



Early childhood education in Brazil: history and purpose

Early childhood education in Brazil: historical and specific

Ana Raphaella Azevedo dos Santos

Genilson Abreu Teixeira

Helena Coelho de Sousa

Mirian Costa dos Reis

Mirtes Castro Araujo

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the historical trajectory of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, highlighting the legal, political and pedagogical milestones that consolidated it as an essential stage of basic education.

Using a qualitative approach and documentary basis, the research demonstrates the transition from a welfare-based model to the recognition of Early Childhood Education as a child's right and a duty of the State. The 2009 Curricular Guidelines reinforce its pedagogical and formative role. Despite progress, challenges such as unequal access, poor infrastructure, and professional development persist. Strengthening this stage is essential for promoting citizenship, equity, and human development from early childhood.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Development. Public Policies. History of Education. Legislation.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the historical trajectory of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, highlighting the legal, political, and pedagogical milestones that have established it as a key stage of basic education. Using a qualitative and documentary-based approach, the study traces the shift from a welfare model to the recognition of Early Childhood Education as a right of the child and a duty of the State. The 2009 National Curriculum Guidelines reinforce its pedagogical and formative role. Despite significant progress, challenges such as unequal access, poor infrastructure, and undervaluation of professionals remain. Strengthening this stage is essential for promoting citizenship, equity, and human development from early childhood.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Development. Public Policy. Education History. Legislation.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education, the initial stage of basic education, has been taking on an increasingly important role central to the Brazilian educational context, both in the scope of legal regulations and in pedagogical practices. Recognized as a child's right and a duty of the State, this phase covers care for children aged 0 to 5 years, with an emphasis on promoting comprehensive physical, psychological, intellectual and social development. Historically, however, Early Childhood Education was permeated by a welfare logic, often associated with

philanthropic initiatives and charities, with little connection to the field of education formal.

It was only with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988 that the recognition of this stage as an integral part of the Brazilian educational system, being thus, a guaranteed social right. This article aims to analyze the historical trajectory of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, understand its contemporary functions and reflect on the challenges that still persist for its full implementation. The research uses an approach qualitative, based on bibliographic review and documentary analysis, based on current legislation, updated scientific literature and specialized Ebooks on the subject.

1. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In Brazil, the origins of Early Childhood Education are deeply associated with the context of assistance aimed at children in vulnerable situations. Since the imperial period, the care of young children, especially those belonging to the lower classes, was in charge of religious and philanthropic institutions. As highlighted in the Ministry of Education (2009), “the first daycare centers emerged as charitable institutions, aimed at the care of children whose mothers needed to work.”

With the advancement of urbanization and the development of the industrialization process, in the beginning of the 20th century, the first kindergartens appeared, aimed at the education of children of urban elites, inspired by the pedagogical concepts of Friedrich Froebel. In contrast, services aimed at the low-income population remained with a function predominantly assistance-based, disconnected from systematized educational practices.

Only in the second half of the 20th century did Brazilian educational legislation begin to recognize the formative role of Early Childhood Education. This recognition gained strength with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which, in its article 208, section IV, established as the State's duty to ensure educational services for children aged zero to five years old through daycare centers and preschools, consolidating it as a social right and an integral stage of educational system.



2. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A RIGHT AND STAGE OF BASIC EDUCATION

With the enactment of LDB nº 9.394/1996, Early Childhood Education was officially incorporated to the structure of basic education, alongside elementary and secondary education. Article 29 of the LDB states:

“Early Childhood Education, the first stage of basic education, has the following purpose of the integral development of children up to five years of age, in its physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the family and community action” (BRAZIL, 1996).

This recognition strengthened the need for specific public policies for the sector, including financing, teacher training, and curriculum regulation. Approval of the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) in 2009 consolidated a pedagogical framework that replaced the welfare logic with a person-centered approach the right to learning and care with educational intent. Goals 1 and 7 of the Plan National Education (2014-2024) reaffirm the importance of expanding access and guaranteeing quality in Early Childhood Education. Goal 1, for example, proposes universalizing education preschool for children aged 4 to 5 and expand the provision of early childhood education in daycare centers.

3. PURPOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: LEARNING AND CARING

The central purpose of Early Childhood Education is to promote integral development of the child, considering in an articulated way the physical, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, social and cultural aspects that make up their formation. This stage must be experienced as a legitimate time of childhood, not as preparation for future stages, but as a own period, full of meanings, rights and experiences. Pedagogical practices aimed at early childhood must be intentionally planned to ensure an environment



rich in interactions, games, artistic expressions and discoveries, respecting the rhythm, the interests and potential of each child. According to the DCNEI:

“Early Childhood Education institutions must respect and embrace the singularities of each child, offering conditions for their full development” (BRAZIL, 2009).

From this perspective, the educator assumes the role of a sensitive and attentive mediator, capable of promote affective bonds and contexts that favor the construction of autonomy, identity and children's curiosity. Childhood pedagogy attributes centrality to play as a guiding principle of educational practices aimed at early childhood. Elements such as symbolic play, playfulness, music, literature and artistic expressions constitute fundamental instruments in pedagogical mediation, favoring the development of language, motor coordination and social interaction skills.

In addition to the cognitive aspect, this educational stage plays an essential role in socialization and the formation of values, contributing significantly to the construction of identity and to strengthen children's autonomy. In this sense, Oliveira (2002) highlights that “Early Childhood Education should not only be preparatory for primary education, but a stage with its own identity, focused on human development from the earliest years”.

4. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Although important advances have been made in recent decades, the Early childhood education in Brazil still faces significant structural and managerial. Among the main persistent challenges, regional disparities in access to places, especially in daycare centers; deficiencies in physical infrastructure and pedagogical conditions of many units; the devaluation of the teaching career, aggravated by insufficient initial training; in addition to the scarcity of financial resources and the absence of permanent policies for monitoring and evaluating educational quality.

Although universal access to preschool has almost been achieved, attendance in daycare centers still falls short of the targets established by the National Education Plan (PNE). Added to this is the urgent need to overcome decontextualized pedagogical practices and



excessively bureaucratized, which do not recognize the specificities of development childish nor do they value childhood in its uniqueness.

The promotion of quality Early Childhood Education constitutes a strategic investment in construction of a more equitable society, formed by critical, creative and socially participatory. To this end, effective coordination between the different federative entities; Union, states and municipalities, through planned actions, teacher training continued, community engagement and evaluation processes that favor improvement continuous improvement of pedagogical practice and institutional management.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study allowed us to understand the historical trajectory of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, marked by a profound transition: from a predominantly welfare-based practice, aimed at children in vulnerable situations, for an approach that recognizes the formative potential and the value of childhood itself. This transformation was driven by significant advances in the legal and political fields, especially since the 1980s, when the child began to be recognized as a subject of rights and Early Childhood Education as an integral part of the educational system.

Currently, this stage is conceived as essential for human development, promoting experiences of care, play, coexistence and learning, which are fundamental for the construction of identity and autonomy. However, it is still possible to observe several obstacles that compromise its full implementation: the shortage of places, especially in daycare centers public; the precarious infrastructure conditions in many institutions; and the fragility of public policies capable of guaranteeing quality and continuity of care.

The understanding is reinforced that strengthening Early Childhood Education requires not only financial investments and legal frameworks, but above all, a collective commitment to valuing childhood. This responsibility does not fall exclusively on the State, but must be shared with families, education professionals and society in general, to ensure that all children have access to educational experiences significant from the first years of life.

REFERENCES

BRAZIL. Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988. Brasília: Federal Senate, 1988.

BRAZIL. Law No. 9,394 of December 20, 1996. Establishes the guidelines and bases for national education. Official Gazette of the Union: section 1, Brasília, p. 27833, December 23, 1996.

BRAZIL. Ministry of Education. National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education. Brasília: MEC/SEB, 2009.

BRAZIL. Ministry of Education. National Education Plan – PNE: 2014–2024: Law No. 13.005/2014. Brasília: MEC, 2014.

OLIVEIRA, Zilma de Moraes Ramos de. Pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education.

BRAZIL. Ministry of Education. Early Childhood Education: support for developing a curriculum proposal.

BRAZIL. Ministry of Education. National Early Childhood Education Policy: for the right of children aged zero to six to education.