

The Game of Teacher Education in *Early Bird Project*: moves, disputes and disruptions

Emanuelle Perissotto de Assis¹
Flavia Medeiros Sarti¹

¹Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Rio Claro/SP – Brazil

ABSTRACT – The Game of Teacher Education in *Early Bird Project*: moves, disputes and disruptions. Assuming teacher education as a game played among agents in the educational field, this paper analyzes the case of *Early Bird Project*, which introduced the English language in primary public schools in the state of São Paulo/Brazil through a partnership between the São Paulo State Secretary of Education and Dutch Institutions. Through the lens of the field concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and analyzing documentary and bibliographic data and also semi-structured interviews with teachers from the project, this paper focuses on the ramifications of the proposal's teacher education of the project, highlighting elements that, together, put at stake the continuity of the game of teacher education and the role of university in this competitive space.

Keywords: Teacher Education. English Language for Children. Field Concept. Teaching Profession. *Anti-universitization*.

RESUMO – O Jogo da Formação Docente no caso *Early Bird*: lances, disputas e rupturas. Pressupondo a formação de professores como um jogo disputado entre agentes do campo educacional, o artigo analisa o caso do Projeto *Early Bird*, que introduziu a língua inglesa nos anos iniciais do Ensino Fundamental em escolas da rede pública paulista por meio de parceria firmada entre a Secretaria de Educação do Estado de São Paulo e instituições holandesas. À luz de categorias teóricas ligadas ao conceito bourdieusiano de campo, e valendo-se de dados documentais e bibliográficos, e entrevistas semiestruturadas com professores do projeto, o artigo focaliza os desdobramentos de sua proposta de formação docente, evidenciando elementos que colocam em xeque a continuidade do jogo e o papel da universidade nesse espaço concorrencial.

Palavras-chave: Formação de Professores. Língua Inglesa para Crianças. Campo. Profissão Docente. *Antiuniversitarização*.

Introduction

Reformist agendas have been imposing themselves on the social space of teacher education for several decades, suggesting that traditional teacher training systems should be replaced by less expensive and more performative structures (Ball, 2010; Zeichner, 2013). Aligned with the ideals of the New Public Management – NPM (Oliveira, 2018), which may be more or less evident in different contexts, these agendas significantly impact the local configurations of teacher education, considered here, in this paper, as a space of disputes: a game (Sarti, 2012).

This competitive space brings together different entities that seek to shape teacher education, determining “[...] what teachers should know, how they should act professionally, where, how, and by whom they should be trained” (Sarti, 2012, p. 332). In contrast to the trend observed throughout the 20th century, when teacher education gradually attained university-level status in various national contexts as part of a broader movement towards the professionalization of teaching (Bourdoncle, 1990; 2007; Tardif, 2013), recent years have witnessed a weakening process within universities, questioning their ability, in their current organizational form, to offer professional education to teachers (Bourdoncle, 2009; Zeichner, 2010).

In this context, trends of anti-universitization (Bourdoncle, 2009) emerge, advocating that teacher professional education should be handled by sectors independent of universities. This phenomenon was identified a decade ago by Zeichner (2013) in relation to the scenario of American teacher education. According to the author, in that context of intense struggles over the meaning and control of teaching and its education, as well as the survival of public education, three main groups are in contention. The first group, labeled as *reformers*, considers the university system to be failing. It is primarily composed of entrepreneurs from the education market who, from outside universities and education departments, hope to replace university teacher education with market-driven competition. This group is guided by principles linked to neoliberal and NPM agendas, proposing alternative forms of training that align more directly with the fast and applied logic of the market, expecting the State to only play a regulatory role in monitoring these proposals.

In contrast to this position, a second group, the *defenders*, advocates for the current university system, calling for greater support and investment in its improvement. The third group, consisting of agents connected or not connected to universities, is referred to by Zeichner as *transformers*. Committed to a significant transformation of the current teacher education system, this group proposes changes, counting on the involvement of higher education institutions and demanding the maintenance of their public nature.

