

## **Childhood Education in policies on literacy: ruptures, recoveries and (dis)encounters**

A Educação Infantil nas políticas de alfabetização: rupturas, retomadas e (des)encontros

La Educación Infantil en las políticas de alfabetización: rupturas, retomadas y (des)encuentros

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### **ABSTRACT**

Report CNE/CEB n. 20 and Resolution CNE/CEB n. 05 established that the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education in Brazil issued in 2009 should be reviewed to re-ensure sociopolitical and pedagogical commitment to children's rights since they are the main subjects of curriculum organization. Public policies on teacher Education seemed to follow this view up to mid-2016 when there was a rupture in the political scenario and the far-right wing took office. Since then, Childhood Education teachers have been included in policies on literacy, as proposed by the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (2017), the National Policy on Literacy (2019) and the National Commitment to Literate Children (2023). This text reports the qualitative study which used bibliographic and documentary procedures to introduce and problematize implications of the policies on Childhood Education in the country. Data were subject to the Textual Discourse Analysis and showed two movements that oppose each other, i. e., the intention to accelerate and standardize teaching of reading and writing, as proposed by policies on literacy, and the attempt to ensure respect to childhood culture and to broaden children's view of the world, as highlighted by policies on Childhood Education.

**Keywords:** Childhood Education; Policies on Literacy; National Curriculum Guidelines

on Childhood Education

## RESUMO

Em 2009, o Parecer CNE/CEB n. 20 e a Resolução CNE/CEB n. 5 instituíram a revisão das Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil no Brasil, afirmando o compromisso sociopolítico e pedagógico com a garantia dos direitos das crianças, sujeitos centrais da organização curricular. As políticas públicas para a formação de professoras davam indícios de seguir essa perspectiva até meados de 2016, quando houve uma ruptura no cenário político, com a ascensão da extrema-direita ao Governo Federal. Desde então, as professoras da Educação Infantil têm sido inseridas nas políticas de alfabetização, como se pode observar no Pacto Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa, em 2017; na Política Nacional de Alfabetização, em 2019; e no Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada, em 2023. Neste texto, apresentamos e problematizamos as implicações dessas políticas que englobam a Educação Infantil, por meio de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, com procedimentos da pesquisa bibliográfica e documental. Os dados, analisados a partir dos pressupostos da Análise Textual Discursiva, indicam dois movimentos que se contrapõem: o intuito de acelerar e padronizar o processo de ensino da leitura e da escrita, como as políticas de alfabetização conotam; e a tentativa de garantir o respeito à cultura infantil, ampliando a visão de mundo das crianças, como os textos das políticas da Educação Infantil salientam.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Infantil; Políticas de alfabetização; Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil.

## RESUMEN

En 2009, el Dictamen CNE/CEB n. 20 y la Resolución CNE/CEB n. 05 instituyeron la revisión de las Directrices Curriculares Nacionales para la Educación Infantil en Brasil, afirmando el compromiso sociopolítico y pedagógico con la garantía de los derechos de los niños, sujetos centrales de la organización curricular. Las políticas públicas para la formación de profesoras daban indicios de seguir esa perspectiva hasta mediados de 2016, cuando hubo una ruptura en el escenario político, con la ascensión de la extrema derecha al Gobierno Federal. Desde entonces, las profesoras de Educación Infantil han sido insertadas en las políticas de alfabetización, como se puede observar en el Pacto Nacional por la Alfabetización en la Edad Cierta en 2017; en la Política Nacional de Alfabetización, en 2019; y en el Compromiso Nacional Niño Alfabetizado, en 2023. En este texto, presentamos y problematizamos las implicaciones de esas

políticas que engloban la Educación Infantil, por medio de una investigación de abordaje cualitativo, con procedimientos de la investigación bibliográfica y documental. Los datos, analizados a partir de los presupuestos del Análisis Textual Discursiva, indican dos movimientos que se contraponen: el objetivo de acelerar y estandarizar el proceso de enseñanza de la lectura y de la escritura, como las políticas de alfabetización connotan; y el intento de garantizar el respeto a la cultura infantil, ampliando la visión del mundo de los niños, como destacan los textos de las políticas de la Educación Infantil.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Infantil; Políticas de alfabetización; Directrices Curriculares Nacionales para la Educación Infantil.

## Introduction

This paper problematizes the inclusion of Childhood Education in public policies on literacy, a fact that happened at the beginning of the 21st century<sup>i</sup>. We highlight that Childhood Education has been considered the first stage of Basic Education since December 20th, 1996, when Law 9,394 was issued to establish the Guidelines and Bases of National Education. This stage aims at children's full development regarding physical, social, intellectual and linguistic aspects as a complement of their families' and communities' actions (Brasil, 1996, 2009a). The inclusion of childcare centers and pre-schools in Brazilian educational systems, mainly in city systems, was not a neutral choice. On the contrary, it was the result of social and political struggle to make sure that children from 0 to 6 years old had the right to Education (Brasil, 2009a). Such scenario required expansion and re-organization of discussions in the field of policies on Education so as to encompass legal regulations.

