environment that underestimated the significance of public education, characterized by ideological and theoretical/methodological disagreements.

These struggles are characterized by a persistent need to redefine daycare centers as welfare spaces dedicated to caring for infants and children, as well as the notion of preparing children for elementary school. Conversely, this trajectory has been accompanied by reductionist and technicist views that disregard the production of knowledge and the specific demands of early childhood education, as evidenced by the current BNCC, which is predicated on the logic of competencies and skills.

In this complex interweaving of times and events, we are prompted to reflect, at times perplexed, on the advances and setbacks in the evolving trajectory of early childhood education policies. These policies have been shaped sequentially by two major developments:

the decline of social democratic enthusiasm in the 1980s and the overwhelming rise of the neoliberal wave in the 1990s (Saad Filho and Moraes, 2018). In this logic, the right to education collides head-on with a neoliberal-biased state, which radicalizes social inequalities and affects the social rights of the working class, as defined by Antunes (2020). The dialectical path of analysis, with its inherent contradiction, enables the comprehension that the phenomenon under scrutiny does not stem from incoherence or contradiction. Rather, it is the necessity to decipher counter-trends that, through their struggle, give rise to the movement of phenomena (Pasqualini, 2020, p. 3).

We then experienced the struggle for budgetary funds with the creation of the Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e de Valorização dos Profissionais de Educação-FUNDEF (*Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Valorization of Education Professionals*) (Brazil, 1996b), which did not address Early Childhood Education. A decade later, the Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental e de Valorização do Magistério-FUNDEB (*Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Primary Education and the Valorization of Teachers*) was approved (Brazil, 2007), finally incorporating the first stage but with greater openness to public-private partnerships in the provision of places. In practice, this indicates that between 2001 and 2012, enrollment among four- and five-year-old children increased from 55.0% to 78.2% during the same period (Silva; Brito, 2018, p. 6). In 2020, Brazilian society made a significant achievement by approving the new FUNDEB (Brazil, 2020) as a permanent policy. The legitimacy of the admiration for this positive result is substantiated by the extremely unfavorable nature of the moment, which was marked by government measures aimed at dismantling both the MEC and educational achievements, in addition to the brutal context of the coronavirus pandemic.

These three budgetary laws were in force simultaneously with the two versions of the Plano Nacional de Educação-PNE (National Education Plan), both with a ten-year term. The first PNE was approved in 2001 (Brazil, 2001) and the second in 2014 (Brazil, 2014). Recently, the term of the latter was extended until 2025 (Brazil, 2024a) in a conflictual context marked by tensions and disputes in the field of educational policies, especially considering the current configuration of the National Congress. In the same vein, the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação (*National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education*) (Anped, 2025), in its assessment of the PNE 2024-2034 Bill (PL 2614/2024) (Brazil, 2024b), recognizes that the text presents both advances and risks of setbacks. Among the risks, aspects of financing stand out, such as the possibility of private financing with public resources and the absence of

guarantees regarding competitive examinations for public education positions. On the other hand, the Association positively highlights the emphasis on equity as a structuring element of the new plan. Still, it is worth noting that many political and conceptual disputes remain open until the new Plan is effectively approved.

To date, these plans, with their accompanying guidelines, goals, and strategies, have established objectives for Brazilian education and guided the development of public policies. However, the objectives established for early childhood education have not been attained. The current target is for 50% of children to be enrolled in daycare and universal preschool, a mandate established by Constitutional Amendment 59 (Brazil, 2009).

According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP) in 2025, the proportion of children receiving daycare was 41.2%, while 94.6% of children were enrolled in preschool. These national figures may also obscure intrafederal inequalities within the country. Although none of the major Brazilian regions achieved the goal of serving 50% of children up to three years of age in daycare, the data reveal disparities between regions. According to the Report on the fifth cycle of monitoring of the PNE (INEP, 2024), the southeast region reached 44.3% of daycare places, the south region 42.5%, the northeast region 33.7%, the midwest region 31.5%, and the north region a mere 20.4%. The data also reveal other distortions. For instance, there has been no significant improvement in access to childcare for black children up to three years of age compared to white children, and the inequality between the poorest 20% and the richest 20% is far from meeting Target 1.2, which is to reduce the gap to 10 p.p.⁴; it fell from 29.9 p.p. in 2013 to 25.4 p.p. in 2022. PNE (INEP, 2024).