As consequences of these disputes, which extend beyond the borders of the United States, the new configurations surrounding teacher

education bring about significant changes in the role of universities. However – and this is the main point of discussion here in this paper – they also entail serious disruptions to the established game, hinting at the possibility of its dissolution. In this regard, this paper aims to discuss the processes present in the disputes among these groups vying for the power to define teacher education. This discussion is conducted through the lens of the *Early Bird Project* case. Drawing on categories related to Bourdieu's *concept of the field*, we analyze its moves and disputes, seeking to identify the agents involved in the case, the strategies they employ to legitimize themselves and operate within the competitive space of teacher education, and the types of consequences these movements have for the established game.

Implemented in the São Paulo State Public School System in 2013 with the aim of offering English language instruction in the early years (primary schools) of selected schools, the *Early Bird Project* draws attention to aspects related to teacher education by being, as highlighted by Lima (2016), as closely aligned with what Zeichner (2013, p. 32) refers to as an *alternative route*, a path capable of “[...] greatly reducing the role of universities in teacher education and moving towards shorter, more ‘practical’ programs based on clinical training.” However, a longitudinal examination of the case allows us to highlight aspects that go beyond the contours of an *alternative teacher education route*, pointing to broader elements that question its *illusio* and, in that direction, the very meaning of this game.

The discussions and data presented here result from research guided by a qualitative, descriptive-interpretive perspective, conducted through a case study. The empirical data explored were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers and former teachers participating in the *Early Bird Project*¹. The process of selecting teachers for the research began by contacting the 56 schools involved in the project, as disclosed in Resolution SE-29, dated May 28, 2014. Out of those 56 contacted schools, only 6 participated in the research, and among them, 10 teachers agreed to participate and were interviewed. This group of teachers showed heterogeneity in their involvement with the project: two teachers were involved since its inception, and they were the only ones who had participated in any form of training provided by the São Paulo State Public School System. Of the two, one was no longer involved in the project at the time of the interview. Three teachers joined during the project's transition phase when it became a regular subject in the curriculum (2015-2016), and the other five teachers took on the classes after this change had already been established, starting in 2016.

Bibliographic and documentary data also form part of the analyzed dataset and were selected from public texts (news articles and resolutions) and video conferences conducted by the São Paulo State Public School System.

The *Early Bird Project* in the São Paulo State Public School System

In November 2013, the São Paulo State Department of Education (SEE-SP) announced the launch of an English language teaching program for the early years of primary education called the *Early Bird Project*. The announcement was made during a ceremony held at the School of Education and Professional Development (EFAP) and was the result of a partnership between the SEE-SP and the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Netherlands (Alunos..., 2013).

In general terms, the project aimed to introduce the English language in initially 10 pilot schools in the public school system, eventually expanding to a total of 203 schools by 2016. The project's novelty, widely reported in various media outlets, lay in the adoption of a methodological approach proposed and developed by the Dutch Center Early Bird². This approach was based on playful teaching strategies focused on oral comprehension and production skills, with less emphasis on written activities (São Paulo, 2014b). To facilitate this partnership, the SEE-SP announced the implementation of a series of teacher training activities related to the program, which, under its responsibility, would receive assistance from the Early Bird Center and the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS). The latter was responsible for producing the teaching materials to be used by the teachers.

The project was innovative in terms of offering a foreign language in the early years of primary education in the São Paulo State Public School System. However, the partnership between the entities involved aligned with the public policies implemented by the SEE-SP in recent decades (Barbosa et al., 2022). These policies, focused on pedagogical and administrative reorganization of the São Paulo State Public School System, began in 1995 under the guidance of the State Apparatus Reform Master Plan (Brasil, 1995). Aligned with the principles of the NPM and foreseeing increasing private sector involvement in educational management activities (Hall; Gunter, 2015), public-private partnerships were prevalent in the training initiatives carried out by EFAP. For instance, between 2018 and 2019 alone, more than 40 partnerships of this kind were established with various institutional arrangements (Souza; Feldmann, 2021).