Understanding Childhood Education as a stage that complements families' and communities' actions highlights the collaborative character which involves the actions of educating and caring (Brasil, 1996, 2009a). This aspect reinforces the need for a sensitive, welcoming, inclusive and dialogic perspective that considers children's and their families' life stories and cultural contexts so that their full development becomes a priority (Souza, 2023). Thus, Rosemberg (2014) states that, when Childhood Education is inserted in the Brazilian educational system, we bestow it a different

connotation from the one given to non-formal processes that have historically constituted children's care and Education in households and non-educational environments. It is reinsured by Article no. 5, Resolution CNE/CEB no. 05, issued on December 17th, 2009, which established the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education:

Childhood Education, the first stage of Basic Education, is offered by childcare centers and pre-schools which are characterized as non-domestic institutional spaces that constitute public or private educational institutions to teach and care for 0-5-year-olds in the daytime, part- or full-time, regulated and supervised by a competent authority that belongs to the educational system and subject to social control (Brasil, 2009b, p. 19).

Twenty years have passed the Guidelines and Bases of National Education were promulgated and fourteen years have passed since the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education were reviewed. Even though the Brazilian legislation advocates democratic principles which are sensitive to specificities of Childhood Education, it does not ensure that several deadlocks related to this stage are solved.

The same happens with policies and teacher Education programs, i. e., advances and setbacks have been observed over time. This scenario instigates us to write this paper to problematize proposals of in-service programs – aimed at Childhood Education teachers<sup>ii</sup> – connected to policies and programs of literacy, since they concern identity constitution in the first stage of Basic Education.

The investigation has a qualitative approach (Bauer; Gaskel, 2000) by means of a bibliographic and documentary study (Cellard, 2008) of legal norms that established public policies on literacy in the last decade, such as the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (2012–2018), the National Policy on Literacy (2019-2022) and the National Commitment to Literate Children (2023).

Sources of our study were decrees and ordinances that have established policies on literacy in the last ten years. They are available in official electronic addresses of the Federal Government and are listed in Chart 1.

Chart 1 - Documents used as sources of the documentary research

YEAR	DOCUMENT
2012	Ordinance MEC no. 867; July 4th, 2012 – It establishes the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age, its actions and its general guidelines.
2017	Ordinance MEC no. 826; July 7th, 2017 – It establishes the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age, its actions and general guidelines, besides the development of the New Program More Education.
2019	Presidential decree no. 9,765; April 11th, 2019 – It establishes the National Policy on Literacy.
2023	Presidential decree no. 11,556; June 12th, 2023 – It establishes the National Commitment to Literate Children.

Source: the authors (2024)

According to Fávero and Centenaro (2019), since documentary sources introduce more discourses that information given by texts, in the field of policies on Education, we must go beyond the textual elements, beyond appearances (Souza, 2023). Thus, we used the Textual Discourse Analysis (TDA) to analyze objectives, concepts and proposals for Childhood Education in the context of policies on literacy. As an analytical tool which moves between the Content Analysis (whose focus is the way of developing the study, its methodology) and the Discourse Analysis (whose focus is the theory that analyzes the conceptual density of the language used by texts), the TDA aims at understanding the phenomenon under analysis. As a result, its dynamics is more ontological, i. e., it aims at comprehending the essence of the existence of the phenomenon under study with the use of the hermeneutic method (Moraes; Galiuzzi, 2007; Souza, 2023).

Based on the TDA, this text was organized into two sections. The first section discusses the identity of Childhood Education and highlights child-centeredness in documents and norms in this stage of Basic Education. The second section introduces three policies on literacy, which include pre-school, issued by the Federal Government in the last decade. Finally, our final remarks show that the policies have increasingly been aligned with principles of the neoliberal market since they see children as potential human capital (Moraes; Galiuzzi, 2007; Souza, 2023). Thus, they institute proposals that aim at accelerating and standardizing the process of teaching how to read and how to write. On the other hand, they seem to ensure respect to children's

culture which is emphasized by the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education. However, they are also linked to efficacy and competitiveness required by large-scale assessment and global Education models.

## **Child-centeredness based on norms of Childhood Education**

Putting children at the center goes much beyond welcoming their ideas, hypotheses and curiosities to organize the pedagogical work. It is asserting their rights, it is ensuring their places as subjects, as participants, as authors and producers of culture, as persons who are strong and capable of collaborating on an important political and social change (Souza; Barbosa, 2019, p. 16).

Guarantee of childcare centers and pre-schools, which was cited as a duty of the State by the 1988 Federal Constitution, has become a political decision so that our country establishes the legislation and norms to prioritize children's Education in the sphere of policies on Education, rather than in the field of social assistance and health (Souza, 2023).

