

## Early Childhood Education: an assessment from the field of differences.<sup>1</sup>

### *Educação Infantil: um balanço a partir do campo das diferenças.*

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**Abstract:** This essay proposes an assessment of Early Childhood Education between 1995 and 2016, based on questions about the advances that occurred in the context of public policies in relation to issues concerning the theoretical field generically named “differences”, comprising racial, gender/sexuality, social and ethnic differences. From an analysis of Early Childhood Education policies in the aforementioned decades, the paper highlights the forces present in the State and in social movements. It questions the place of Early Childhood Education in public policies deriving from various forces for the expansion of children’s rights. Based on the articulation between the results of a diagnostic research on Municipal Public Policies for Early Childhood Education and a documentary research focusing on national laws and documents dealing with Early Childhood Education since 1995, the essay addresses the new configuration of the themes related to promoting and amplifying human rights in Lula’s and Dilma’s presidencies, which were brought under the umbrella of national security during Temer’s presidency. It calls into question the investment made in this stage of education; it highlights how policies for Early Childhood Education have been replacing the direct service of daycare centers by the State with an outsourced service, especially with philanthropic institutions, which have been increasing their third sector offers. Finally, the paper calls into question the privatizing logic, which supports the *Base Nacional Curricular Comum* (National Common Core Curriculum), and concludes on the need for an Early Childhood Education that regards childhood as experience.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, public policy, differences, curriculum, childhood.

<sup>1</sup> Apoio: Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES); Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq); Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP); Fundação Pró-Memória de São Carlos (FPMSC); Fundo de Apoio ao Ensino, à Pesquisa e Extensão, Universidade Estadual de Campinas (FAEPEX).

**Resumo:** Este artigo propõe um balanço da Educação Infantil entre 1995 e 2016, a partir do questionamento sobre os avanços ocorridos no âmbito das políticas públicas em relação aos temas relativos ao campo teórico denominado genericamente de “diferença”: às diferenças raciais, de gênero/sexualidade, étnicas e sociais. É um ensaio que parte de uma análise das políticas de educação infantil nas décadas proposta, destacando as forças presentes no interior do Estado e dos movimentos sociais. Problematisa o lugar da educação infantil nas políticas públicas que se travam entre forças diversas por ampliação de direitos das crianças. A partir de articulação entre os resultados de uma pesquisa diagnóstica sobre Políticas Públicas Municipais de Educação Infantil e pesquisa documental focando leis e documentos nacionais que incidem sobre a educação infantil a partir de 1995, argumenta sobre a passagem dos temas relativos a promoção e ampliação dos direitos humanos na gestão Lula/Dilma para serem configurados como relativos à segurança nacional na gestão Temer. Questiona os investimentos feitos nesta etapa da educação; evidencia como as políticas para a educação infantil vêm trocando o atendimento direto do Estado em relação as creches para um atendimento conveniado, em especial, com as filantrópicas, cuja oferta pelo terceiro setor tem crescido. Questiona a lógica privatista, que sustenta a Base Nacional Curricular Comum. Conclui sobre a necessidade de uma educação infantil pautada pela Infância como experiência.

**Palavras-chaves:** Política Pública, Educação Infantil, Políticas Públicas, Diferenças.

## 1. From human rights to national security

The current Brazilian political climate strongly impacts us. Any assessment made at this time will carry the mark of the contemporaneity in which we live. On the one hand, we have a significant reversal of the guidelines related to inclusiveness, social issues, and human rights. This reversal was implemented by a number of actions – such as the dismantling of the *Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão* [Department of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion] and of ministries related to diversity and human rights policies – carried out through a rupture, by the elites, with the rule of law and the democratic governance. On the other hand, we observe, on the post-2013 political scene, the emergence of social actors striving to expand the common and the public spaces, and of the forces resisting the advances of the anti-social and economic policies of neoliberalism. These resisting forces are led by youth movements, feminist movements, and college students, allied with other social movements present in the Brazilian political scene: the black movement, the landless workers’ movement, etc. Under this climate, we intend to develop a brief assessment of Early Childhood Education

from 1995<sup>2</sup> to 2016, from the perspective of the differences, that is, from the perspective of concepts located in the broad theoretical field of differences<sup>3</sup>: racial/ethnic relations, gender and sexuality, poststructuralism, postcolonial relations, etc.

What kinds of advances have occurred in relation to an agenda that sought to include the differences (race, gender/sexuality, ethnicity, etc.), whether in the curriculum, in the social and aesthetic marks of the school, or through the effective inclusion of black and indigenous children in Early Childhood Education?