Following this direction, to initiate the project's implementation in 2013, the coordinator of the Dutch Early Bird Center visited the first 10 pilot schools for a week (São Paulo, 2014b). The purpose was to introduce the foreign methodology to the teachers and familiarize themselves with the São Paulo State education system. After a few months of work with the 10 schools, in 2014, several resolutions (SE-3, SE-29, and SE-43, issued in January, May, and August, respectively) regarding the project were disseminated by the SEE-SP. These resolutions formalized normative guidelines for the project's development and the training of teachers in all schools that would include the project in their curriculum. In September of that year, the project was expanded to 56 schools,

and former and new *Early Bird* teachers were called to participate in the first day of in-person training activities held at EFAP. The meeting aimed to discuss teaching strategies based on the foreign approach.

In the following years, 2015 and 2016, two more expansions of the project occurred, reaching a total of 203 schools, and two additional video conferences were conducted by the CEFAl (Center for Training and Support for Inclusion) of the SEE-SP. These conferences, which were not mandatory, provided updates on the program via video conferencing through the SEE-SP's virtual platform called Rede do Saber. In the May 2015 conference, the then-director of CEFAl reviewed the project's methodological guidelines and presented "best practices" (verbal information, 2015) for teaching English³.

In the video conference held in March 2016, on the other hand, some changes were announced by CEFAl: it was informed that from that moment on, the work related to English language teaching for children in the São Paulo State Public School System would no longer be referred to as the *Early Bird Project*, but rather as an integral part – a mandatory subject – of the curriculum of the 203 schools that had already implemented it. The reasons behind this decision were not mentioned in the virtual meeting. However, it was stated that the teaching materials related to English language instruction for children, which were continuously requested by the program's teachers during the meetings, were still under development. From that moment on, the methodological guidelines of the classes would become more flexible and "adaptable to the context" (verbal information, 2016), including the possibility of including written activities, which differed from what was originally envisioned in the Dutch framework of the project.

With the publication of Resolution SE-6 on January 19, 2016, which notably removed the *Early Bird Project* from the curriculum of the early years (São Paulo, 2016), the end of the partnership with the European institution was dated. Following this reconfiguration, Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) classes continued to take place in the São Paulo State Public School System without any association with the *Early Bird Project* until 2020 - the year in which the subject was removed from the curriculum, with its hours replaced by the Coexistence Project (São Paulo, 2020).

The (Lack of) Specific Training for TEYL Teachers in the *Early Bird* Case and the Establishment of Alternative Teacher Education Routes

Among the possible questions raised by the *Early Bird Project* are those concerning the lack of official guiding directives for the provision and teaching of TEYL (Rocha, 2006; 2007), and the educational gap experienced by its teachers. This is because the Bachelor's degree in Language and Literature in Brazil, which is required to teach foreign languages in Basic Education, is focused on teaching at the Middle and High School levels⁴, rather than in Early Childhood Education and Pri-

mary School. There are only a few programs dedicated to the education of specialists in the early years (Miller et al., 2019). This complex scenario of scarcity and inconsistencies contrasts with the increasing number of schools offering English at earlier stages in their curriculum (Tonelli; Pádua, 2017). These implementation initiatives often align with a process of neoliberalization of TEYL (Kawachi-Furlan; Tonelli, 2021), in which the language itself - being hegemonic and possessing significant symbolic value in the social field (Bourdieu, 2003b) - functions as “[...] a career booster or something that will objectively be important for the child’s future” (Kawachi-Furlan; Tonelli, 2021, p. 469).

These elements involved in the current configuration of TEYL in Brazil, and the resulting outcomes, seem to compose and foster what Ball (2004, p. 1106) refers to as a “new global political agreement.” Although long-standing, this agreement is the result of a set of contemporary processes that operate through educational reforms aimed at reducing the state’s provider role and increasing its regulatory function. As a guarantor (White, 1998), the state starts to govern public sector activities from a distance (Ball, 2004, p. 1106), promoting a more performative and competitive culture in educational practices based on private market values such as “entrepreneurship, competition, and excellence” (Ball, 2004, p. 1105), at the expense of agreements that prioritize education as a common good and teacher education as a pillar of the professionalization process. To implement this institutional arrangement, educational policies cease to be the concern of a single nation-state and become regional and global, becoming part of a burgeoning international trade, where binary relations between the state and private institutions are formed, boundaries between the social and economic realms become porous, and notions such as “partnership” are increasingly articulated (Ball, 2004).

