

**BRAZILIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION QUALITY: SOME
RESEARCH RESULTS**

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ABSTRACT

BRAZILIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION QUALITY: SOME RESEARCH RESULTS. *This paper discusses data obtained from a review of empirical studies on the quality of early childhood education in Brazil published between 1996 and 2003. The sources were the main education journals published in the country and the papers presented at the most important scientific meeting of the area, The National Association of Graduate Studies and Research on Education (ANPEd) Annual Congress, Work Group on Education of 0-6 Year-Old Children (WG 7). The information gathered was selected according to main criteria for assessment of early childhood education quality as published in the literature: teacher education; curricula; infrastructure; educational practices, and relationships between schools and families.*

This study is the result of a review conducted for the Early Childhood Policy Review Project sponsored by UNESCO and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This project is part of a comparative diagnosis including three other countries: Kazakhstan, Kenya and Indonesia.

The general picture of early childhood education systems described in this review suggests a dynamic but contradictory reality characterized by an enormous distance between existing legal frameworks and the real day-to-day situations confronted by the majority of children and adults in early childhood education institutions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – TEACHER EDUCATION – TEACHING QUALITY – RESEARCH

Discussions on the quality of education for 0-6 year-old children offered by early childhood education institutions were given impetus in the 1990s on the wake of political and legal changes brought about during the country's redemocratization.

The late 1970s and the 1980s saw civil society mobilization demanding that the right to education be extended to young children: neighborhood and workers' union movements struggled for access to day care centers in big cities; professional groups and education experts mobilized to propose new regulations; local governments tried to meet the increasing demand by building and/or expanding municipal day care centers and preschools. From the perspective of grassroots movements, the struggle for day care centers was regarded as the right of working mothers to child care and education; other movements, including those advocating children and adolescent rights, struggled for day care for children of vulnerable, at-risk families (Campos, 1999).

The quality of Brazilian early childhood education was no priority at all in this period: day care center system expansion was boosted mainly through government funding of nonprofit and/or community organizations that often operated in poor conditions; municipal preschools increased the number of enrollments often by expanding the number of children per classroom and/or daily school shifts. This is the case of the city of São Paulo, where Municipal Preschools (EMEIS) for children aged four to six offer three daily school shifts (from 7 to 11 AM; from 11 AM to 3 PM, and from 3PM to 7 PM), and up to 40 children are grouped per classroom (Correa, 2003).

Concern about the low-quality of child care and education increased with the publication of the first studies on the operation of such institutions, particularly day care centers linked to government social welfare agencies. These studies revealed the poor conditions of buildings and equipment, lack of teaching materials, low schooling and training of teachers, absence of pedagogical projects and difficulties in communication with families.

A survey on early childhood education programs implemented in the State of Mato Grosso between 1983 and 1990 (Silva, 1999) well exemplifies social policies that led to such a situation in schools serving poor populations: in order to expand the number of enrollments at low cost, federal agreements with organizations and municipalities helped developing several projects which often used inappropriate school facilities and unskilled personnel.

Another paper traces the development of day care centers and community schools in Rio de Janeiro slums, describing how they emerged in the context of social movements in the 1970s, and as a result of agreements between U.N. Children's Fund - UNICEF and the city of Rio de Janeiro to open schools at the Rocinha slum. Schools were opened in other slums as well, building a low-quality, poor operation school system supervised by the municipal social welfare agency and subject to political and clientelistic interests. Children who could not enroll in regular municipal schools attended these slum schools. (Tavares, 1996).

Rosemberg (2003) shows that this low-cost expansion in the number of enrollments, which adopted so-called emergency solutions, was supported by international organizations operating in developing countries such as World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. Füllgraf (2002) also found in a period of 25 years along the process of enrollment expansion in Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina, increased use of agreements as a means to expand the number of enrollments and cut expenditures.

Many studies showed that low costs were obtained by passing the cost burden on to the same families that should be served, which were used as sources of support and/or unpaid labor. Merchede (1998) gives an example of this situation by comparing costs of two institutions in the Federal District, taking into consideration parents' disbursements.

The concern about the low-quality of early childhood education brought the child to the center of the stage: the perception was that child care and education should be based, first of all, on the respect for children's rights, and then show legislators and officials the importance of ensuring minimum quality standards for day care centers and preschools. As a result of efforts by groups linked to universities and education professionals, the ensuing principles formulated were added to the new 1988 Federal Constitution, and basically maintained in the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) of 1996.

The main change was recognition of early childhood education as the first stage in basic education (also comprising the compulsory eight-year primary school, and high

school), which meant, in practice, requiring municipalities and other governmental spheres to assign the responsibility for day care centers to education agencies.

The second important aspect in the education reform was requiring proper education for teachers and educators of small children. Higher education degrees were preferred, although middle-level education degrees were still accepted.

Education systems have resisted accepting the degree requirement, particularly for day care centers. While state and city governments organized training courses for unskilled individuals who were already working at these institutions, many local governments and entities have challenged the degree requirement, and used maneuvers to circumvent it, e.g. hiring unskilled teachers as cleaning personnel.

The beginning of the new century saw the continuity of the process of changes unleashed by the reform started in the previous decade. This is a period of adjustment and adaptation that still poses huge restraints to the desired improvement in quality.

THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES

The new Constitution and the LDB determined that municipalities are responsible for early childhood education. Therefore, the job of federal agencies is to set the guidelines on basic service standards to be followed by state and city education systems, including private schools and institutions supported by public funding.

In the period between the promulgation of the new Constitution (1988) and the passage of LDB (1996), the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) – initially supported by the commitments internationally assumed at the Jomtien Conference – played an important role in the formulation of guidelines for early childhood education by publishing documents, promoting surveys and debates, and preparing curriculum proposals, as well as supporting the mobilization of educators and other stakeholders in different arenas (Machado, Campos, 2004).

The document *(Criteria for Child Care in Day Care Centers that Respect Children's Fundamental Rights)* (Brazil, 1995)) was published together with a poster featuring the twelve criteria to be affixed at day care centers, and a video – *Our Center Respects Children* – accompanied by a leaflet with suggestions for group discussions at teacher training sessions. Its content was based on an experience involving advising and intervention efforts in government-subsidized day care centers in the city of Belo

Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais. Several institutions and municipal agencies were partners in this effort. Thus, it reflects the reality found at these day care centers, which, for the first time, were systematically supervised by the local government. The document tried to address concrete problems observed in government-subsidized day care centers, and the difficulties unskilled educator teams face in their daily routines, which, in fact, are problems found in the majority of institutions that provide care for small children from poor families around the country.