Therefore, it must be acknowledged the construction of the identity of Childhood Education was based on historical and social contexts over time. Thus, it outlined not only the definition of the legislation and public policies on Education, but also specific actions of the Federal Government, mainly via the Ministry of Education, which started to acknowledge children as subjects who have rights, the center of curriculum planning, when issuing texts and promoting educational actions (Brasil, 2009a, 2009b; Souza; Barbosa, 2019).

In the Ministry of Education, the General Coordination of Childhood Education has been in charge of discussions about expansion, offer, quality and assessment of Childhood Education. This department has contributed to the expansion of studies and publications about pedagogical work and development of policies on Childhood Education since 2006. The partnership between the General Coordination of Childhood Education and Brazilian universities/researchers enabled the Ministry of Education to issue guidelines and actions to develop the identity of Childhood Education. Such partnership has shown certain consensus about specificities of

childhood and the socio-interactionist perspective on the first stage of Basic Education, although we have observed tension between policies on Education and curriculum proposals pervaded by neoliberalism (Souza, 2023).

An example is the Project of Technical Cooperation coordinated by the Ministry of Education, via the Department of Basic Education and the General Coordination of Childhood Education, at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), a Higher Education institution located in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. It started in 2008 and aimed at organizing input to develop curriculum guidelines on Childhood Education. Studies were carried out and three reports that resulted from them originated the document entitled *Everyday Practices in Childhood Education: Bases of Reflection on Curriculum Guidelines* (Barbosa, 2009). The studies and the participation of several social actors<sup>ii</sup> in public hearings that debated the curriculum identity in Childhood Education gave contributions so that the National Council on Education could review the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education which had first been published in 1999. Then, Report CNE/CEB no. 20, issued on November 11th, 2009, and Resolution CNE/CEB no. 05/2009 instituted the new guidelines on the Childhood Education curriculum (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b).

We may perceive that the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education and their review gather guidelines on curriculum organization in the first stage of Childhood Education, even though they are neither well known nor disseminated in the field of Education. These guidelines constitute a compulsory document that introduces the norms of organization of offer and curriculum and the development of public policies on this stage. It also considers the rules that had already been established by previous policies. This updating movement was essential to enable advances in scientific production, social movements and politics to be incorporated into the document that resulted from the review of the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education. Thus, dialogue and articulation among several institutions led to “[...] what is understood as quality Childhood Education” (Brasil, 2009a, p. 03).



When children are considered the center of curriculum planning in Childhood Education (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b), their own ways of learning become the goals of political and pedagogical organization. Thus, playing, exploring, imagining, experimenting, interacting, investigating, questioning, talking and observing are some ways used by children to apprehend the world and produce culture; they show adults which aspects should be part of the organization of educational intentionalities (Souza, 2023).

However, according to Souza (2023), children's centrality has currently been interpreted from two perspectives: i) the mistaken view of the concept of the homogeneous and unified child, i. e., the one who has linear and standard development; and II) the idea that the child is capable of self-education, which confuses a subject's centrality with the fact that he should be free to do what he wants, follow his instincts and even wait for his own time to learn. In a way, it collaborated to the adult's secondary role in the educational process. In this regard, Souza and Barbosa (2019, p. 16) stated that:

To be in the center of planning does not mean being far from and disconnected from what surrounds them, to be in the center should be the starting point, the destination, rather than an isolated, disconnected, self-educating point. It is similar to the center of a city, where all other ways connect, meet and draw apart, but never cease to be something larger and unique: the city.

In contrast with both positions, when children are acknowledged as subjects, they demand new ways of understanding the educational process. However, it should never be separated from relations and connections that make this process happen: interaction among children and interaction among children and adults, toys, spaces/material, time and experiences (Loss; Souza; Vargas, 2019; Souza, 2023). Therefore, from a post-modern perspective, a child's centrality considers its cultural context, which is diverse and plural. That is why we mention "children" and "childhoods" in the plural, since "[...] there are many children and many childhoods, each one is constructed by our 'understanding of childhood and what children are and must be'" (Dahlberg; Moss; Pence, 2019, p. 63).

In this scenario, children are acknowledged as citizens, people who have rights, who produce culture while being produced in it; thus, they provoke adults to see the



world from their viewpoints, their own ways of learning. As subjects of here and now, of the present, children cannot be seen as “turn out to be” anymore (Kohan, 2003; Kramer, 1982; Souza; Nogueira, 2024). When we acknowledge this image of children, we are able to produce a welcoming, sensitive and ethical curriculum which is committed to childhood(s) and their ways of learning – far from preparation, expectation and the idea of “abandonment”, i. e., the idea of self-education (Souza; Barbosa, 2009; Souza; Nogueira, 2024).