Starting from the legal aspects that directly affect Early Childhood Education, we identified some important milestones in the decade discussed in this article: in 1995, with the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDB [National Education Guidelines and Framework Law]; Law 9.394/96), the establishment of criteria for a daycare center service that respects the fundamental rights of children; the *Parâmetros Nacionais de Qualidade em Educação Infantil* (National Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education; Brasil, 2006a); the *Política Nacional de Educação Infantil: pelo direito das crianças de zero a 6 anos à educação* (Early Childhood Education National Policy: for the right to education for children from 0 to 6 years of age; Brasil, 2006b); Law 11.274/06, which amended Articles 29, 30, 32 and 87 of the LDB, determining the 9-year duration of Elementary school, and the compulsory school enrollment of children from 6 years of age onwards; the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education; Brasil, 2009); the final document of the *Conferência Nacional de Educação 2010* (National Education Conference; Brasil, 2010) expressing the discussions prior to the publication of the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (PNE [National Plan for Education]; Law 13.005/14) 2014-2024; the compulsoriness, from 2007 onwards, of college education for professionals who work with Early Childhood Education; Laws 10.639 /03 and 11.645/08 amending the original text from the law by inserting, respectively, the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture and of Indigenous

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<sup>2</sup>When the following books were published: *Educação Infantil: Creches: atividades para crianças de zero a seis anos* [Early Childhood Education: Daycare centers: activities for children from 0 to 6 years of age] (Abramowicz & Waskop, 1995) and *Critérios para um atendimento em creches que respeite os direitos fundamentais das crianças* [Criteria for child care that respect children's fundamental rights] (Campos & Rosenberg, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> This field combines different concepts of “difference”, and we point out, roughly speaking, two strands: those, such as Fanon, Stuart Hall, etc., that align with the concepts of difference as recognition, in the theoretical perspective of Hegel; and those who join the field of differences in the perspective of Nietzsche, such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. Both oppose the neoliberal notion of diversity.

history and culture; and lastly, Law 12.796, from April 4, 2013, which amends LDB No. 9.394/96, determining that children aged 4 must be enrolled in Early Childhood Education.

It is also with the LDB that Early Childhood Education became part of Basic Education, triggering the beginning of a discussion process that continues to this day regarding the curriculum<sup>4</sup> of Early Childhood Education. Shortly after this law was passed, a first attempt to detail the Early Childhood Education curriculum took place with the document *Referencial Curricular para Educação Infantil* (National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education; Brasil, 1998). This three-volume document, deeply criticized by Early Childhood Education researchers, presented a discussion, within Education, of ethnic/racial relations from the perspective of diversity. It indicated the need for the adequacy of the curricular proposal to two aspects: first to the cultural and social diversity of the Brazilian states; secondly, to children's individual differences in relation to their cultures, but also to their unique needs and learnings. Diversity in the *Referencial Curricular para Educação Infantil* (Brasil, 1998) emphatically appeared under the title "Respect for diversity" and the text indicated a perspective of "acceptance" and tolerance. "Accepting," tolerating, and respecting the diversities among children were also justified by the need of children to build a perception of the differences among themselves – that is, a process that sought to form children's "identities," but kept intact that which forged the unequal and hierarchical relations between white and black children. Moreover, the material in question did not bring a clear definition in relation to the Early Childhood Education curriculum, which somehow caused the guidelines to be followed according to the frames and structures of the other stages of Basic Education, with rigid content organization and routines.

We can observe, from these discussions, that issues pertaining to Early Childhood Education and, specifically, to the curriculum of Early Childhood Education are as contemporary as the discussion of the education of ethnic/racial relations, updated now from the debate on the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC [National Common Core Curriculum]) for Early Childhood Education. The latest definition we have of the Early Childhood Education curriculum was set by the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais da Educação Infantil* (Brasil, 2010, p. 12)

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of curriculum is also disputed in the social and educational fields, a debate which we will not address at this moment. We corroborate the ideas of Lopes and Macedo (2011) and of Macedo (2012). According to Macedo (2012, p.736), the curriculum that projects it acts as a control technology that suffocates the possibility of the emergence of the difference. Not a specific difference that is established between two or more identical beings, but the difference itself, the differing that belongs to instituting movements, to enunciations, and to culture.

in which the curriculum is considered a set of practices that seek to articulate children's experiences and knowledges with the knowledge that is part of the cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific and technological heritages, in order to promote the integral development of children from 0 to 5 years of age. The same document also incorporates the ethnic/racial discussion from the perspective of diversity, but with elements such as the education of the *quilombola*, the indigenous, the *ribeirinha* child, etc.