In 1998, another important document was published: *Subsídios para credenciamento e funcionamento de instituições de educação infantil* (*Information on Accreditation and Operation of Early Childhood Education Institutions*) (Brazil, 1998a)). It was the result of discussions conducted by State and Municipal Education Boards all over Brazil. This publication contained several texts on issues such as physical space, health, personnel training, among others, and was meant to serve as reference for the regulations to be adopted by school boards for accreditation and operation of early childhood education institutions in their states and municipalities.

The National Education Board also played its guiding role in the implementation of new regulations by approving a series of norms to include day care centers into the education systems, as well as curriculum guidelines for early childhood education institutions and for teacher education courses for early childhood and primary school teachers (Brazil, 1999, Brazil, 1999a).

In 1998, MEC published the 3-volume *National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI)*, which was sent to all schools in the country to help the implementation of pedagogical projects of municipalities and early childhood education schools (Brazil, 1998).

Concomitantly, the discussion on the National Education Plan (PNE) involved civil society organizations and the Brazilian Congress (Didonet, 2001). Passed in 2000 after long discussions, the PNE establishes minimum infrastructure standards for child care and education institutions to ensure:

- internal space with good lighting, view of outside areas, power supply and security, potable water, sewerage;
- sanitary facilities and bathrooms for the children;
- facilities for preparing and/or serving meals;

- internal and external areas for activities according to curriculum guidelines and the relevant methodology, including rest, self-expression, movement and play;
- furniture, equipment and teaching materials;
- adaptability to children with special needs

PNE also establishes goals for enrollment expansion in day care centers and preschools countrywide. However, passing of the bill on the new education funding system – Fund for Maintenance and Development of Elementary Schools and Advancement of Teachers (FUNDEF) – implemented in Brazil from 1998 on has not set early childhood education expansion as a priority (Guimarães, Pinto, 2001). Therefore, the new regulations addressing improvement in service quality could not be translated into practical effective measures of larger scale. Unfortunately, the gap between legislation and reality holds on and characterizes a good part of child care and education in the country, as we will see below.

In this context, nationwide civil society mobilization now coordinated in local Early Childhood Education Forums, and in Brazilian Early Childhood Education Forums Movement (MIEIB) plays a vital role to make achievements in legislation become reality.

ACCESS TO CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

A democratic concept of quality in education should not avoid taking into consideration access to day care centers and preschools. In a populous country like Brazil, where children from 0-6 years of age account for 13.3 percent of the total population (17 percent in some states (Brazil, 2002)), with rampant inequality of income distribution and among regions, it is important to find out who has access to education and what kind of education is offered.

Kappel (2003, 2005) conducted a study based on data collected by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and MEC for the period 1995-2001. These agencies are the main sources of statistical data on Brazilian education: IBGE collects data in households through decennial demographic censuses and annual national sample surveys, and MEC collects school enrollment data supplied by the school systems. As Rosemberg showed (1999), IBGE records have always presented higher enrollment

figures than MEC's. An explanation for this could be the fact that many educational services used by families are not supervised by or registered in relevant agencies, that is, they have a marginal existence as opposed to regular public and private school systems.

Kappel's study showed that in the period considered there was an expansion in the number of enrollments; however, a large part of young Brazilian children was still out of school in 2001. In that year, only 10.6 percent of 0-3 year-olds and 57.1 percent of children between 4 and 6 were attending child day care centers and preschools. Kappel, Carvalho and Kramer (2001) also showed in a previous study based on 1996 and 1997 data the prevalence of enormous inequality in terms of access to child day care centers and preschools according to age, income range, color/ethnicity, parents' schooling, mothers' occupation, number of persons in the household, region, and urban or rural housing. Percentages of enrolled children were higher for children approaching seven years of age, from white, high-or middle-income families, and parents – particularly mothers – with higher schooling levels; mothers who work; and households with a smaller number of people, located in urban areas in more developed regions.

In her diagnosis of enrollment and access in Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina, Füllgraf mentions a total of 1,945 children between zero and six years registered in waiting lists for places in municipal schools (2000 school census). According to the author, the survey also found that without access to regular schools, many families seek alternatives, such as non-regulated neighborhood child care, but some of the families have turned to the judicial system to fight for their rights. In the same city, Lobo and Gonçalves (2001) found out that the location of early childhood education schools in the neighborhoods displayed discontinuities, thus aggravating access in many places.

Data examined by Kappel (2003) revealed serious unsolved distortions: in 2001, IBGE published a total of 627,000 children aged 7 to 9 enrolled in preschools and literacy classes, and a total of 38,000 children over 9 in the same situation! Therefore, children who should be in elementary school were illegally retained in preschools (see also Rosemberg, 1996).

On the opposite direction, six or even five-year-olds have enrolled in elementary schools, a growing trend in recent years. Permitted by legislation, and for that matter adopted in most countries, enrollment before 7 can be harmful to children in local education systems, which still display high failure rates in the first grades. This would mean early negative school experiences for many children. In 2001, 25.4 percent of six-

year-olds, and 4.8 percent of five-year-olds, respectively 725,000 and 103,000 children attended elementary schools in Brazil (Kappel, 2003, 2005).

Studies on education funding in the country revealed huge obstacles to expansion and improvement of quality in early childhood education. As Guimarães and Pinto showed (2001), most municipal governments – in charge of education for the 0-6 age group – lack sufficient resources to consolidate quality early childhood education systems. According to these authors, it would be necessary to allocate new federal resources to fund expansion goals established in PNE and still not implemented. Unfortunately, as Barreto's study showed (2003), in the previous federal Administration (1998-2002) quite the opposite happened when priorities for education were set forth.

QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN STUDIES PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1996-2003

The main purpose of the bibliographical survey was to collect recent research findings on the quality of education in early childhood education institutions in Brazil¹. Along the past decade, the production of research and studies on child education had a significant growth in the country. This production is disseminated mainly at academic events and in education journals. It often results from papers written for master's or doctorate programs in the universities, or from diagnoses sponsored by Education Secretariats or nongovernmental organizations – NGOs – to find out the situation of childhood education in their municipalities, and yields significant data on the quality of education for small children in various contexts and in different aspects.

Methodology

The bibliographic review did not intend to make a critical analysis of this production according to a state-of-the-art model. In the survey and selection of texts, the approach used was to check the relevance of texts to education quality, priority being given to papers that included empirical data on the surveyed reality. Papers that focused on education quality under a theoretical perspective supplied by secondary data, or

¹ This survey was carried out during the year of 2004 in the context of the Early Childhood Policy Review Project policies in Brazil promoted by the Ministry of Education, and that was part of the survey sponsored by UNESCO and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

presented surveys of policies and/or legislation that were relevant to the theme were also included.

The period analyzed, 1996 to 2003, was chosen because 1996 was the year of passage of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), the legal framework for a new reality that significantly impacted educational systems and education policies at federal, state and municipal government levels, giving room to various changes in the public, private and government-subsidized child care services for children aged 0 to 6 years.