The review of the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education highlights that children’s full development established a new paradigm of Childhood Education since the Guidelines and Bases of National Education introduced Article no. 29. It exposes the need for a broad dialogue among families, schools and societies about “[...] peculiar ways in which children, at this stage of life, experience the world, construct knowledge, express themselves, interact and show wishes and curiosities” (Brasil, 2009a, p. 05). We must reject practices that result from pedagogies organized in transmissible, hierarchical, mechanical and external ways which contribute to nothing but “subjugate” (Sarmiento, 2003), dominate (Dahlberg; Moss; Pence, 2019) or oppress (Freire, 2014) children.

Ensuring children’s full development is complex and requires Childhood Education to exert political and social commitment to children’s rights, a place to fight, defend, produce and disseminate childhood culture (Souza; Nogueira, 2024). It also points out the need for intersectoral work (Souza, 2023). For this reason, Barbosa (2009, p. 20) emphasizes:

An important political characteristic of Childhood Education is that it plays a complex role in children’s full assistance, which includes aspects related to Education, health, culture and protection, a fact that makes it vital to interact with other areas of public services. Thus, policies on Childhood Education must be integrated with policies determined by Departments of Health, Justice, Environment and others since all of them are expected to deliver quality services in Childhood Education.

Therefore, when the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education mention that Childhood Education institutions have the task of taking care and teaching 0-5-year-olds (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b), we believe that children must be fully

acknowledged and that we must fight for integrated public policies to ensure their rights. It keeps being a weakness mainly because the functions of Childhood Education have not been understood as they should.

The responsibility of playing an active role in the construction of a truly democratic society (as a function of Childhood Education determined by the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education) requires a careful look at this stage; firstly, because the State has not yet taken on its role to ensure right to Education to all 0-5;11-year-olds; as a result, there is a large gap between its regulations and its actual public policies. An example is Constitutional Amendment no. 59 issued at the end of 2009; it altered Article 208 in the Federal Constitution and determined compulsory Basic Education for 7-14-year-olds. Obligatoriness of Childhood Education for children from 4 years old on has generated many debates in academic and social spheres specially because the main objective of Amendment no. 59/2009 was to address educational resources, rather than determining obligatoriness in schools. Secondly, since childcare centers are not in the period of obligatoriness, they discourage the offer of vacancies to the public system and expand initiatives of assistance in non-formal models of Education. Finally, obligatoriness ensured neither universalization of offers nor investments needed in this stage (Souza, 2023).

Thus, according to Rosemberg (2014), to face the mismatch between the real and the ideal, social, economic, cultural and political conditions that constitute the society must be considered, rather than merely develop “sophisticated” proposals which depict strong, beautiful and democratic speeches, when everyday practices experienced by schools, mainly public ones, reports the reverse. Besides ensuring access, our country needs to “[...] retrieve proposals of democratic Education and curriculum guidelines, children’s voices, quality parameters and indicators, ensure teacher and professional recognition and then heavily invest and fund policies along these lines” (Monção; Godoy, 2021, p. 61).

Thereafter, some people still advocate that a nation’s promising future depends on children and their Education; strategically speaking, it generates actions that are increasingly striking in the search for results and increase educational and social

inequality (Souza; Nogueira, 2024). In this scenario, early childhood is seen as “[...] the basis of well-succeeded progress in posterior life”, which includes the view of humans as “economically productive beings” (Dahlberg; Moss; Pence, 2019, p. 65). Children as potential human capital (Laval; Dardot, 2021) draw social interest of several groups and professionals who believe that they must be brought up for the future, generating educational models with the prerogative to subjugate others, as highlighted by Faria and Santiago (2015). Thus, one of the issues that contributes to the rise of capitalism “[...] is forced and precocious schooling which works as a mechanism that ‘steals’ and tries to delete boys’ and girls’ singularities, obliging them to learn how to read and write in a single language and institutionalizing unique and universal truths” (Faria; Santiago, 2015, p. 75).

According to Kramer (2006, p. 799), these conceptions which guide some mistaken views of the nature of the identity of Childhood Education emerged in the 1970’s under strong influence of “[...] guidelines issued by international agencies and programs developed in the United States and Europe”. It resulted in the fact that, for a long time, official documents published by the Ministry of Education advocated the idea that the sub-stage of pre-school “[...] could, in advance, save schools from problems related to school failure” (Kramer, 2006, p. 799). The idea that Childhood Education was responsible for preparing children for Elementary School was then disseminated.

However, the fact the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b) acknowledge children as subjects who have rights reinsures that proposals of pre-service and in-service programs for teachers and other professionals in the field of Education need to integrate:

[...] the list of basic requirements for quality Childhood Education. Such programs are teachers’ rights to improve their practices and develop themselves and their professional identities at work. They must give them conditions to reflect on their everyday teaching practices in pedagogical, ethical and political terms and to take decisions regarding the best ways of mediating learning and child development, considering children collectively and their singularities (Brasil, 2009a, p. 13).