Since the passing of the LBD (Brasil, 1996) until the present day, there is a significant number of documents published by MEC (the Brazilian Ministry of Education) addressing Early Childhood Education. These documents also develop the curriculum, since they guide the forms of physical, structural, pedagogical or professional organization of Early Childhood Education in its entirety. This set of legal provisions and educational documents sought to equate, situate and circumscribe issues related to differences/diversity<sup>5</sup>. By doing this, these texts, on the one hand, recognize that there is an inequality of treatment among children, for example: black and white, poor and rich. On the other hand, in recognizing such inequalities and differences, the texts seek to settle them in order to appease the differences so that no differentiation is made and the social and educational structures are not broken. The fact that the Brazilian State<sup>6</sup> recognizes and points out the existence of discrimination in its different laws and publications reveals a political change in terms of human rights, including children's rights. However, it does not present an advancement regarding a positive understanding of the difference.

In this article, we propose a debate on Early Childhood Education and the field of differences, based on the articulation between the results of a diagnostic research on Municipal

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<sup>5</sup> At this moment we are using these terms as synonyms, but in the course of the article they will be differentiated.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of the State here used is that of the hegemonic political forces that, allocated in the State, produced a certain consensus from divergent forces. In Foucault, the State is not the bearer and the centralizer of power, and this is Foucault's great novelty in understanding power as positive, and as not operating through repression or ideology. According to the author (Foucault, 1993, p.45) the theory of the State and the traditional analysis of State apparatuses certainly do not exhaust the field of the exercise and functioning of power. He points out the existence of a great unknown: who exercises power? Where is the power exercised? He affirms that it is known, more or less, who exploits, where the profit goes, by what hands it passes and where it is reinvested, but that it is also well known that the rulers are not the ones who have the power. Foucault also addresses how the notion of "ruling class" is neither very clear nor very elaborate. "To master," "to rule," "to govern," "the group in power," "the State apparatus" etc. form a whole set of notions that require analysis. In addition, it would be necessary to know how far power is exercised, through which relays and to which instances, frequently minimal, of control, of surveillance, of prohibition, of coercion. Where there is power, it is exercised. No one is, properly speaking, its owner; and, nevertheless, it always exerts itself in a certain direction, with some on one side of it and others on the other side; those who hold it are not known; but those who do not have it, are.

Public Policies for Early Childhood Education and a documentary research focusing on national laws and documents dealing with early childhood education since 1995. The Early Childhood Education institutions that take the difference as an aspect to be overcome will maintain their discriminatory and prejudiced logic, as well as the unequal condition in which the children who attend these institutions live. It is, therefore, necessary to problematize this concept, bringing to the debate an understanding of the difference in a positive outlook, that is, differences that make differences and that are not taken as appendices, keeping intact what is seen as central, hegemonic and universal. It should be noted that the debate of ethnic/racial differences in Brazil was included in the curriculum in order to achieve a kind of cultural justice, as a substitute for social and racial justice. By referring to Rodrigues and Abramowicz (2013), we can state that, under the mantle of diversity, the recognition of the various identities and/or cultures is crossed by the question of tolerance, currently in vogue, since asking for tolerance still means keeping the hierarchies of what is considered hegemonic intact. In addition, the authors affirm that diversity is the keyword in the possibility of expanding the field of capital, which increasingly penetrates into previously intact subjectivities. Products for differences are sold and, in that sense, we have to encourage them. That is, diversity was understood as a form of governance exercised by public policies in the field of culture, as a strategy for appeasing inequalities and emptying the field of differences, having as its function the blurring of identities and the breaking down of hegemonies.

However, we must emphasize the significant reversal that occurs in Temer's government, when compared to Lula's and Dilma's governments, in relation to the difference/diversity issues: the replacement of the Department of Human Rights with the Department of National Security. Those things that, in difference, meant diversity now are seen as deviations to be banished from the public policy or to be put under the charge of a security policy, so that the repair and recognition claims can be criminalized.

## **2. How much is early childhood education worth?**

In the period between the promulgation of the Constitution of 1988 until the implementation of the *Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* (FUNDEB [Fund

for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education])<sup>7</sup> in 2009, Early Childhood Education had, apparently, some gains in the Brazilian educational public politics, but it always remained as a smaller policy when compared with the other educational stages<sup>8</sup>, which can be seen in the growth rate of the percentage of the GDP spent in Early Childhood Education. In 2013, it was 0.6% and it grew only 0.2% from 2000 to 2013. The enactment of Law 11.274/2006 extended Elementary Education to 9 years and moved 6-year-old children from Early Childhood Education to the first year of the Elementary School<sup>9</sup>, indicating a process for anticipating schooling and transferring funds from Early Childhood Education to Elementary Education, as pointed out by Campos (2012, p. 20). According to this author, in the field of Early Childhood Education, the reactions to this change have been very critical, revealing a concern with what is considered the precocious schooling of six-year-old children – and even of those who are still five years old; with the transfer of funds from Early Childhood Education to the Elementary School; and with the adequacy of the pedagogical proposals adopted by the schools to the contingent of younger children entering the first grade.