For the period from 1980 to 1995, before LDB passage, references related to the theme were selected, using as source for the study the document *Early Childhood Education – 1983-1996* (Series State-of-the-Art, n.2) published by MEC/Inep (Rocha, 2001).

The survey on the period from 1996 to 2003, after enactment of the new LDB, sought to locate papers published in top Brazilian education journals and presented during the most important scientific meeting in the area, the annual meeting of the Brazilian Association for Graduate Studies and Research on Education (ANPEd), in the Work Group on Education of 0-6 Year-Old Children (WG 7).

Selected papers were read and summarized. In order that the focus of the analysis would not be missed, and also to standardize abstracts, a reading plan was established. A total of 68 texts were chosen: fifty articles published in journals and 18 papers and posters presented at ANPEd.

Articles published in journals

The search for education journals was carried out at Carlos Chagas Foundation (FCC) Ana Maria Poppovic Library. The following journals indexed to the library database, and which are the most representative in the area, were selected: *Cadernos CEDES; Educação & Sociedade; Cadernos de Pesquisa; Estudos em Avaliação Educacional, Educação e Pesquisa; Educação & Realidade; Ensaio; Pro-Posições; Revista Brasileira de Educação; Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos* and *Em Aberto*.

In the Carlos Chagas Foundation search system, descriptors *creche* (day care center) and *educação infantil* (early childhood education) located 240 references. These two descriptors comprise references to papers on preschools. Based on publication dates

and titles, 41 articles were selected for reading and summary. Later, article lists were reviewed and nine more titles were selected. Some journals initially included in the list were removed because they did not include texts with research findings.

Papers presented in the annual ANPEd Meeting

These papers are posted on ANPEd's website, and can also be found in CDs and floppy disks edited by the organization. Titles and abstracts can also be found in *Programas* edited for the meetings. Web searches were conducted in July/August 2004. References include papers and posters presented with ANPEd's WG 7, from which 30 titles and abstracts were selected. By dismissing papers which could not be found in their full version on ANPEd website or in ANPEd's CD-ROMs, and also papers that had been published, it was possible to complete a set of 18 papers. When a text presented at ANPEd was later published in one of the selected journals, our preference was for the published paper.

Paper characteristics and their use in the review

The most interesting feature of the selected papers is the fact that a significant number of them was published in special issues and/or thematic issues, or in thematic dossiers of some journals: twenty-one among fifty. Ten out of these 21 papers are in the journal *Em Aberto* (2001), whose theme was "Early Childhood Education: Day Care Center, a Good Start."

It should be noted that many of the articles and papers presented at ANPEd are summaries of the most important findings in academic theses or dissertations. In some cases, the same dissertation or thesis can be the basis for more than one article.

Information contained in these texts was freely used in our review. Papers containing descriptions and/or analyses of child care policy data; diagnoses of early childhood education systems and institutions; case studies and reports of experiences were used to collect and introduce data on the subjects addressed in this review: 1. teacher education; 2. pedagogical proposals; 3. operating conditions and educational practices; 4. relationships with children's families.

Texts on the quality issue considered as conceptual and/or theoretical; on the recent history of early childhood education in the country; addressing aspects of official

child care policies and legislation were used in the introduction to this review and along the text, when necessary. Rocha's paper (1999) on ANPEd's production before 1996 has been highlighted because it includes a good review on the background of the production reviewed in this paper.

In the final references there are two sets of texts: the first set includes 68 summarized titles obtained from a survey on 1996-2003 production, and the second set includes all the other papers located in the state-of-the-art paper mentioned above (Rocha, 2001), as well as other references used in the text.

ANPEd's 1990-1996 production according to Rocha's study

Rocha's article (1999), one of the papers selected in this survey, offers an interesting overview on production presented at ANPEd's in the period before the one covered in this review. The author examines 122 texts, 110 of them presented at ANPEd's WG 7, and 12 in other thematic groups.

Rocha observes an increasing number of studies investigating different aspects of relationships within early childhood education institutions, and a significantly growing amount of papers on institutions providing care for 0-3 year-olds on a full-time basis. The previous trend calling for discussions of issues related to education policies was replaced by a larger number of studies examining regional or local experiences. These studies reaffirm the prevalence of institutions providing part-time care for children aged 4 to 6, which ends up favoring socially-advantaged population segments.

Other themes examined in the studies are: the diverse characteristics of professionals working at day care centers result in low-quality work that disregards the child as the central element for the formulation of pedagogical proposals; the influence of studies on other countries over educational models and thoughts on Brazilian reality; game and play related to language, and recognition of their mediating role. Language (including writing) is central to a large number of papers, and one of the most frequent themes is the impact of adult-child interactions in language comprehension and building by children.

The survey also shows that studies presented a set of indicators for pedagogical practice, such as the recognition of the importance of games and exploration of physical space; favoring child-child interactions by structuring and diversifying objects and space; exploration of significant situations, interactions with adults; integration of

folklore and traditional games, as well as children's literature to a set of activities to foster self-expression.

On the other hand, the analysis shows that there are very few studies including sociocultural determinations, such as class, gender, race and ethnicity: most papers deal with an abstract child, referred to in the singular, with no distinctions from the multiplicities that determine and constitute it. Generally, studies that seek to give children a voice end up concluding that kids precociously apprehend a vision of school in which authority and control of teachers prevail.

Some studies discuss teacher education, particularly regular education offered in higher education programs and its implications to pedagogical practice, highlighting situations of practice redimensioning based on supervised internships. Others combine regular teacher education with on-the-job training, particularly for public school teachers. The relationship research-education is cited in some investigations as a fundamental aspect of teacher education, with special emphasis on the role of some day care centers at public universities in guiding new educational practices based on students' own experiences.

Relationships among adults are present only in indirect way in the two studies on day care center-family interaction. Among the studies analyzed, a few papers investigate the identity of these professionals. Also limited are the studies concerned with the effects of preschool and its relationship with socioeconomic inequality. In this aspect, the author draws attention to the need to associate the discussion on quality to the problem of social inequalities, a connection that could not be found in most studies examined. The author also criticizes texts that advocate the indissociability of young children care and education, but in the end neglect the dimension of care in their approach.

The quality of early childhood education

The education of early childhood education professionals

One of the main quality criteria used internationally to assess quality of schools at any education level is the type of previous education and on-the-job training of teachers or educators who work directly with students.

Before the current legislation, the two main divisions of early childhood education systems in Brazil (care and education of 0-6 year-olds) were linked to

different government agencies. Preschools, which generally serve 4-6 year-old children on a part-time basis, have always been linked to regular school systems, either operating at elementary schools or in their own premises. In these schools, teachers (mostly women) were normally required to have a middle-level education degree, but in some school systems there are significant numbers of teachers with higher education degrees. In some Brazilian regions, emergency care arrangements remained, in general through agreements that admitted unskilled teachers.