The review of the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education shows that teacher Education programs aiming at Childhood Education teachers and

other professionals must be based on respect and ethical and political reflection on the practice with children. Even so, we are going through a weak moment related to it since we have observed that there has been constant lack of attention to these issues, i. e., many proposals have considered teachers the ones who reproduce practices that are created by others and often rooted in the banking model of Education and an empiricist view.

These findings impelled us to research, in texts of public policies on literacy, how Childhood Education is seen by them since it was in this field that teacher Education was developed in the country in the last decade.

## Childhood Education in policies on literacy

To understand Childhood Education as a children's right became increasingly less evident after the former president Dilma Rousseff's<sup>ii</sup> judicial-parliamentary-media-driven coup (Filgueiras; Druck 2020; Nobre, 2020, 2022) and the rise of the right wing in the country. Even with studies, norms and legislations that constitute the nature of Childhood Education nowadays, it cannot be denied that pressures – internal and external ones – from international and national groups and political agents in office have remained. These groups often have a different view from everything that has already been planned as goals in this stage and that has been published by federal documents, as mentioned in the previous section.

More than 20 years ago, Rosenberg (2002) used the metaphor of the Sisyphus curse<sup>ii</sup> to explain the constitution of national policies on Childhood Education and highlighted that he had already witnessed two falls and an attempt to climb. The metaphor may also be used these days to update that we experienced another attempt to climb, mainly between 2006 and 2015. However, we have seen “the boulder rolling down the hill” since 2016. According to Albuquerque, Felipe and Corso (2017, p. 10):

The “new” government installed since then has clearly shown that it moves away from quality Education. It is enough to say that Brazilian Education suffered a hard blow (obviously, not only Education) with the proceedings, in the National Congress, of the Constitutional Amendment Bill no. 241/2016 and, in the Federal Senate, of the so-called Constitutional Amendment Bill no.

55/2016. Such proposal of constitutional amendment establishes a new fiscal regimen and determines that no investment in social fields should be higher than the inflation adjustment, which means that there will be no investments in Education, thus, making it unfeasible to honor the goals and strategies of the National Plan of Education no. 2014–2024 (Law no. 13.005/2014).

The authors highlight that the proposal of a new fiscal regimen was implemented in the country in December 2016 in former president Michel Temer's government (2016-2018) by means of the Constitutional Amendment no. 95, which is also known as the "Constitutional Amendment Bill of Expenses" that directly established the Education budget freeze for 20 years. Besides this Constitutional Amendment Bill, we observed that Childhood Education was included in the National Common Curricular Base and in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age in 2017. It was included in the National Policy on Literacy after Jair Bolsonaro's election in 2019 and in the National Commitment to Literate Children after Lula's election in 2023.

The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age, the National Policy on Literacy and the National Commitment to Literate Children became governmental policies on teacher Education programs aiming at pre-school teachers and managers to include them in national literacy actions, as introduced below.

### **The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (2012 - 2018)**

The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age was launched in 2012 via Ordinance no. 867 issued by the Ministry of Education. It aimed at teaching Brazilian children how to read and write up to the end of the third grade in Elementary School. The commitment made by the Federal Government and State, City and District Departments and Higher Education institutions determined that the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age aimed directly at teachers' in-service programs. In addition, it not only accounted for didactic, pedagogical and literary material, but also for educational technologies that enabled literacy, assessment and management of the policy by people who are involved in the process (MEC, 2012).

The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age started a new proposal and granted scholarships to literacy teachers and the team that participated in the program.

Besides, as the result of the influence of European and North-american countries, a large-scale assessment process started. It included exams and tests to “measure” children’s literacy levels and their performance at the end of second and third grades in Elementary School (MEC, 2012).

Five years after its implementation by means of Ordinance no. 826 issued by the Ministry of Education on July 7th, 2017, Childhood Education, mainly pre-school, was included in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age. Thus, children, teachers and managers in this stage of Education were inserted in the national literacy programs for the first time. However, objectives of Childhood Education established by the pact, mainly the ones of pre-school, were not well defined by Ordinance no. 826/2017 issued by the Ministry of Education, as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2 - Summary of objectives defined for Childhood Education/pre-school by the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age

Ordinance no. 826 issued by the Ministry of Education on July 7th, 2017	
Actions of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (Art. no. 3)	- Focus on pre-school and Elementary School students in their search for the right to read and write according to their ages;
Axis of teacher Education in-service programs (Art. no. 6)	- In-service development of Childhood Education pedagogical coordinators and pre-school teachers; - Establishment and constitution of a net of pre-school and Childhood Education teachers;
Target audience of in-service programs (Art. no. 13)	- Pre-school teachers and pedagogical coordinators effectively working in public institutions;
In-service programs (Art. no. 16 and no. 17)	- In-service programs for the whole team that will use the material and the support to teaching, in agreement with guidelines established by the Ministry of Education whose focus is students’ learning.