To better understand the issue, it is important to mention that the FUNDEB was established in 2007 (through Law 11.494/2007) and that it accounted for the distribution of financial resources to state and local governments in the proportion of the number of students enrolled in the respective in-person public basic education networks, according to the data collected in the most updated school census. It established, in § 2 of Article 31, that this calculation would consider:

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<sup>7</sup> The FUNDEB replaced the *Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental* (FUNDEF [Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education]), which did not provide resources for Early Childhood Education. FUNDEF allocated resources only for elementary education, prioritizing four ranges of values per student/year. In its place, FUNDEB prioritized 11 ranges consisting of Early Childhood Education, 1st to 4th urban grades, 1st to 4th rural grades, 5th to 8th urban grades, 5th to 8th rural grades, urban secondary education, rural secondary education, vocational secondary education, youth and adult education, and special education, as well as indigenous and *quilombola* education.

<sup>8</sup> According to an estimate of the percentage of total public investment in Education in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by level of education in Brazil from 2000 to 2013. In the 2000s, 4.6% of the GDP was invested in education at all levels; 3.7% in Basic Education; 0.4% in Early Childhood Education. In 2013, investment at all levels grew to 6.3%, and Basic Education investment to 5.1%, while Early Childhood Education investments grew only 0.2%, reaching 0.6%. (Inep/MEC – Table developed by DEED/Inep. Updated 06/22/2015).

<sup>9</sup> Currently, it is estimated that around 460,000 children between the ages of 6 and 14 are still out of school. These children are mainly from poorer families with per capita incomes of up to ¼ of the minimum wages, as well as black and indigenous children, and those with some form of disability (Cruz & Monteiro, 2016).

I – for regular and special public Elementary Education: the total number of enrollments counted immediately from the first year of validity of the Fund;

II – for Early Childhood Education, high school, and youth and adult education:

- a) one third of the enrollments in the first year of validity of the Fund;
- b) two thirds of the enrollments in the second year of validity of the Fund;
- c) the total number of enrollments from the third year of validity of the Fund. (Brasil, 2007)

Not only did it not consider the total number of enrollments in Early Childhood Education in the first years of its implementation, the Law also defined, in its Article 36, an index according to which an enrollment in Early Childhood Education would be worth less than an enrollment in Elementary Education.

The interest in increasing the value received from the FUNDEB, coupled with the need to adapt to the expansion of Elementary Education, led states and municipalities to a race for resources and a set of actions aiming to anticipate as much as possible the entry of children into Elementary Education.

This migration of children to the 9-year schooling was neither part of the agenda nor a claim of those who fought for the young child. This does not mean that there is a contrary position to this proposal of expanding the universalization of education, since this is a question of the expansion of rights<sup>10</sup>, and to some degree this means, in Brazil, a fight against poverty – to the extent that it incorporates other children, even if only a small percentage of them, into the schooling process.

From a macro-political point of view, we can say that this policy serves black and poor children who are out of school, since Early Childhood Education is important for them, because poverty affects more strongly and perversely children from 0 to 6 years of age, and black children with even greater intensity. Increasing schooling by one year, we incorporate these children. However, from a micro-political point of view, this proposal that sought to solve the

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<sup>10</sup> Although the attendance rate continues to expand, the distance to reach the PNE's goals is still great: 20.4% for daycare and 10.9% for Early Childhood Education. The statistics of access to Education evidence the inequality in attendance since the first years of Basic Education. Among the richest 25%, there are 10% more children enrolled in the Preschool than among the poorest 25% (Cruz & Monteiro, 2016).



“school failure” or the unequal school performance of children<sup>11</sup> by incorporating poor and black children is questionable because it is necessary to (re)take the discussion of what the meaning of school failure is in the Brazilian school in its full complexity. This failure has already caused countless propositions to emerge and submerge in the Brazilian educational scenario, some of which are the municipalization, the standard school, the basic cycle, the full-time school, the end of grade retention, the acceleration of schooling, and millions of other packages and proposals instituted from top to bottom; and we have produced some failures. In fact, what we observe is the differentiated performance of black and white children, as pointed out in the *Relatório Anual das Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil: 2009-2010* ([Annual Racial Inequality Report in Brazil]; Paixão, Rossetto, Montovanele, & Carvano, 2010). The school’s operating mechanism that excludes differences makes black children have a lower school performance than white children, and it somewhat anticipates their failure in this schooling process that placed 6-year-old children in school.