Child day care centers, on their turn, were in their majority supervised by social welfare agencies, providing full-time care and education for the 0-6 age group. They were either managed by local or state governments or through agreements with public agencies or local or international NGOs. Social welfare agencies were rarely concerned with minimum schooling levels or previous education degrees for adults who worked directly with children (Tavares, 1996). At most, some unsystematic on-the-job training was offered, either directly through supervision systems or by means of external consultants.

After the recent, but not fully completed, integration of child day care centers to education systems, teacher education is legally required. Various strategies have been used to face this challenge: organization of adult education courses for unskilled educators who work in day care centers; replacement of unskilled educators for professionals with education degrees; employing two adults – one teacher and one teacher assistant – per group of children, and so on (see Yamaguti, 2001, Vieira, 1999). The tendency observed is more education being required for educators of children who are approaching seven, and more flexibility to those providing care for younger children. To reinforce this tendency, early childhood education teachers with an education degree generally prefer to work with groups of older children (see Tomazzetti, 1997).

In Brazil, 2002 data reveal that 64 percent of preschool teachers had middle-level education degrees, and 23 percent held higher education degrees, the remaining jobs comprising unskilled personnel (Brazil, 2003, pg. 23). But in child day care centers, a sector in which MEC statistical data do not cover all establishments yet, teacher education deficiencies are more serious. As an example, even in the city of São Paulo where an effective system of public and government-subsidized day care centers is in place since the 1980s, when public day care centers were transferred to the Secretariat of Education in 2001, 50 percent of child development assistants had less

than high-school education, and 40 percent finished high-school but none had middle-level education degrees. In the preschool system (EMEIS), however, no teacher has less than middle-level education degrees, and 60 percent had a higher education degree in 2001 (PMSP apud Campos, 2003). Another example comes from the results of a study on community day care centers/preschools at *Baixada Fluminense*, in Rio de Janeiro: only 27 percent of 245 so-called “chairs” had middle-level education degrees, and less than 2 percent of educators had a higher education degree (Fundação Fé e Alegria do Brasil, 2001, pg. 49).

A survey conducted in 91 municipalities in the state of Rio de Janeiro by researchers from Rio de Janeiro Catholic University (Kramer, 2001, Corsino, Nunes, 2001) obtained information from 54 of them and revealed serious quality problems in terms of teacher education and on-the-job training. Also, there were different schooling or qualification requirements for teachers or teacher assistants: fifty municipalities required middle-level education degrees for teachers; 22 required only secondary school education for assistants; 25 were not able to inform the level of education of assistants. In over 70 percent of municipalities surveyed, public service entrance examinations do not include specific exams for early childhood education, and only half of such municipalities have career plans for education employees.

The survey also collected information on supervision and on-the-job training. Most municipalities responding to the survey developed teacher education projects, but only half of them carry out projects oriented to early childhood education.

As to school principals, the majority of them are commissioned to the positions; and only in eleven municipalities principals are elected. In 40 of the municipalities surveyed, high school education is required for preschool, and in 30 of them it is also required for day care centers. Only seven require college degrees for preschool principals, and six require similar degrees for day care center principals.

Other data collected reveal segmented and heterogeneous municipal school systems. They interpret legislation on their own without any support or guidance from state agencies. So, for example, enrollment of 6-year-olds in primary schools depend on decisions made at random by local officials, so that neighboring municipalities may adopt different procedures to organize primary education and to provide connection with early childhood education.

In the material located for this review, reports on diagnoses made in municipalities in different regions include data on teachers and educators.

In Fortaleza, State of Ceará, Cruz (2001) conducted a survey on community day care centers funded by the local government, and, among other aspects, a sample of 25 educators was analyzed. Most of teachers were young (20 to 28) black women with little schooling who worked in poor conditions for a low pay. Despite of this, they seemed to be quite happy with their work. However, they revealed negative views about the children and their families, and generally thought of child care centers as charities.

In the city of Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina, Rocha and Silva Filho (1996) surveyed a sample of 20 percent of local early childhood education institutions, and collected data on 464 professionals holding different positions. In general, teachers had middle-level or higher education degrees. In private schools, 10 percent of teachers had poor schooling. But in informal neighborhood child care homes, all adults who took care of children had almost no schooling at all. In institutions running full-time child care programs, a higher concentration of “other professionals” was found. About half of professionals in the sample were registered workers. As a conclusion, the authors urge the formulation of “policies for the progress of human resources via teacher education, professionalization, careers and salaries.”

In the municipality of Rio Grande, State of Rio Grande do Sul, Sayão and Mota (2000) conducted characterization of a sample of teachers: 48 from state public schools, 70 from municipal public schools, 84 from private schools and 21 from non-governmental organizations. In this municipality, there were no public child care services for children aged 0-3years. Qualification levels of early childhood education professionals were very poor. Only 13 percent of professionals in state public schools had middle-level education degrees, 29 percent in municipal public schools, 27 percent in private schools, and 33 percent in non-governmental organizations. There were only 13 percent of professionals in state public schools with college pedagogy degrees, 9 percent in municipal public schools, 11 percent in private schools, and 5 percent in non-governmental institutions. The largest percentages of professionals (from 47 percent to 57 percent) were in the category “others.” This, and the fact that 10 percent of teachers is under 20, makes us suppose that large numbers of educators have low schooling and poor qualification. A large group of teachers from private or non-governmental institutions were not registered workers. It was also in these institutions where a larger concentration of professionals with only a few years of work experience was found.

In the city of Niterói, State of Rio de Janeiro, Vasconcellos (2001) conducted a research in 13 early childhood education units, collecting data about 210 professionals.

This research showed an increasing number of professionals with college degrees. However, these professionals received low salaries, and it was difficult for them to reconcile child education and child care roles. Later on, Vasconcellos developed action research work with some professionals in the same municipality, and this made the researcher observe the importance of on-the-job training programs to ensure better education for small children.

Other smaller-scale studies tried to take a closer look at educators' practices by observing teachers and collecting their impressions at their daily work with children. Findings were not very different from those in Cruz's research on community day care centers in Fortaleza. Maranhão (2000) conducted a case study focusing on the health issue in the nursery of a child care center. The study identified a concept of health care as necessary for children considered fragile, destitute and dependent. Empirical data reveal that educators recognize they need more knowledge to perform their child care activities, since their skills are built "during the work with children, exchanging experiences with those who have taken care of their own children, nephews, nieces or grandchildren or professionals who have been working at the day care center for a long time."

A review of education theses and dissertations containing data on 0-3 year-old children (Strenzel, 2001) shows the same lack of clarity of educators about their own role. This leads them to mix up their professional and family roles, without distinguishing public and private environments.