Consequently, the advancement of early childhood education has been and continues to be a challenging process marked by numerous contradictions. This is exemplified by the training of teachers at this stage. This activity has historically been linked with women's work and has been associated with negative connotations. According to data from the 2022 School Census (INEP, 2023), women represent 97.2% of positions in daycare centers and 94.2% in preschools. In terms of training, only 78.4% of daycare teachers had a college degree, while for preschool teachers the rate is slightly better, reaching 81.3%. It is worth mentioning that these figures represent the lowest in all of Basic Education.

These and numerous other factors underscore the intricacy and historical struggle inherent to early childhood education. The defense of this stage of basic education is predicated on the effort to establish public early childhood education that is

⁴ Percentage points

managed by the state, secular, free of charge, and of high quality. A socially referenced education is defined by the initial and continuous training of teachers, the development of effective career plans, the universalization of preschool education, and a substantial increase in the availability of childcare facilities, unencumbered by selection criteria. Furthermore, we advocate for the development and implementation of pedagogical proposals that consider children as central to curriculum planning. We define education professionals who see children as people capable of relating and becoming co-participants through interactions, relationships, and pedagogical practices that experience instrumental and symbolic culture. These interactions contribute to the learning and development of children. We define educational spaces where children play, imagine, fantasize, desire, learn, observe, experiment, narrate, question, and construct meanings about nature and society, producing culture (Brazil, 2009).

In that context, the present dossier presents research that discusses early childhood education, emphasizing specific public policies for the initial stage in the context of the Brazilian redemocratization process up to the present day. This macro-to-micro perspective analyzes historical events and their ramifications in the actions of public authorities, which have changed the social understanding of the role of school in early childhood.

This dossier opens with an interview with Professor Rita de Cássia Freitas Coelho, who serves as the General Coordinator of Early Childhood Education at the Ministry of Education's Secretariat of Basic Education. In the interview entitled "Early Childhood Education in the Historical Struggle for the Dignity and Rights of Babies and Young Children," Rita Coelho engages in discourse with teachers Menissa Bessa and Jocileia Souza Printes, discussing her personal decision and her professional endeavors supporting children's access to education. She emphasizes her extensive experiences and unveils various domains of conceptual and budgetary disagreements, the escalation of political confrontations, and the progression and regress of this endeavor. Finally, the author reiterates her optimistic perspective on the advancement of educational opportunities for infants and young children, as well as the ongoing efforts to combat poverty, which severely victimizes children.

The first article in the Dossier is "Roda de intelectuais: memórias do Fórum Permanente de Educação Infantil do Rio de Janeiro (*Intellectual Circle: Memories of the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro*)" by Sônia Kramer (Pontifícia Universidade Católica) and Rosiane Brandão Siqueira Alves (Pontifícia Universidade Católica), in which the authors analyze the trajectory and role of intellectuals in the founding of the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) and its

importance as a space for political praxis in defending the right to early childhood education. This is an essential article that points to the relevance of the articulation between intellectuals and social movements in the consolidation of policies aimed at children.

The text entitled “Uma abordagem integrada à educação infantil e integração no sistema educacional: a experiência brasileira (*An integrated approach to early childhood education and integration into the educational system: the Brazilian experience*),” by Lenira Haddad (Universidade Federal de Alagoas), analyzes the premises that shape an integrated approach to early childhood education and care and those that shape the integration of services into the educational system, considered here as two distinct movements. The main conclusion is that in the globally structured agenda for education (AGEE) (Dale, 2004), there is little room for issues related to child welfare, family life, gender equality, and the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. This is an urgent discussion in the field of Early Childhood Education.