### **3. The rupture in Early Childhood Education: direct care prioritizes preschool**

Law No. 12.796, from April 4, 2013, which amended LDB n. 9.394/96 (Brasil, 1996), declares that 4-year-old children must be enrolled in preschool. This fact made it mandatory for the State to offer this stage of education – which was already established by the Federal Constitution and the LDB, but was still not fully complied with by the public authorities. Hence, this legal document initiates a schooling process in Early Childhood Education that is substantiated by the implementation of evaluation policies, of unified curricula, of literacy, of the National Curriculum Core for Early Childhood Education, etc. We can, thus, identify a process that could be called the colonization of preschool by school, so that this schooling stage is required to solve the crucial problems of Brazilian education, such as the deficient and unequal school performance among children of different social classes, genders and races. In addition,

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<sup>11</sup> According to Inep, the difference in performance between the poorest and the richest public schools in Brazil has increased since 2005. In this year, there was a 20,34% difference in 5<sup>th</sup> grade Portuguese Language test performance between the 20% of students from the lowest socio-economic levels, and the 20% from the highest. In 2013, the number doubled to 42,7%.

at this stage, education continues to be seen as an antidote against poverty. Four-year-old children are incorporated into compulsory schooling, and those from 4 months to 3 years of age remain in formal and informal educational spaces, increasing the demand for daycare centers<sup>12</sup>.

We can say, therefore, that we are going through another “civilizing and modernizing” level regarding the incorporation of rights by young children. These children who emerge, in this new legal standard, as subjects of rights have in daycare centers and preschools the spaces for the development of their actions as subjects. Because of this legal status, it is not enough to take care of the children, but it is necessary to educate them and, more than this, to school them, in the sense that they have to learn to be students, to understand the culture of the school and everything that the school socialization process encompasses. Preschool, fundamentally, can no longer only confine itself to its dimension of caring; it now belongs, necessarily, to the process of schooling that is responsible for citizenship education. It educates for autonomy, for critical thinking and for all that is required in the “production of citizens,” active subjects in the composition of what we can comprehend as a people. This people is unified in language, race, and sexuality – which is made evident in the prohibition of the gender debate in schools, seeking, necessarily, to homogenize the differences and universalize ways of being and living. In relation to 6-year-old children, it is not enough to simply educate them, it is necessary to teach them how to be citizens, to make them literate. This is one of the functions of Elementary Education.

A diagnostic study carried out in the city of São Carlos (Abramowicz, 2012; Henriques, 2015) evidenced the existence of both a significant increase in the availability of seats for children aged one to three years in philanthropic institutions contracted by the municipal public authority, as well as a drastic decrease in the attendance of preschool children in the same institutions, reaching a number of zero attendances in 2015 and 2016, which characterizes a reorientation, between charitable institutions and municipal units, of the type of seats offered. We can conclude that the State has gradually neglected daycare centers in favor of preschools,

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<sup>12</sup> There has been a significant evolution of the preschool attendance rate, with a growth of 22.7 percentage points since 2001 and 16.6 percentage points in the last ten years only. At the same time, however, the growth rate, especially in the most recent period, indicates that, in 2016, Brazil would reach a number of about 90% of the 4-to-5-year-old children enrolled in Preschool, that is, with an important deficit in relation to the universalization goal of the PNE and of the Constitutional Amendment No. 59, of 2009. Examining the data of the daycare centers over time, the advances are less significant. Since 2001, the attendance rate increased by 15.8 percentage points and reached, in 2014, 29.6%. (Paixão et al., 2016).

thereby compromising the quality of the offered education, since it has left the education of young children in the care of philanthropic, usually religious, institutions.

Facing these new forms of segmentation, Campos (2012, p.99) highlights the one produced by the introduction of compulsory Early Childhood Education, which tends to break with the pedagogical and management unit achieved with great effort at this educational stage. Adopted by most of the countries of the region, it has produced paradoxical effects and established a new dynamics in the composition and management of educational systems. Also according to the author, regarding the first aspect, the focus on the final age cycle – 4 to 5 years of age – has led to the growth of enrollments, and in some countries to the universalization of access. However, this universalization has been done to the detriment of the education of children from 0 to 3 years of age, who are increasingly the recipients of poor quality welfare programs.

The data presented converges to the hypothesis that the division of Early Childhood Education in daycare centers and preschools has created two distinct universes within this modality of education, or two educational networks, and that these distinctions could be intensifying, insofar as the compulsoriness of the preschool universalization begins being implemented by the municipal public authority, even though the final document of the *Conferência Nacional de Educação* has positioned itself against this split.<sup>13</sup>

In a study conducted by Campos (2012), it was also possible to observe a trend that is similar to the data identified in our study. According to this author, the access to daycare centers is still very limited, especially considering the PNE, which set the goal of 30% for 2006 and 50% by 2010. Comparing the period from 1995-2009, both for daycare centers and for preschools, Campos observes that the growth in enrollments for the former was more than double 27.8%. Also in daycare centers, the author finds the highest rates of attendance in private institutions.