In the case of teacher education, this culture of performativity (Ball, 2004; 2010) is reflected in what Zeichner (2013) refers to as *alternative routes*. In general, the author defines these routes as non-university training programs that provide very little or no preparation for teachers to assume full responsibility in the classroom. They are based on a technical view of teaching work’s applicability, lacking the intrinsic characteristics of the teaching profession and its professionalization, such as social, cultural, and political dimensions (Nóvoa, 2017). These routes, open to market-established dynamics, are less costly and faster, often detached from the context in which they are proposed, resembling a form of “one-size-fits-all” training (Silva, 2015, p. 153). In most cases, this training model is promoted by the group of entrepreneurs mentioned earlier, referred to as *reformers* by Zeichner (2013). In the name of the need for innovation and reformulation of teacher education, these reformers propose to “[...] greatly reduce the role of universities in teacher education and move towards shorter, more ‘practical’ programs based on clinical training” (Zeichner, 2013, p. 32).

In this context, how does the *Early Bird Project* relate to the prominent institutional arrangement proposed for education in the 21st cen-

ture? As mentioned, the *Early Bird* case highlights aspects of the intricate scenario of TEYL in Brazil, where the lack of official initial and continuing education for its teachers and the absence of clear guidelines for its teaching create a fertile ground for the proliferation of emergency proposals that disregard university participation, such as the *alternative routes* reported by Zeichner (2013). Lima (2016), in analyzing the teacher training proposal of the *Early Bird Project* in the year of its launch in 2013, draws attention to the fact that the SEE-SP, in its attempt to universalize English teaching in the early years within a short period and without qualified teachers, relied on offering “[...] a fast (one-week) and low-cost (outside the university) training” (Lima, 2016, p. 661), which indicated configurations very close to those of the *alternative routes*.

Indeed, in the resolutions published by SEE-SP in the subsequent year of the project’s launch, 2014, the exclusive partnership with the Dutch Center in terms of theory, methodology, and training can be observed. In Resolution SE-29 of May 28, 2014, for example, Articles 1 and 6 established that *Early Bird* teachers should conduct their classes “by applying a specific methodology” and also “plan and develop differentiated activities with the students, linked to the project’s pedagogical proposal” (São Paulo, 2014b):

From the academic year of 2014 onwards, the Early Bird Project is established with the *aim of introducing the teaching of the English language into the curriculum of the early years of Primary Education, through the application of a specific methodology*. This will enable students to use *various strategies* to advance in the learning of the language, acquiring basic content and gaining the ability to continue improving their learning in the years of Middle level (São Paulo, 2014b, emphasis added, our translation).

Additionally, it was determined that only teachers who had “[...] availability to participate in the specific training, planning, and evaluation process of the Project” (São Paulo, 2014b) could work in it. These training activities were supposed to take place “[...] both in school units and at the central and regional levels, on pre-defined days, locations, and schedules” (São Paulo, 2014b) established by the SEE-SP. Teachers who had already been working in the program since 2013 could only continue to do so if they had “[...] participated in the training offered by this Department of Education” (São Paulo, 2014b). Following the same path, Resolution SE 43 of August 5, 2014, continued to enforce the provisions established in the previous resolutions, still without any mention of university involvement in the stages of project implementation or execution (São Paulo, 2014a).

In this way, considering the mandatory nature of teachers’ participation in specific training processes, there seems to have been initially “[...] a concern with the training of the teachers responsible for the English language classes in the Primary School of the São Paulo State Public School System” (Lima, 2016, p. 659) on the part of SEE-SP. Indeed, this configuration remained in the *Early Bird Project* until the end of 2014

when, in a longitudinal analysis of the case (Assis, 2018), other elements were identified regarding the paths taken by the program, including modifications to the Dutch training framework. This path will be problematized below from a Bourdieusian perspective of the *field*.