Source: the authors, 2024

Excerpts of Ordinance no. 826/2017 issued by the Ministry of Education (Chart 2) show that pre-school was inserted in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age

as a stage that would start to be part of in-service activities aiming at literacy teachers and managers. Therefore, there seemed to be concern about ensuring/accelerating the literacy process at the right age; there were clues that it would be the second grade in Elementary School, a fact reassured after the homologation of the National Common Curricular Base at the end of 2017.

The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age has organized actions whose focus is the literacy cycle, i. e., first, second and third grades in Elementary School, since 2012, when it was issued. Inclusion of Childhood Education in the program quickly triggered “[...] a scenario of demands and resistance by Brazilian universities and researchers who advocated the preservation of the role of the first stage of Basic Education, apart from school-related processes (Souza, 2023, p. 56). We followed this controversial action closely since we worked as state educators of pre-school teachers in the group that organized the actions in Rio Grande do Sul state.

Thus, we were invited to participate in the “Seminar on Literacy: Management of Learning in Literacy” which was organized by the Ministry of Education and held in São Paulo, SP, in December 2017. At the event, the Ministry of Education proposed the debate about results collected by the National Assessment of Literacy and the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age and launched the New Program More Education because students’ assessments did not show any advances, even five years after the implementation of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age.

The New Program More Education was launched on October 10th, 2016, by means of Ordinance no. 1,144, to improve learning in Elementary School in the fields of Portuguese and Mathematics by increasing school hours in 5 or 15 h weekly in the literacy cycle (from the first to the third grade). In July 2017, Ordinance no. 826 issued by the Ministry of Education stipulated actions to develop the New Program More Education in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age. The program aimed at carrying out complementary activities related to literacy and Mathematics which would be offered by schools that adhered to it by “learning mediators”, i. e., pedagogues, Pedagogy students and High School students. They would interact with teachers and be in charge of pedagogical activities proposed by the program to accompany their



students. These professionals would be volunteers and get some financial help to pay for transportation and meals, depending on the number of working hours, students and groups. Schools would also get financial resources (via the Direct Funding Program to Schools) to buy material and hire complementary services, if needed.

In the Seminar on Literacy, when we heard the explanation about the proposal of the New Program More Education in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age, we and other colleagues who represented several Brazilian federal universities requested permission to speak and started a debate that lasted for hours. Teachers and professionals who worked in coordination centers of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age in all Brazilian states were neither satisfied with the data that were shown to us nor with the methodology of the event which hired a private institution (*Instituto Singularidades*) to guide in-service programs proposed by the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age and the New Program More Education based on international methodologies (North-american ones). People who represented the Ministry of Education did not know how to lead the debate in the light of so much questioning. As a result, the event was suspended since most people refused to keep participating in the activities which not only increasingly showed dismantling of Education, but also kept public universities away from teacher Education programs developed since the Pact was implemented in 2012.

In that event, we participated in a movement that questioned the goals of a “new” literacy program, mainly in the midst of a political crisis we were passing through since the parliamentary coup that had taken place the year before. The change in the Brazilian presidency also affected professionals who used to work in several projects at the Ministry of Education and were replaced. It might have been the reason why many people who represented the Ministry in the event could not handle the demands that emerged. On that day, we saw the discontinuity and the rupture of the country’s policies on Education, i. e., the repetition of the “[...] vicious circle that makes every government want to leave its mark, often starting from scratch” (Souza, 2023, p. 57).

The last months of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age in 2018 carried the purposes of neoliberalism and neoconservatism that had been installed in Brazil:

in essence, to accelerate the literacy process, to focus on policies on teaching and to ignore the children's social context. Therefore, activism and forums on Childhood Education emerged in the country with the support of Brazilian universities, mainly federal ones in Minas Gerais (UFMG), Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Paraná (UFPR), Bahia (UFBA) and Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ and UNIRIO). This movement was crucial to make the Ministry of Education subsidize pre-school teacher Education with the use of eight booklets<sup>ii</sup> produced by the project "Reading and Writing in Childhood Education" (Silva; Signorelli, 2021; Brião, 2019; Souza, 2023).

Such material was written between 2013 and 2016 and funded by the Ministry of Education in a partnership among the UFMG, UFRJ, UNIRIO and the Coordination of Childhood Education at the Ministry. Its original purpose was to constitute a teacher Education program aiming at the country's Childhood Education teachers, mainly to enable work with oral language and writing to reach better dialogue between theory and practice in an interactionist conception of learning (Silva; Signorelli, 2021; Brião, 2019). However, Ms. Rita Coelho, a teacher who worked as the coordinator of the General Coordination of Childhood Education since 2007, was dismissed and the project was interrupted. Even though the material had been printed, it was neither distributed nor reached its goal. i. e., to be the basis of in-service teacher Education (Souza, 2023).