The third article in the Dossier, titled “A política nacional em disputa: o papel do CME na construção das estratégias locais para o atendimento à Educação Infantil (*National policy under dispute: the role of the CME in developing local strategies for early childhood education*),” was authored by Edson Cordeiro dos Santos, Maria Fernanda Rezende Nunes, and Gabriela Scramingnon, all affiliated with the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. The study focuses on municipal deliberations aimed at identifying the conditions that facilitate children's access to early childhood education. It also involves an analysis of policy implementation, an investigation into the application of national standards, and an examination of prevailing discourses. The results of the study suggest that certain national documents have the capacity to influence the induction process and that there is heterogeneity among council formats. In the course of the deliberations, the target audience is predominantly linked to private and community institutions; the age range typically aligns with the stipulations outlined in the Guidelines; compulsory education is addressed in 57% of cases; training is predominantly at the higher education level, often requiring at least a teaching degree; infrastructure meets minimum criteria; grouping exhibits varied subdivisions; and the professional-to-child ratio adopts different proportions.

The paper entitled “Formação continuada de docentes da educação infantil no Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada: uma análise circunstanciada (*Continuing education for early childhood teachers in the National Commitment to Literate Children: a detailed analysis*)” by Menissa Cícera Fernandes de Oliveira Bessa (Universidade Federal do Tocantins) deals with the continuing education of early childhood teachers in the National Commitment to Literate Children (CNCA), through the Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education course (LEEI). It highlights teacher training from a historical and legislative perspective,

citing the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (*National Education Guidelines and Framework Law*) (LDB), and also discusses literacy in early childhood education. This particularity mediated a macro view of neoliberal policies and the uniqueness of the CNCA, which revealed a field of political, ideological, and budgetary disputes in which early childhood education remains secondary in the context of Basic Education policies.

The fifth article, “Políticas para a Educação Infantil nos governos de Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (*Policies for Early Childhood Education in the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva*)” by Thaliane da Silva Rodrigues (Universidade Federal do Acre) and Giane Lucelia Grotti (Universidade Federal do Acre), analyzes the main public policies for Early Childhood Education implemented in the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) between 2003-2006, 2007-2010, and 2023-2026, with the aim of mapping the most relevant initiatives of this period on the subject. It concludes that, during Lula's three terms in office, there were significant advances in the creation of programs, guidelines, and teaching materials focused on Early Childhood Education, with an emphasis on teacher training initiatives. These initiatives reflect a special focus during the Lula administrations, implemented through public policies aimed at encouraging early childhood education, which seeks both to qualify teachers without specific training to work in this field and to offer continuing education to professionals in the area.

The essay “A qualidade da educação mediante as relações público-privadas e o direito à educação infantil no município de Uberlândia-MG (*The quality of education through public-private partnerships and the right to early childhood education in the municipality of Uberlândia-MG*)” by Laís Hilário Alves, Lúcia de Fátima Valente, and Darluce Andrade de Queiroz Muniz, all from the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, presents the concept of quality in early childhood education and seeks to identify how the right to and quality of this stage of basic education have been implemented in the municipality of Uberlândia through public-private partnerships established with civil society organizations (CSOs). It indicated that there has been progress in the legal field regarding the right to early childhood education; however, there is still resistance for the State to providing quality education at this stage.

Josemara Duarte Vieira (Universidade de São Paulo) and Bianca Cristina Correa (Universidade de São Paulo) are the authors of the seventh article, “O silenciamento de gênero na BNCC: entrave para um atendimento de qualidade na Educação Infantil (*The silencing of gender in the BNCC: an obstacle to quality care in Early Childhood Education*).” The text deals with reflections on gender silencing in the BNCC and the possible relationships with the provision of quality care in Early Childhood Education. This excerpt presents the initial considerations of a doctoral research project that aims to analyze the proposals for Early Childhood

Education present in the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) (Brazil, 2017) from a gender perspective. The aim is to demonstrate that the silencing of gender demands in a mandatory, nationwide document tends to hinder the availability of quality early childhood education as a right for all children.

The article “Projeto Leitura e Escrita na Educação Infantil (LEEI) na perspectiva dos formadores estaduais do estado do Amazonas (*Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education (LEEI) Project from the viewpoint of state trainers in Amazonas*)” by Michelle de Freitas Bissoli (Universidade Federal do Amazonas), Ana Paula Lima Carvalho de Oliveira (Universidade Federal do Amazonas) and Patrícia Marques Freire Hosterno (Universidade Federal do Amazonas) analyzes, from the perspective of state trainers, the possibilities for developing the Reading and Writing in Early Childhood Education (LEEI) course in the state of Amazonas, as well as its contributions to teaching practice in early childhood education. To this end, it examines the reports obtained through interviews with six of the eight state trainers. Initially, it revisits the creation of the LEEI Project. It also discusses the concrete conditions of the Amazonas territory and, subsequently, the perceptions of trainers about the challenges faced during the implementation of the training, as well as the advances and contributions of the course to pedagogical work.