In other words, under the pressure of fulfilling the obligatory attendance rates of preschool children, the municipal public authority, attempting to meet such demands, increases the daycare services by contracting private entities.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the document, considering the extension of the compulsoriness mechanism from the age of four, Brazil cannot run the risk of not prioritizing the increase in enrollment in the daycare stage in favor of the expansion of preschool enrollments. Early Childhood Education cannot be partitioned (Brasil, 2010, p. 68).

In the observed municipality, in addition to the increase of seats in daycare centers in its own school units, there was a complementation in this type of care, making use of the contracting of private entities, which assumed almost the complete responsibility for the preferential attendance of children of childcare age.

This evidences that the compulsoriness is being fulfilled with a setback for children of childcare age, who make up almost exclusively the waiting list for seats<sup>14</sup>. Among the children enrolled in the contracted philanthropic institutions, almost all are of childcare age. In turn, the teachers of the municipal school units that work in daycare centers are those that have the highest percentage of surplus children per class, contrary to the resolution of the *Conselho Municipal de Educação* [Municipal Council of Education], that, setting the guidelines for the authorization of the operation and of the supervision of Early Childhood Education institutions in the municipal education system of São Carlos, regulates, in its Article 12, the parameters of group organization and the teacher/child ratio<sup>15</sup>.

In order to observe the effects of the compulsoriness of Law 12.796/13 on the provision of seats for children of childcare and preschool age, the diagnosis, by the *Programa Observatório da Educação* [Observatory of Education Program], of the investigated network provided the following indicators: an increase in seats in the philanthropic network for children of childcare age leading to a decrease of the waiting list mainly for children aged 2 to 3; the manifested demand for preschool age children is practically fulfilled, an indicator that little has changed between the years 2010 and 2014; an increase in seats in the contracted entities for children of childcare age, accompanied by a significant increase in the workload of these entities' teachers; a considerable increase in the teacher/child ratio, leading to a demand for work greater than that presented to preschool teachers; besides the previously mentioned significant increase in the availability of seats for children aged 1 to 3 in the philanthropic institutions contracted by

<sup>14</sup>In Brazil, there are about 604,000 out-of-school children who belong to the age-group attended by Early Childhood Education. In 2014, 29.6% of the children were in daycare centers and 89.1% were in preschools. (Cruz & Monteiro, 2016).

<sup>15</sup>According to article 12 of the *Conselho Municipal de Educação* Resolution n. 04, 2006, the organization of groups and the teacher/children ratio must consider:

- 1 teacher to every six children from 0 to 1 years of age;
- 1 teacher for every eight children from 1 to 2 years of age;
- 1 teacher for every twelve to fifteen children from 2 to 3 years of age;
- 1 teacher for every twenty children from 3 to 4 years of age;
- 1 teacher for every 25 children from 4 to 5 years of age.

the municipal public authority and the drastic decrease in the attendance of preschool children in these institutions.

#### **4. Who has an interest in the National Common Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education?**

In a recent article, Abramowicz, Cruz, & Moruzzi (2016) defended the hypothesis that the proposal of a *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC [National Common Core Curriculum]) for Early Childhood Education is part of the neoliberal policies of praising diversity and, in a process that meets the privatizing logic of education, of constructing educational strategies in which the differences do not make any difference; disputes and differences of concepts therefore remain confined to the curriculum and can be organized in didactic, educational and pedagogical materials, to unify curricula, and to be sold to the public network of Early Childhood Education.

There is an epistemological problem in the BNCC proposal for those who intend to think from the field of differences: how can we unify differences? How can we transform them into a consensus, when historically they have been constructed in unequal and hierarchical ways? How can we put such uneven and different forces to dialogue in equality, and why should we harmonize the differences? In a Common Core, what will be left out? What difference will not be included? What will be considered as common? There is no possible consensus without the exercise of force, knowledge/power that establishes what is common. We know that what is/was considered as the cultural heritage of humanity has been accumulated and embedded as humanity's heritage, from the banishment of local, "minor" forces and knowledges – such knowledges and forms of lives were taken as "subaltern", and sometimes considered inferior. In another article, Rodrigues & Abramowicz (2013) asked whether one needs to understand how the universal ethics proposed by interculturalists is possible, when it has already been broken by colonialism.

The underlying idea of the BNCC is that there is a possible unity in multiplicity and that it can be achieved without the use of force. From this perspective, thinking has almost the same function of the State: to unify. The second order, under which the arguments outlined here lie,

is the order of ideas, regarding this “unity desired in multiplicity” as something that must be confined to the curriculum, methodologically through the field of experience. The proposal of “convergence” governed by a curriculum standardization seeks to ward off conflicts and, thus, also differences.