Alternative Route or Disruptions in the Game of Teacher Education?

To exercise the relational thinking of Pierre Bourdieu's *concept of field* proposed in this specific case of the *Early Bird Project*, we propose analyzing teacher education as a game, in which the positions of the agents can be considered in a triangulation scheme defined by Sarti (2012) as the "teacher education triangle."

In this triangle, each vertex is occupied by an agent (player) of the teacher education game, establishing their position always in relation to others and to themselves according to the value of their capital. The positions of the agents, just like in a game, are not permanent but are reconfigured through changes in the value of the contested capitals and the ways in which they are distributed. In this game, the vertices of the triangle have historically been represented by "teachers and the entities that represent them; universities, foundations, and research institutes with their experts; and the government, represented by education departments and other administrative bodies" (Sarti, 2012, p. 329), and the relationships they establish configure different models of teacher education.

It is important to highlight that throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the *illusio*, in Bourdieu's sense (2003a), of the teacher education game - what mobilizes it and gives it value - has been anchored in the need for teachers to receive specific education for the teaching profession. However, this recognition of the need for teacher education emerged late and through a long and discontinuous process, with its earliest initiatives in the late 18th century, with the French revolutionaries of the 1794 Convention, as indicated by Butlen (2014).

This process of producing specific teacher education has taken on new contours in recent decades with the emergence of an international political movement focused on teacher professionalism (Tardif, 2013, p. 561), which envisions changing the status of teaching to a "profession in its entirety", that is, a profession based on legitimate scientific knowledge acquired through high-level university education and updated through "continuous improvement" (Tardif, 2013, p. 558), which, from the perspective of the NPM embraced by *reformers*, aims primarily to increase school and teacher effectiveness. Thus, for teaching to achieve the status of a profession and, in turn, for teachers to be recognized as professionals, their education has been university-led, entrusted to universities and other academic institutions.

In this context, whether as a "site of actual education" (Sarti, 2012, p. 328) or as an "instance of producing more sophisticated and esoteric

knowledge about teaching, learning, and even about teachers themselves” (Sarti, 2012, p. 328), the university has taken a central role in the teacher professionalism movement, both nationally and internationally, assuming prominence in the educational models directed towards them (Holmes Group, 1995; Nóvoa, 1999). For this reason, the absence of the university in the implementation process of the TEYL classes in the public schools of São Paulo caught our attention.

On this topic, Zeichner (2013) explains that, contrary to the movement towards teacher professionalism, the exclusion of universities from teacher education programs has gradually become an international trend, gaining strength as the state becomes less obliged to invest in educational policies for teacher education (Sousa Santos, 2011). Through the “magic of official nomination” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 114), the state has delegated control of the training processes to entities that are sometimes external to the educational field.

Indeed, actions like these have been intensifying since the final decades of the 20th century and are part of a larger process that Sousa Santos (2011) defines as three crises currently affecting universities: the crisis of hegemony, which removes from the university the responsibility for its educational processes, transferring them to external agents in actions deliberately carried out by the government itself; the crisis of legitimacy, in which the state excludes the university from participating in the construction of public policies, justifying that it is incapable of training teachers integrated into the real demands of society; and the institutional crisis, which occurs when the university, “due to the consequent financial drying up and decapitalization” (Sousa Santos, 2011, p. 8), finds itself succumbing to market-driven and business-oriented criteria of effectiveness and productivity, heavily fueled by the state, which decides to significantly reduce its commitment to investment in educational policies.

In the case of *Early Bird*, which we are focusing on here, these processes identified by Zeichner (2013) and Sousa Santos (2011) can be observed when, contrary to the more conventional structures of the teacher education triangle, the state (represented here by SEE-SP) favors the entry of an outsider (the Dutch Center) into the teacher education game, authorizing them to be part of the regularization and implementation of this public policy to the detriment of the participation of universities. And to make this new institutional arrangement viable, SEE-SP used legitimate discursive strategies within the educational field and that are also justified in two other related fields: the scientific and the economic (Assis, 2018).