In this context, only some Brazilian states and cities implemented the proposal of the project Reading and Writing in Childhood Education. The policy was developed fast, in less than a year. In-service Education that aimed at pre-school teachers addressed several themes, such as conceptions of child, childhood and curriculum and children as readers and authors. In a way, the fact that not all states accepted the proposal shows disregard towards this stage of Basic Education and disrespect to professionals and children.

### **The National Policy on Literacy (2019- 2023)**

Along with the economic setback resulting from the Constitutional Amendment Bill of Expenses, related to the previously mentioned Constitutional Amendment no.

95, the Brazilian Congress and Legislative Assemblies in the states started to evaluate projects and actions to implement homeschooling, the policy on vouchers (credit that enables to buy vacancies in households, philanthropic and private institutions), regulations of “moms as carers” or “childcare centers at home” (usually women who are responsible for taking care of children in their homes) and others (Souza, 2023).

The Department of Literacy was created in this historical context, in the scope of actions proposed by the Ministry of Education. It was in charge of the National Policy on Literacy, established in the country by means of the Presidential Decree no. 9,765, issued on April 11th, 2019, and aimed at improving the quality of literacy and fighting against absolute and functional illiteracy.

The National Policy on Literacy conceived literacy as the process of teaching how to read and learn in an alphabetic system and one of its guidelines was teaching children how to read and write in the first grade in Elementary School (Brasil, 2019). This prerogative affects the identity of Childhood Education which was conceived as a stage that prepares to the next. Thus, state and city Childhood Education teachers who adhered to the proposal were exposed to online courses that gave priority to phonics instruction. The courses used a preparatory, dominating and controlling approach and recommended compensatory and technical exercises of alphabetic and phonemic knowledge to reach expected results (success) of literacy (Souza, 2023).

The analysis of the Decree that instituted the National Policy on Literacy shows that Childhood Education was included in guidelines of the policy as an essential stage to develop skills of oral language and of emergent literacy, which is understood as a “[...] set of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to reading and writing developed before literacy” (Brasil, 2019, p. 15). Chart 3 shows a summary of objectives of Childhood Education.

Chart 3 – Summary of objectives defined for Childhood Education/pre-school by the National Policy on Literacy

<b>Presidential Decree no. 9,765/2019</b>
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Guidelines of the National Policy on Literacy (Art. no. 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to encourage teaching practices to develop oral language and emergent literacy in Childhood Education;</li> <li>- to value Childhood Education teachers;</li> </ul>
Agents of the National Policy on Literacy (Art. no. 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Childhood Education teachers are considered “agents” of the policy;</li> </ul>
Implementation of the National Policy on Literacy (Art. no. 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clear and objective curriculum guidelines and goals in Childhood Education;</li> <li>- development and use of scientifically grounded didactic and pedagogical material aiming at emergent literacy and numeracy;</li> <li>- encouragement to make teacher Education programs (pre-service and in-service) that aim at Childhood Education teachers not only to encompass teaching and the application of cognitive sciences, but also to emphasize linguistic knowledge needed for literacy;</li> </ul>

Source: the authors, 2024

Guidelines and actions related to the implementation of the National Policy on Literacy (Art. no. 8) intended teachers to bring forward some skills that are considered important to teach early Childhood Education. Some of them are knowing how to listen, name and recognize letters and numbers, develop vocabulary and reach phonemic awareness (Brasil, 2019). Thus, professionals were instructed to develop activities of motor training, sound and letter differentiation, alphabet training and memorization of words through reading. Then, children would start writing. After all, according to the guiding documents, teaching advanced from simple to complex.

Based on scientific evidence of cognitive science of reading that originated in successful and innovative practices and studies carried out in European and North-american countries, the work used synthetic/phonic methods to save children from school failure. Thus, the proposal of the National Policy on Literacy showed misalignment with norms of Childhood Education which, on the contrary, highlight that Elementary School contents should not be brought forward (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b). As discussed in the previous section, the National Policy on Literacy developed precocious and forced schooling and showed the conception of early childhood as the basis of successful future in literacy (Dahlberg; Moss; Pence, 2019; Faria; Santiago,

2015). It resumes ideas and influences that had already been present in the Brazilian history in the 1970's (Kramer, 2006).

## The National Commitment to Literate Children

The Presidential Decree no. 11,556 instituted the program entitled the National Commitment to Literate Children in the country in June 2023. It “[...] aimed at ensuring Brazilian children to have the right to literacy, the structuring element to construct successful school trajectories” (Brasil, 2023, p. 03). Thus, the commitment aims at implementing policies, actions and programs so that Brazilian children are able to become literate up to end of the second grade in Elementary School, including the stage of Childhood Education.