Foucault<sup>16</sup> used the term “biopolitics” to designate one of the modes of the exercising of power over life, effective since the eighteenth century. Biopolitics is articulated as a methodology of action, whose object is the population. In that sense children are permanent objects of biopolitics, because there is no territory more elusive than that of the children, and it is necessary to operate on them. This is what is intended: to govern children and their teachers. There are researchers of Early Childhood Education who believed that the content of the BNCC could be disputed, so that a certain content would be affirmed, particularly the ludic one, as a priority in Early Childhood Education. However, non-schooled concepts of Early Childhood Education do not have the same political and economic power and force of the privatizing concept of education that is associated with the schooling of the young children. At the same time, there is no need to support this ludic concept, already present in the national curriculum guidelines, in a BNCC.

By agreeing and converging on a supposed consensus on the acceptance of a common core for Early Childhood Education, there is a loss for those who take the difference as a pedagogical/educational theme, because the form or “envelope” on which the core – which is common and universal – is based on immediately imposes a content that must be “homogeneous,” unique, common and universal, because the difference is not encapsulated, since it always differs. There is another idea underlying this attempt to unify differences through culture: that it could be possible to use culture to appease economic or social inequalities. In other words, there is a belief that it is possible to achieve a kind of cultural justice, replacing social justice, through the curriculum.

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<sup>16</sup> The concept of biopolitics appear, in Foucault’s thought, in “*O Nascimento da medicina social*” [The birth of social medicine] a lecture given in Rio de Janeiro, later published as an article available in the book *Microfísica do poder* ([Microphysics of Power]; 1979). The term is also present in *A vontade de saber* ([The will to knowledge]; 1976), and in the courses offered in *Collège de France* that were published, namely: *Em defesa da sociedade* ([Society must be defended]; 1975-1976), *Segurança, território e população* ([Security, territory, population]; 1977-1978) and *Nascimento da biopolítica* ([The birth of biopolitics]; 1978-1979).

There is also a culturalist strand that places reading, writing and language as culture. Thus, it reaffirms the importance of regarding the learning of a language as a cultural learning, and also as an expansion of the repertoire of culture. There is an interesting article in the book *Cartografia do desejo* [Cartography of Desire] where Guattari and Rolnik (1986) affirm that the concept of culture is deeply reactionary, and they discuss how culture does not exist as an autonomous sphere: it enters the market of power, the economic markets, the real consumption of things – which means this culture is sold. In fact, large conglomerates are selling the reading/writing culture in textbooks for town halls; this culture is not free from the capitalist modes of production, from the exchange and use values, which are of the order of the capital.

If, for Lazzarato (2011, p. 16), the social is introduced as a mode of government since the relationship between the capitalist economy and the politics has become problematic, education, as a branch of the social field, is the place where an intervention is possible, so as to produce, conciliate and/or respond to the conflicts that are placed in society by the material basis and in social relations.

Michel Vandebroek (2009, pp.13-22) states that it is precisely the disagreement that allows us to reflect on the decisions taken. There is nothing as deadly to a team as the consensus. Indeed, in the practice of Early Childhood Education, it is the exception, the odd issue, the unexpected, the *leakage* that generate debates that make the *progress* of professionalism. Therefore, according to the author, the disagreement might be complex, but the complexity is exceptionally welcome. It is not only in sameness that we construct that we are, it is also through to the mirror of difference and divergence.

It must be said that multiplicity is always heterogeneous, and differences are what is immediately harmed in the attempt of homogenization. The presumption of the common comes against that which is not bearable and does not belong to everyone, i.e., that which is put in the place of the difference. The issue that arises is: a unified core, subject to certain procedures, establishes a model and puts everything in motion towards a particular purpose. It is necessary to emphasize that the universal perspective is not given *a priori*, it was produced as a truth and as a value that is supposed and that is assumed as universal. What we mean is that the universal is always achieved through the use of knowledge/power, and that it is also a perspective that was constructed historically. We can affirm that the BNCC intends to purge the difference. And why does Early Childhood Education need a common core? In our view,

so that a certain kind of childhood can be imposed over every child, without them being able to question it by themselves.

The last version of the BNCC proposed by Temer's government was criticized by Maria Machado Malta Campos (2017). Her main concerns regarding Early Childhood Education are based not in the parts of the BNCC that specifically address this stage, but in the passages that refer to the first years of Elementary Education. Among other things, the time frame for children to learn the alphabetical writing system has been shortened by 1 year (as can be seen in article 12, chapter IV). Campos affirm that even though teachers will, thankfully, remain general-purposed, the core is still organized by areas of knowledge starting in the first year, to which 6-year-old – and even younger – children, were transferred some years ago. Among these areas, “religious education” was included, as ruled by court. Since the proposed emphasis for the first two years should be placed on literacy, Campos believes that, in reality, children will go from a perspective organized in experience fields, to a focus that is indicated in article 12, chapter IV: that pedagogical action must focus on literacy, which includes the four basic mathematical operations. The author fears that the pressures over Early Childhood Education can intensify even more than today, now affecting children aged 4 and 5, not to mention those who are still under 8 years old.