“Identidade e configuração remuneratória de trabalhadoras da Educação Infantil em quatro municípios da região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte (*Identity and payment system for early childhood education workers in four municipalities in the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area*)” is the text by Daniel Santos Braga (Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais), Otavio Henrique Ferreira da Silva (State University of Minas Gerais), and Laura Regina Gouvea (“Universidade Estadual de Minas Gerais”), which analyzes the identity and payment system of early childhood education professionals in four municipalities in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, based on data obtained from the Erês Program (2024–2025). The analysis of data from 1,223 course participants reveals a predominance of black women, mostly working in the public school system and with high levels of education. However, there are wage inequalities, greater precariousness in affiliated and private school systems, and a low incidence of remuneration commensurate with the complexity of teaching-related work.

With the objective of describing and analyzing the process of implementing racial quotas in early childhood education at Colégio Pedro II, a traditional federal institution located in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the article “Política de cotas raciais na Educação Infantil do Colégio Pedro II: trajetória e significados de uma ação afirmativa (*Racial quota policy in early childhood education at Colégio Pedro II: trajectory and meanings of affirmative action*)” by researchers Gabriela dos Santos Coutinho (Colégio Pedro II), Suzana dos Santos Barbosa

(Colégio Pedro II), Rosana Rodrigues Heringer (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro), and Dyego de Oliveira Arruda (Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica Celso Suckow da Fonseca). Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach, structured as a case study, based on a bibliographic and documentary survey and analysis of institutional data, articulating records from NEABI/CPII and official documents.

The eleventh article, “A implementação do atendimento à Educação Infantil no município de Teresina – PI: da política de financiamento à política de convênios (*The implementation of early childhood education in the municipality of Teresina, Piauí: from financing policy to agreement policy*)” by Vinicius Silva de Sousa (Universidade Federal do Piauí) and Carmen Lucia de Sousa Lima (Universidade Federal do Piauí), analyzes the implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the Municipal Education Network of Teresina through agreements with community, religious, and non-profit philanthropic institutions. The study highlights the ECE segment through the policy of agreements signed between the Municipal Education Secretariat of Teresina, PI, and the partner institutions, through social subsidies allocated to these institutions. It concludes that FUNDEB and Constitutional Amendment No. 59/09 were important regulatory milestones for increasing agreements as a strategy to expand the provision of EI and comply with the plan, but a reduction in the number of affiliated enrollments was observed, mainly due to municipalization, and that the outsourcing of public policies can generate inequalities, weaken municipal management, and favor market interests.

The article, “Filosofia para Crianças e Círculo de Cultura: contribuições para uma formação integral, dialogada e participativa da criança (*Philosophy for Children and Culture Circle: Contributions to a Comprehensive, Dialogical, and Participatory Education for Children*)”, authored by Sandra Olades Martins Venturelli (Universidade Federal de Uberlândia), Lilian Calaça da Silva (Universidade Federal de Uberlândia), and Armindo Quillici Neto (Universidade Federal de Uberlândia), seeks to analyze the contributions of Philosophy for Children, with Paulo Freire's Culture Circles, to the comprehensive, critical, and participatory education of children in Early Childhood Education and the early years of Elementary School. The findings suggest that integrating philosophical practice with Freire's principles of dialogue, problematization, and awareness fosters the development of autonomy, active listening, argumentation, and critical reflection in children.

In conclusion, we present a review of the book *Teoría de la Orientación Profesional*, written by Pierre Naville, as conducted by Tania Aillón Gómez of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón.

In closing, we extend our profound gratitude to the journal Educação e Políticas em Debate (REPOD), the authors of the manuscripts, and the reviewers who contributed to the dissemination of research and studies focused on early childhood education. It is our hope that this material will contribute to the strengthening of the fight for the rights of our children and the implementation of quality early childhood education.

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