Micarello (2003) interviewed technical staff from municipal Education Secretariats in a Brazilian state on education of personnel working in day care centers and preschools. In their remarks, technicians recognize that in the absence of better qualification for the work, educators mobilize their personal experiences as mothers, and over the years they build skills based on the performance of these two roles: mother/teacher. Interviewees emphasized the poor initial schooling in middle-level education courses, in which internships are not practical training and do not prepare students to face the reality in schools, on-the-job training is poor because there are no fixed schedules for team planning work, and the training models adopted do not provide the opportunity to integrate theory and practice.

Cruz (2003) also investigated teacher training experiences in the city of São Paulo by interviewing 21 technicians from 17 public and private institutions in charge of teacher training courses. The focus was on sex education as a component of training

programs. According to interviewees, day care centers and preschools are “full of prejudice”. During the training courses, teachers and educators describe situations with children involving sexuality and gender roles, which they do not know how to deal with and cause them anxiety. However, considering the many problems that have to be coped with in the institutions, this topic is not a priority: interventions in sex education during training are “cyclic, sporadic and rarely continued.”

Another research that investigated a sample of neighborhood child care homes in the city of Blumenau, State of Santa Catarina, found that despite the fact that child care women (“*crecheiras*”) had training and supervision from local government agencies, their role was not clear to them. Most believed that to take care of children they needed only “to like children, have common sense and do not have social problems” (Bento, Meneghel, 2003). The research observed that in their daily work these women concentrated their attention in tasks related to safety, hygiene, and feeding children, and some of them carried out such tasks very well. During training offered by the local government, *crecheiras* are rarely heard, and a power relation is established between them and the agency in charge of the agreements.

The confusing mother/teacher roles were also found in a study that observed teachers and assistants who work side by side in day care centers in the city of Campinas, State of São Paulo (Wada, 2003). The work division between those who educate – teachers – and those who provide care – assistants - is minimized in practice, despite differences in salaries, training and working hours of both professionals. According to the author, in the daily routine, teachers look for references in home and school contexts, while assistants adopt the home as a model. Without adequate training, both end up developing contradictory practices in their work.

Bufalo’s research (1999) reached similar results when observing an early childhood education center where teachers and assistants shared their work with 1-2 year-old toddlers. The author observed a sort of task hierarchy developed by the two professionals, but at the same time some ambiguity in the roles played. In case of assistants, lack of qualification and informality was leading to carelessness about planning and evaluating the work with children.

These findings indicate some of the major problems in training early childhood education professionals. As to education, even teachers with middle-level education degrees or college degrees are not qualified enough to develop educational work, particularly with younger children in full-time day care centers. Educators or assistants,

who in their majority have no secondary school education, base their work in the knowledge acquired at home, giving priority to activities related to hygiene, food and safety. Supervision and on-the-job training programs, if any, also display concept flaws, and have to take into account the fact that professionals are not paid for planning and team work in the institutions.

The transition in the educational area, with the migration of day care centers to education systems, adds new challenges in terms of definition of roles and division of work in the institutions. However, this process of integration seems to be opening new perspectives for qualification and on-the-job training for unskilled day care center educators. Nevertheless, warns Haddad (1997), this process should be accompanied by in-depth review and reformulation of functions and objectives in both institutions in face of their responsibility for care and socialization of children.

Pedagogical proposals and curriculum for early childhood education

Yamaguti's report (2001) on the experience of integrating day care centers to the municipal school system of São José do Rio Preto, an inland city of the State of São Paulo, very well reflects the reality of many other municipalities. Some of the main policies for day care centers that migrated from social welfare agencies are continued teacher training, encouraging non-qualified personnel to seek further education, and formulation of a pedagogical proposal. Indeed, with a few exceptions, while they were under social welfare, day care centers did not have projects that would focus on full development of children. When they did exist, guidelines usually addressed children's health, food and hygiene.

In a national survey conducted by MEC (Brazil, 1996), which analyzed a sample of 45 sets of documents from states and municipalities in five Brazilian regions, we could see that most of them did not include proposals for 0-to-3-year-old children, since most day care centers were not yet linked to the education agencies covered by this survey. The work also included case studies of a subsample of five state capitals, with interviews and visits to early childhood education facilities. Its conclusions show that schools that had migrated to education agencies were gradually absorbing the work with the 0-to-6-year-old age group; most states and capitals offered curriculum or pedagogical proposals, many of them restricted to preschool; together with promising efforts, there were also deviations, such as "literacy classes" between preschool and the first grade of elementary school, and the early schooling of 4-to-6-year-old children,

resulting from the adoption of strict pedagogical models. This study, rich in observations and comments, detected many problems still found in today's education systems, such as the lack of cohesion between technical staff discourse and educator practices, and the contents of proposals as well.

In the period following the passage of LDB, debates on pedagogical concepts and childhood education curriculum – now including children under 4 and day care centers – gained momentum in the educational area, mainly after publication of the document *Referencial curricular nacional para a educação infantil (National Curriculum References for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI))* by MEC (Brazil, 1998). Made by a team of advisors hired by the Ministry, this document is organized in three volumes: the first one is an overview of early childhood education in Brazil, and discusses concepts, such as “child”, “education”, and “educator”; the second one is about “personal and social education”, and the third volume deals with the different contents included in the “knowledge of the world.” A first draft of the text was sent to a large number of consultants (approximately 700, according to Cerisara, 2002), who presented individual opinions. Based on these opinions, the document was redrafted and sent to all Brazilian early childhood education institutions, with the purpose of reaching teachers and educators directly. Training programs based on RCNEI were later funded by MEC all over the country.

According to provisions in LDB, the Basic Education Board of the National Education Board issued the *National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Brazil, 1998 - Rapporteur: Regina de Assis). The guidelines are binding on all state or municipal education systems, different from RCNEI proposals. Guidelines are clear, by defining, in article 3, the “guiding principles” which must direct the pedagogical projects developed in childhood education institutions:

- a. ethical principles of autonomy, responsibility, solidarity, and respect for the common good;
- b. political principles regarding the rights and duties of citizens, development of critical capacity, and respect for the democratic system;
- c. aesthetic principles of sensibility, creativity, playfulness and diversity of artistic and cultural expression.

MEC's document, however, became the main subject of debate, and was also the target of much criticism, especially from the academic area (Kramer, 2002; Bujes, 2000). The ANPEd (1998) published in *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, the full text of the institutional opinion prepared by a committee, and sent to MEC. Many suggestions were made there, and some were eventually incorporated into the final document version, and others not. Among the failures highlighted, special attention should be drawn to the document's omission as regards guidance for integration of preschool and primary school, especially as to the admission of six-year-old children in first grade. Other criticism refers to the excessive emphasis on learning contents, even in the age range of 0-3 years, and to the "psychologising bias."