Concerned with justifying the presence of the outsider, SEE-SP evoked, during the project’s opening ceremony in 2013, broadcasted by Rede do Saber, studies in linguistic education that discuss methods and approaches in the process of learning an additional language in childhood. According to the data collected in Assis (2018), SEE-SP’s arguments advocate the need or advantage of learning a new language

“[...] to the extent that you are becoming literate in the mother tongue” (verbal information, 2016). According to the former deputy secretary at the time, the interaction between the mother tongue and the additional language during literacy can “even facilitate” (verbal information, 2013) learning or “[...] at least that’s what studies and research show at the international level” (verbal information, 2013). Thus, by hiring the Dutch Center, SEE-SP presents the method proposed by them as the best alternative for the São Paulo State Public School System since, being oral, the method would not interfere “in the teaching of the mother tongue” (verbal information, 2013) and would be “adaptable to any context and reality” (verbal information, 2013).

The economic arguments used to justify the presence of the outsider in the project relate the implementation of the TEYL discipline to the neoliberal discourse of globalization, which often focuses on the language learning of children in relation to their future professional careers and, consequently, their potential success in the job market. During the ceremony, the then Secretary of Education of SEE-SP stated that “The introduction of TEYL aims to prepare children for a world where English is increasingly present as the language of communication” (verbal information, 2013) or “Those who do not master English today have difficulty even being able to work on the internet. And the sooner our children start to master the English language, the better” (verbal information, 2013). In this context, the idea that a foreign country, “a reference in teaching a foreign language from early childhood” (verbal information, 2013), would act and assist the São Paulo state system proves to be promising and justifiable.

Thus, justified by the presence of the outsider by the SEE-SP, the absence of universities in the training offered to teachers was considered by Lima (2016), as mentioned earlier, as indicative of a possible *alternative route* of teacher education (Zeichner, 2013). The situation seemed to suggest yet another indication that significant changes were occurring in the configurations of the training models indicated in the teacher education triangle proposed by Sarti (2012). However, the analysis of the participants’ testimonies - whether through documentary sources resulting from the transcriptions of the videoconferences in 2015 and 2016 or those collected through semi-structured interviews in 2017 - points to another path of interpretation.

What data do we have and What do they suggest?

Among the collected data from the transcriptions of videoconferences held by CEFAI on the virtual platform of SEE-SP Rede do Saber, as well as the interviews with teachers involved in the project, some aspects have drawn our attention, providing more evident clues about the role (or lack thereof) of the different traditionally involved entities in the disputes concerning teacher education (Sarti, 2012), and furthermore, about the impacts of these disputes on the very illusion that guides and gives meaning to them.

During the videoconferences, as mentioned earlier, with the aim of informing and updating the new teachers of the project about the “Dutch methodology” (verbal information, 2015), SEE-SP conducted sessions in 2015 on “good practices” (verbal information, 2015) in TEYL classes. When the session was opened for audience questions, some teachers raised concerns about the lack of educational materials that were supposed to be provided by RUAS and the absence of guiding documents or resources for the project’s development. According to these teachers, the lack of clear information about the foreign methodology made them feel “very insecure” (verbal information, 2015) in continuing with the project. Additionally, another significant obstacle mentioned by the teachers was “how to develop a system and how far they could go with the students” (verbal information, 2015), in accordance with the required methodology. According to the teachers, it was necessary to establish a framework of content and expectations for the classes and for each age group.