However, the Decree does not clearly specify the objective of the policy on Childhood Education. The remarks that address the stage are mostly related to teacher Education and teacher valuation, as shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4 - Summary of objectives defined for Childhood Education/pre-school by the National Commitment to Literate Children

Presidential Decree no. 11,556/2023	
Principles (Art. no. 3)	Valuation of Childhood Education professionals
Guidelines (Art. no. 4)	Acknowledgement of the main role played by city governments in Childhood Education.
Implementation strategies (Art. no. 10)	Strategies that aim at improving the quality of Childhood Education are implemented as the result of integration among the Ministry of Education, states, cities and the Federal District.
Teacher Education programs and improvement of pedagogical and school management practices (Art. no. 26)	The Ministry of Education must develop guidelines, directions and offer of technical and financial assistance towards actions of teacher Education, with focus on the improvement of pedagogical and school management practices in Childhood Education.
Acknowledgement and sharing of	Pedagogical and management practices that successfully

good practices (Art. 34)	ensure the right to literacy shall be identified, awarded, acknowledged and disseminated.
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Source: the authors, 2024

Chart 4 shows that directions related to teacher Education programs in the scope of the National Commitment to Literate Children (Art. no. 26) would be developed by the Ministry of Education. As a result, the proposal of in-service programs aiming at Childhood Education professionals resumed the same project designed in 2017 and 2018, when the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age included pre-school in its actions: the project named Reading and Writing in Childhood Education.

Integration among the Ministry of Education and federal institutions rendered booklets about the Commitment which highlighted that teacher Education programs aiming at Childhood Education, in the scope of the Reading and Writing in Childhood Education project, had 92.2% adherence in state and city schools; Goiás and Sergipe were the only states that did not adhere to this project<sup>ii</sup>. Mr. Lourival Martins Filho, the director of Development and Valuation of Basic Education Professionals, stated that this project considers the principle that Childhood Education should neither aim at teaching children how to read and write, nor prepare them to attend Elementary School since the stage has its own specificities, mainly “[...] interaction and games, but, in this stage, it is fundamental to acknowledge writing as a right and reading as a humanizing practice; that is why activities and experiences that deal with the culture of writing are part of the proposal”<sup>ii</sup>.

However, we should highlight that respect to this specificity of Childhood Education, emphasized by Mr. Martins Filho, is not explicitly described in the documents of the Commitment. In a way, this lack of clarification enables several interpretations and political attitudes in Brazilian states and cities, since this policy has still been in progress.

## Final remarks

To finish this text, we would like to point out Education as a space of human development has got much importance to maintain political ideals the rule (or dominate) the global context, since concern for social policies has increased in our country. Thus, in the case of policies on literacy created in the last decade, neoliberalism (re)appears as a way of developing standardized and linear Education for children who are seen as homogeneous beings, i. e., there is the universalizing tendency to conduct policies and norms that institute work in Childhood Education.

Verbal language (both oral and written) is a cultural asset, a right that children – central subjects in curriculum organization – have, as ensured by the National Curriculum Guidelines on Childhood Education (Brasil, 2009a; 2009b). Therefore, refusing this right is imposing oppressing ways of dealing with Education, since it would prevent children from broadening their views of the world and enjoy their human, social and political rights. However, our criticism related to the inclusion of Childhood Education in policies on literacy lies on the fact that it ignores its nature in this stage, as highlighted by the proposal of the National Policy on Literacy, which considered pre-school as a space to prepare for the next stage, ignoring the objective of children's full development.

To see Childhood Education as preparation and compensation imposes Pedagogy focused on individualism and technicism since teaching is based on transmission of knowledge, on repetitive and mechanical strategies, as emphasized by Behaviorism. Neither interacts with the democratic and socio-interactionist nature of current norms in Childhood Education, mainly the Guidelines, nor considers that children and their socio-cultural context are the core (Souza; Nogueira, 2024).

Children's centrality and reading and writing as cultural assets are assumptions found in the collection of booklets of the project Reading and Writing in Childhood Education, which was used as the proposal for teacher Education in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age and the National Commitment to Literate Children. What we still find weird is: i) the fact that the federal government has not launched a policy on teacher Education aiming specifically at Childhood Education, rather than placing it amidst policies on literacy and large-scale assessment; and ii) the exclusion of professionals who work in childcare centers



and, because the stage is not mandatory, are neither included in the budget nor in state concerns.

Therefore, results of the study show two movements that oppose each other, i. e., the intention to accelerate and standardize the process of reading and writing and the attempt to ensure respect to child culture and develop projects in an epistemological interactionist basis which are, at the same time, inserted in neoliberal political contexts that see children as potential human capital. As a result, discussions introduced by this text warn us against consequences of Education aligned with principles of the market: individualist, homogeneous, competitive, “innovative” and effective. In other words, it is a perfect meeting with the contemporaneous barbarism that nulls and silences children, inserting them in precocious schooling by means of activities – usually mechanical and technicist ones – to reach results expected by external assessment.

Finally, we reinsure that designing proposals with democratic and strong discourses cannot be more ethical than considering social, economic, cultural and political conditions that constitute the school community, which comprises children, families and teachers, the central subjects in public policies.

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## Notas

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