Cerisara (2002) analyzes the RCNEI in the context of the country's education reform in the 1990s. She acknowledges the advantages of MEC's efforts, but in her opinion, there is an excessive emphasis on the curriculum model. The author also calls into question the fact that the on-the-job training program *Parâmetros em Ação* (*Parameters in Action*), implemented by MEC, presupposes the compulsory use of RCNEI by municipalities and institutions, which makes a document that should be open and flexible become mandatory.

Other works surveyed chose to investigate curriculum proposals adopted locally. In their analysis of the state of child care in Florianópolis – already commented above – Rocha and Silva Filho (1996) stated that half of the institutions offer only one orientation for classes of different ages; 23 percent said they had incorporated different methods in their proposals, and 15 percent stated that they left teachers free to deal with children. "Constructivism" and "interactionism" (based on Piaget and Vygotsky) were the most adopted learning theories. However, the same study also found that the practices and conditions observed did not always correspond to the above-mentioned theories.

Wiggers (2002) analyzes the answers given by 46 institutions that provide care to 0-to-6-year-old children in day care centers and/or in preschools of a Brazilian municipality (Florianópolis) in a survey carried out in the years 1997-1998. One third of these institutions reported the absence of a pedagogical proposal of their own. Private institutions were percentually the ones which had more pedagogical proposals. However, according to the author, this quality indicator should not be overestimated, since some of the proposals of private schools were characterized by a certain lack of clarity, and excessive emphasis on areas of knowledge and cognitive development, not

taking into consideration other important young children's needs. Sixty-seven percent of state institutions surveyed said that they had a curriculum/pedagogical proposal, with over 80 percent of them also following a schooling model quite like that of a school, organized by areas of knowledge, with emphasis on Portuguese and Mathematics. In contrast to this, 42 percent of the municipal institutions reported the absence of a pedagogical proposal of their own. It is the author's speculation that the curriculum reform movement program carried out in this municipality in a previous period did not produce the expected results. Community institutions had the highest percentage of schools without a pedagogical plan: 66 percent. Half of them said they organized their work by activity, and the other half by areas of knowledge. The only federal institution surveyed had a different proposal, organized by lines of work and projects. One conclusion of this study is that proposals for children under 3 worked out by most institutions are not designed to meet the specific needs of this age group, and are probably based on programs for older children.

Other studies describe local experiences which seek to bring innovations to their curriculum proposals, such as the report of Aragão, et al. (2001) on the experience of day care center in Brasília, and the paper by Garms and Cunha (2001), which describes a study on day care centers for the children of employees and professors on different campuses of the São Paulo State University (UNESP), recommending changes in the way they work, including pedagogical proposals.

Working conditions and educational practices in institutions' day-to-day activities

Fifteen research papers with empirical data based on interviews and everyday observation of day care centers and preschools were among the abstracts analyzed: nine about day care centers and six including data on preschools and/or care of 4-to-6-year-old children. Nearly all of the research papers describe local case studies on systems of institutions or individual school units, but even so it is possible to identify common features that characterize everyday life in Brazilian early childhood education institutions.

The survey made by Cruz (2001) on community government-subsidized day care centers in Fortaleza, capital of the State of Ceará, provides information collected in 19 day care centers serving 950 children. They are ill-equipped day care centers with unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Children are provided full-time care, with activities

centered on food, hygiene, and rest. They remain idle for long periods of time, in “waiting mode.” A dichotomy between routine activities and learning activities was observed. Both educators and families do not seem very critical of this reality: educators on account of their negative vision of the families, and families because they are thankful for the child care services received.

On another extreme point of the country, Santa Maria, State of Rio Grande do Sul, Tomazzetti (1997) found a similar reality in a study that covered 24 municipal day care centers and five government-subsidized ones. As regards facilities, these day care centers were generally brick buildings of four to eleven rooms, activity rooms being also used as dorms. Rooms are described as non-attractive, with no cushions, rugs or visual elements, with no quiet little corners for activities, “limiting the children’s visual exploration” and possibilities for play. Physical contacts between child and adult only occur during hygiene routines, thus hampering interactions. This way, children are hindered, and routines lead to “homogeneity of behaviors under authority, rule, and restriction.” Pedagogical practices surveyed are characterized by formal repetition tasks, decodification, and training. The researcher believes that a large part of these deficiencies is due to the lack of educator training and to the employment of trainees (pedagogy students or of any other field), a highly precarious staff situation, with turnover, instability, and temporariness. Also, local governments’ unconcern about supplying educational materials and toys to day care centers has been identified as a contributing factor to the existing situation. In this way, “citizen education” goals, found in eleven educational proposals analyzed, do not seem to be part of the practices that make up children’s everyday life.

In another town of southern Brazil – Blumenau – Bento and Meneghel (2003) surveyed a sample of neighborhood child care homes, selected from a universe of 60, distributed in 13 town neighborhoods, supervised and subsidized by city government. Operating since the 1980s, these child care services were deemed temporary during research, with a deadline for their end. Even though city government’s guidelines advocated a concept of child care different from the one adopted in institutional day care centers, without rigid timetables, and with enough flexibility to meet family needs, home-based day care was found to follow the same patterns of use of time and space of the other ones. Thus, according to the authors, home-based day care routine activities are built day-by-day, with actions directed toward food and hygiene, and child development potential **is** something that depends on children’s efforts, since they do not

seem to expect that the person in charge will behave as an educator or teacher. In this context, infants do not get sufficient attention, those walking and under 2 almost never take part in activities, and older ones are left on their own.

Starting from an exploratory case study, Batista (2001) tries to address the existing tensions between the homogeneity one tries to obtain by preestablished routines, and the heterogeneity brought by children in their everyday life at day care centers. By focusing her attention on children, the author brought to light this conflict between what was proposed and what was experienced, showing that the framework applied by the institution is not validated by the reality of children's life experience.

Another case study on a municipal day care center (Coutinho, 2002) using written, photographic and video records, found the same routinization of everyday life, in which constant rituals practiced by adults, trying to discipline and moralize behaviors through ceremonies, punishments, and valued modes of being and behaving, have a structuring function in the construction of subjectivities. The author also witnessed moments of rupture due to intense experiences that shed light on the alterity of childhood.

Sayão (2003) and Finco (2003) made observations on child manifestations related to gender and sexuality roles, which produce harsh and moralist reactions from adults, making clear that this is a topic not yet duly explored in educational programs and courses for personnel working in day care centers and preschools.

A research with teachers from day care centers and preschools investigating how they deal with child drawings, describes everyday situations in which the drawing is used as a training tool both for developing fine motor skills, and for relaxing, amusing, or killing time. Child production is not respected as such, with teachers "correcting" such drawings, and thus showing how difficult it is for them to understand it as a symbolic activity. Children, on the contrary, live these situations in a different way, talking about their works and exercising their creativity (Silva, 1999).