## 5. Early Childhood Education and childhood

During Lula's and Dilma's governments, there were some advances in relation to the themes placed in the scope of the difference, but not without much struggle and reversals. One of the main positive aspects in the process that can be called the rise of the diversity in the public and social scene was the openness to the possibility of the participation of groups that had not participated in the public scene before, as well as the pressure that these groups exerted in favor of other styles, criteria and policies in the construction of another State. In the moment of the reversal of the rule of law and of the democratic governance in which we live today, under Temer's presidency, there is a substantive setback of this agenda, accompanied by the rise of all forms of fascism. Once again, national identity is disputed so as to place the difference and/or the diversity as aberrations and deviations and, if possible, to abolish them from the public and educational spaces. Some recent examples of this abolishing process include: the interdiction of



the debate on gender relations that was so forcefully included in the approval process of the State and the Municipal Plans of Education; the prohibition of speeches considered to be political/ideological by the teachers who now present themselves through Bill No. 867/2015, and other similar draft bills going through legislative proceedings in different states and in the Federal District; and, finally, the nefarious partisan proposal of a nonpartisan education.

## What about the children?

Godard, the French-Swiss film director from the disruptive *nouvelle-vague* movement, affirmed that children are political prisoners. They are political prisoners, he said – but they are the prisoners of other prisoners, because adults, for the most part, are also political prisoners. Peter Pál Pelbart<sup>17</sup> (2016), in a letter to high school students, states that nothing is truer than regarding children as political prisoners, including, but not exclusively, at the hands of families, schools, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, the media, the market, electronic games intended for them, etc. Pelbart affirms that it is exactly at a time when the prison reveals its arbitrariness, and its legitimacy is called into question, that its strength and fragility, its weight and its vulnerability appear, and it becomes evident that much of its effectiveness rests on fear and intimidation. He believes the same can be said of secondary school students: when they realize that they are at the mercy of the various State instances in charge of deciding their destinies with a simple pen – when they perceive how much this excessive power intends to decide on their daily lives – then everything is turned upside-down, because they cease to be at the mercy of such power, since they now perceive how intolerable the situation is, and they cannot do anything but confront, resist in an active or passive way, take the streets, thus rupturing, with great daring, the media blockade, the military blockade, the legal blockade, and the blockades of fear or intimidation.

Children cannot undertake this confrontation that high schoolers did. So, they are at the mercy both of the adults and of the forces that want to literate them quickly, the forces that

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<sup>17</sup> This text was read by Prof. Peter Pál Pelbart at the Fernão Dias Paes High School, on April 28, 2016, during a public debate, organized by Dalva Garcia, a teacher from the school and from PUC-SP, around the theme of Ethics, with the participation of Marilena Chani, students, parents, teachers and school staff. The following morning, the students decided to resume their occupation of the school in solidarity with the occupation of the Paula Souza Center.

want to initiate them early in the logic of capital, of the hegemonic language, of power, of hierarchies of color and race, of heteronormativity; all of this in the name of the “common” and the universal. What is allowed to escape the common is diversity, a term in vogue in neoliberal times, and this will be tolerated. Under the mantle of diversity, the recognition of the various identities and/or cultures comes under the aegis of tolerance, since asking for tolerance still means keeping intact the hierarchies of what is considered hegemonic. Furthermore, diversity is the keyword of the possibility of expanding the field of capital that increasingly penetrates into previously intact subjectivities.

## **Perhaps childhood is the most powerful tool that children have**

What is childhood? Foucault (1977) wonders whether childhood means simply the freedom of not being an adult, of not depending on the law, and of being able to establish polymorphous relationships with things, with people, and with bodies. This is what childhood can no longer do: to produce the adult and not be produced by it.

We have to oppose the prescriptions that are on the basis of unified curricula. But it has not been easy, because there are those who believe themselves able to provide answers and flood the theoretical and practical field with manuals: on the teaching sciences/mathematics/Portuguese/English/judo in Early Childhood Education; on what to teach babies; on who is afraid to teach; on how and when to teach; etc. We need to oppose supplicating and prescriptive pedagogies. The greatest power and possibility of a child resides in the *aion* time, that is, a time that is childhood itself. Childhood as an experience. Fragment 52 of Heraclitus says that “Aion is a child at play, playing draughts; the kingship is a child's” (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/439260-aion-is-a-child-at-play-playing-draughts-the-kingship>). If there is a new possibility for Early Childhood Education, it is in childhood itself that we must look for it. Thus, we conclude this essay by echoing Virno's belief (2012, p. 34) that a critical thought that is not also, in any of its facets, a meditation on childhood is not conceivable.

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