Curiously, a study (Piotto et al, 1998) carried out in four types of day care centers in Ribeirão Preto (private, university, municipal and philanthropic), in the inland of the State of São Paulo, with the purpose of testing a quality assessment tool produced from a document used in Australia, found that despite the fact that some of these institutions shared a similar reality to what was already described, staff vision on their work was quite positive. Experience also showed how difficult it was for these professionals to deal with written material and to make the assessments proposed by

such tool. The fact that this assessment tool involves parents' consultation was badly received by professionals, showing how negative is their vision of families.

Yamaguti's report (2001) on municipal day care center management in São José do Rio Preto, also in the State of São Paulo, calls our attention to the measures taken to change the legacy of traditional assistencialism in day care centers. She also mentions measures regarding space arrangement, such as crib removal, more outdoor activities, adoption of self-service for children's meals, etc.

If in studies of day care center everyday life the emerging reality is that characterized by food, hygiene and nap routines, in preschool studies, the described pattern points to schooling-based models. These studies also contain data indicating better working conditions in preschools, as regards facilities, equipment, material, and professionals' training.

Between 1996 and 1998, Kishimoto (2001) conducted a random sample research of 84 EMEIS in the city of São Paulo, corresponding to 20 percent of a total of 375 municipal preschools. For a subsample of 13 units the research tools activities comprised observations, interviews and video recording. Schools operate in three daily shifts, serving 4-to-6-year-old children, and relying on qualified teachers. This study gives a detailed picture of these institutions as regards availability and use of toys and pedagogical materials. Based on a return of 65 percent of a total of 704 questionnaires distributed to teachers, one might say that in general, and with Brazilian reality in mind, these schools were in good working conditions, with varied equipment and material. Over 65 percent of the questionnaires mentioned music material; material and equipment for visual, sound, audiovisual, and computer communication; motor activity and physical education facilities; material for sensorial and fine motor experiences and handling; visual and studio art material (present in 91 percent of establishments). Toys and material designed for symbolic, construction, and socialization activities were the least mentioned ones.

Many times, however, school observation showed that such material is kept outside classrooms and out of children's reach. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that there are three shifts and different teachers in every classroom during the day, and by teachers' lack of time to prepare and arrange the material before pupils come in. As a significant example of this, the study describes a school in which the coordinator opens a succession of closets in the corridor, all key-locked, all full of school and audiovisual material, children's books, toys, musical instruments, etc. Therefore, daily

use of this material is limited: musical instruments are for special dates; playground toys in the outside area are only available during playtime, for only 20 minutes every day; magazines are used for literacy activities, out of the context of proposals made by the children themselves; libraries and toy libraries, when existing, are not much attended. Child productions are rarely seen on classroom walls, and, as regards semester folders containing child individual productions, most of them are stereotyped models of the graphic type, and the paper used of standard size. Computer is more used as an end in itself and not as a tool for other learning activities. Games are restricted to the outside area, to physical education activities, and to “rest” periods. Contents linked to Brazilian culture and reality are very much “left out” of proposed games, and even of many children’s literature books. According to the author, these results show that the pedagogical concept still prevailing is adultcentric, expositive, and verbal, and the use of strategies to keep kids “quiet” are very common in these institutions.

In the diagnosis of early childhood education institutions in Florianópolis, State of Santa Catarina, Rocha and Silva Filho (1996) also observed routines that favor a fixed and constant time division. The authors indicate that part-time preschools tend to follow the school design more strictly, and that institutions taking full time care of 0-to-3-year-old children allow them to have more time for open air activities and for staying together.

Some case studies show innovating experiences that try to escape from these patterns. As described by Delgado (1999), *Canto da Lagoa* Early Childhood Education Center, in Florianópolis, is a good illustration of this. The researcher stayed in this center for an extended period of time, investigating its history, making interviews, and observing 4-to-6-year-old children classes. She recorded different aspects of this educational experience. It reflects the influence of local curriculum reform movement, with the following highlights: integration of activities with the school’s natural, cultural, and social environment; intense family participation; project development and insertion of playful and artistic aspects in the pedagogical proposal. The problems detected refer mainly to gender relations and to teachers’ excessive time control.

In general, despite the diversity of existing conditions, these studies show some similar patterns in day care centers and preschools. Such patterns are not similar for day care centers, formerly linked to social welfare agencies, and for preschools which have always been linked to education agencies. Some efforts are being made to break the

rigidity of these models, but there is still much to be done before more advanced concepts introduced in official curricula and in legal texts are put into everyday practice.

Relationships with families

Some studies described in this review focused on relationships established between early childhood education institutions and families of the children assisted.

Franciscato (1997) undertook a qualitative research with four professionals from a government day care center in the São Paulo metropolitan area that assisted 200 children aged 0-7 years old. She found that respondents had a concept of family based on personal experiences and influenced by the media. They use depreciative adjectives to describe the families assisted by the day care center, qualifying them as “very unstructured.” On the other hand, they expect parents, especially mothers, to cooperate, and also to help at home with the work developed by the day care center, by caring for the children’s hygiene and health needs, as well as by encouraging reading and other educational tasks; hence, they are not aware of families’ real living conditions, on both the material and symbolic levels.

Corrêa (2002) conducted a case study at one EMEI in the city of São Paulo. This school was selected because of its effort to build closer ties between school and community. The author found institutionalized participation channels, such as school councils and parent-teacher associations, and periodical meetings with parents. The institution applied questionnaires in order to characterize the so-called “clientele profile” and to assess the school’s performance. However, parent perception of their participation was more focused on obtaining resources and financial contribution. The research concluded that the school did not explore all the options this work with families could offer, showing how practice was more limited than the desired goals.

Another case study (Tancredi and Reali, 2001) featuring a municipal preschool in a medium-size town in the inland of the State of São Paulo for 4-to-6-year-old children and older children in after-school activities, investigated school-family interactions and their impact on the teaching-learning process. The 17 teachers interviewed formed a staff described as qualified, experienced and for many years working in the school. Teachers’ visions of their pupils’ families were stereotyped and biased: families are described as living in violent, aggressive environments, with alcohol and drug problems. According to them, children are sent to school to “escape

the streets” because parents work and/or want to get rid of them. Educators seem to build their concepts based on individual contacts with parents, generally at school or classroom doors, and in isolated comments heard from children. The absence of two-way communication, and not just from school to parents, makes schools ignore the reality of these families and their living conditions. For parents, quite different from what teachers believe, preschool is important because it prepares children for primary school, and consequently for a better future.

Pinheiro’s observations (1997) on the ambiguous and contradictory relationships between mothers and preschool teachers also show similar difficulties. Pulilo (2001), in turn, describes the experience in an early childhood education school that has been run by a parent association for 18 years, whose purpose was to achieve harmony between parents, professionals, and children in the institution’s collective management process. In this case, it seems to be a middle-class group living an experience common to other private schools of the cooperative type.

An exception to this is the reality described by research on infant adaptation to a university day care center in Ribeirão Preto, which shows an environment with an open ear to family problems in this moment (Amorim, Vitoria, Rossetti-Ferreira, 2000).

However, most results point to significant difficulties in the relationships between educators and small childrens’ parents, especially in contexts where the population served is identified as poor and marginalized, even when their reality does not exactly match this image. As some researchers state in their concluding remarks, more attention should be given to this issue in teachers’ previous education and on-the-job training, thus providing professionals with a more open and less biased vision, which would allow them to regard families positively as holders of legitimate rights and aspirations, so that more equity in this interaction is achieved.

FINAL COMMENTS

Research findings collected in this survey show important aspects of the reality experienced by children and adults in Brazilian day care centers and preschools at a time of transition marked by legal and institutional reforms. Old concepts and prejudices inherited from a historical background of colonization and slavery are still present today, routines and practices emanated from clientelistic traditions still survive and resist the generous changes made in the latest legal guidelines, which are based on a

vision of the child as an individual with rights, guided by Psychology of Development studies, and informed about the idea of respect for diversity.

In today's Brazilian childhood education scene, it should be highlighted that legal frameworks are in force and their dissemination and implementation are underway in the country's several different contexts, although in an uneven way. Despite enormous regional differences in Brazil's social reality, some common patterns were observed during research, showing the persistence of child care and education service models for day care centers and preschools which are highly resistant to the changes introduced in the new legislation.

In the four issues surveyed, conditions in day care centers are always most precarious, both regarding staff training and material infrastructure, with rigid routines almost exclusively based on actions oriented toward food intake, hygiene, and restraint of children. In comparison, conditions observed in preschools are better as regards staff training and material infrastructure, but routines are equally not very flexible and focused on school activities. In the two types of institutions there are significant difficulties in communication with families, which are usually seen in a negative and biased way by part of day care center and preschool staffs.

Concerning teacher education, it seems to be clear that existing staffs, both on the level of secondary school education – middle-level education courses – and on higher education level – pedagogy courses – do not meet the demand of day care centers and preschools for qualified personnel. Thus, challenges to be addressed are due to the fact that there are still many educators without the minimum necessary training and schooling required by the new legislation, as well as many education courses which do not meet the training needs for early childhood education (Vieira, 1999; Micarello, 2003; Kishimoto, 1999).

Collected research results show that day care center educators have problems to overcome impoverished routines of care services related to food and hygiene, by incorporating practices that lead to child's total development. In turn, it is very difficult for preschool teachers to escape a heavily school-like model based on traditional primary school practices. The fact that both types of professionals harbor negative feelings toward families suggests another gap in teacher education and on-the-job training.

The recent incorporation of day care centers to education systems, especially the municipal ones, seems to be producing some benefits, such as increased concern about

professionals' education and pedagogical programs. Various efforts are being made to train non-qualified educators working in day care centers, as well as to provide higher education opportunities for teachers with middle-level teaching diplomas.

However, many edges need yet to be cut in this integration process, as some studies show. The educational area has difficulties in dealing with family and community needs, and does not totally accept the idea of a service that must also meet these demands (Haddad, 1997).

As regards physical resources and structure, research data demonstrated immense heterogeneity, in that conditions vary enormously according to the regional context, type of management and child care and education services offered.

Day care centers, especially community and government-subsidized ones, usually face serious shortcomings in terms of buildings and equipment, as regards comfort, sanitation, and age-group adequacy. In general, conditions in preschools are better off, but there are restrictions in the use of school areas for children's games and autonomous activity.

It is clear the effort made by Education Secretariats to remodel and introduce improvements in day care center buildings, but this usually follows the same educational concept previously used, without innovations in the conditions necessary for children's full development. As regards preschools, as Kishimoto's research shows it very properly (2001), even when equipment and teaching materials are available, the operating structure – including teachers' working hours and daily class shifts, and the kind of guidance and training received by staff – does not help children to gain access to this material on a day-to-day basis.

In order to reverse this situation, it is not sufficient to guarantee the resources that are necessary for improvements in buildings and in the supply of material, and equipment. It would be also important to invest more in guidance and training for secretariats, organizations and schools, with respect to specifications in purchase and use of this equipment and material, as well as to those related to new constructions and remodeling undertaken in day care center and preschool buildings.

Concern with space distribution and the use of a wider range of equipment and material also need to become part of previous teacher and school manager education and on-the-job training, so that children can benefit from these improvements in their everyday life in day care centers and preschools.

As if reflecting the situation of pedagogical material shortage, improper facilities, and insufficient personnel training, one notices a certain lack of concern for children's educational programs. Several studies point to the existing disharmony between concepts advocated in official documents on curriculum orientation, supervision staff discourse, schools' planning, when existing, and observed everyday practices. This situation seems to be more serious in day care centers, but it is also of concern in preschools, where a restrictive schooling model continues to prevail. Besides that, some research studies indicated an absence of familiarity and a resistance to employing mechanisms of institutional self-evaluation, which have been too little disseminated in the country.

Integration with the initial grades of primary school is still very poor, despite increasing incorporation of 6-year-old children into the primary school. Some school systems have adopted the regime of learning cycles (grouping of grades, without retentions along the cycle), and there are examples of learning cycles that incorporate the last preschool year. However, in this survey we found no evidence of studies on these experiences. It should be taken into account the fact that the law confers responsibility for early childhood education and primary school to municipalities, what, in theory, would facilitate integration².

On the other hand, policies developed by different government spheres do not always respect legal guidelines nor are consistent with them. As several texts have shown, public funding of early childhood education³ (Barreto, 2003; Guimarães, Pinto, 2001) has not been properly defined yet. In addition, the prevailing mentality in many states and municipalities is that day care centers and preschools do not need qualified and well-paid professionals nor efficient supervision; they do not require buildings and equipment adapted to children's needs, nor books or toys, and so forth.

Moreover, more restrictive concepts of improvements in child care quality still persist, many times reinforced by international agencies interested in low cost services, disregarding the country's history, the knowledge already accumulated on the results of

² In the beginning of 2006, a new federal law was issued, determining that six year old children should be included in the first grade of elementary school, thus adding an additional 9th grade to compulsory education.

³ In June 2005 a bill modifying the existing education funding system was sent to Congress, with the proposal of a new fund, the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (FUNDEB). It includes funds for preschools, but excludes day care centers for 0-3-year-old children. Brazilian Congress Select Committee in charge of project review decided to include day care centers within FUNDEB, but up to mid-December, 2005, the project had not yet been voted on the floor.

these experiences, and the efforts developed by many groups and movements to improve early childhood education (Rosemberg, 2003).

Although still contradictory, the general picture emerging from these studies indicates a dynamic situation, with significant changes introduced in the last decade, posing challenges that seem to be increasing, while a new awareness on the importance of early childhood education is disseminated through society.

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