In the 2016 videoconference held by SEE-SP, nearly a year after the previous one and three years after the project’s implementation, it was announced that the *Early Bird Project* would no longer be a separate project but would be integrated as a regular and mandatory subject in the curriculum of schools that already had it. Based on the newly released resolution (São Paulo, 2016), SEE-SP informed in the videoconference that the partnership with the Dutch partner had ended and that the methodological specifics of the program would be made more flexible, although the Dutch framework would still serve as a guideline for organizing the classes. In this context of partnership termination, the position of a supervising teacher drew our attention when she stated, “[...] only at this moment, I become aware that the classes are tied to this methodology” (verbal information, 2016). The supervisor’s lack of knowledge about the organization of TEYL classes suggests that teachers, coordinators, and supervisors involved in the project still had limited information about it even in 2016. Consequently, some coordinators participating in the videoconference also questioned how they should instruct their teachers without specific materials and necessary information, as this precarious situation could lead to the “failure of the project” (verbal information, 2016).

Based on these initial observations, we conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and former teachers of the *Early Bird Project* between October and December 2017. The ten interviewed teachers worked in different schools within the São Paulo State Public School System, located in six cities. These teachers had been involved in various stages of the program: five of them joined the project in 2017 (Margot, Edna, Selena, Leandro, and Val), two in 2016 (João and Valentina), one in 2015 (Diana), and two in 2014 (Kelli and Aurora). Through these interviews, our aim was to expand and deepen the data obtained from the videoconferences. Therefore, the teachers answered questions such as, “Have you ever heard of the name *Early Bird*?”, “Are you aware that the English classes are based on a Dutch methodology called Early

Bird?”, or “Have you participated in any training regarding the *Early Bird Project*?” The analysis of these interviews allowed us to further investigate.

It was observed that the teachers who recently joined the project in 2017 experienced a situation quite different from that of the other interviewees. When they began their work in TEYL classes, the project had already been terminated, and the training activities for the teachers had not taken place for over a year. Hence, our intention in approaching them was to understand if and in what ways the premises of the *Early Bird* proposal were still present in the São Paulo system. Among the five teachers interviewed in 2017, only one, Margot, claimed to have no knowledge of the *Early Bird Project*. The other teachers who joined after 2017 were aware of the existence of a guiding methodology for the classes, but they provided divergent information about how they became aware of the proposal and what they actually knew about it. For example, teachers Edna and Selena discovered that the TEYL classes were supposed to follow a specific methodological approach only when they started working in the school. In Edna’s case, the coordinator informed her that the classes should be conducted according to the *Early Bird* methodology: “oral, playful, and without written activities” (Edna, interview, 2017). Similarly, Selena learned about a different approach through the school secretary, who informed her that the classes should be conducted “only in English and without writing” (Selena, interview, 2017).

The fourth teacher who joined the project in 2017, Val, was familiar with the term *Early Bird* and was informed that the project “was created by the Department of Education for some schools” (Val, interview, 2017). However, she stated that she had received no further information beyond the project’s name, and thus she said, “I designed it myself, and since I was the one who created the project, I determined in the lesson plan the learning situations and how I would develop them” (Val, interview, 2017). The last teacher who joined in 2017, Leandro, was aware of the *Early Bird Project* and had also been informed about its termination, although the TEYL classes still adhered to its principles. When asked about the methodology, the teacher responded:

It was conveyed to us that it is a project that aims to enhance English in the early years, starting from oral language, which doesn’t mean that you need to eliminate writing, just that you start from oral language and strive for immersion. That was basically it (Leandro, interview, 2017).

The two teachers who joined the project in 2016, Valentina and João, also had a similar situation to the 2017 newcomers. Both stated that they were not deeply familiar with the proposal, although they were informed by their school coordinators that it was a project called *Early Bird*:

Yes, that name was mentioned, but initially, I didn’t receive much information. They told me that there was a project called *Early Bird*, which I already knew existed in the school because I was already working here,

and they summarized it as 'English classes for young children'. They also told me it was something playful. When I started, I talked to the English teacher who was already teaching in the project and asked her how she used to conduct these classes (Valentina, interview, 2017).

In interviews, Professor João reported, "I don't know the proposal. All I know is that I have to have the 30 minutes of immersion. I can't skip the dynamics, and there can't be any writing or any type of record, with the focus being on oral communication" (João, interview, 2017). Both João and Valentina did not participate in any training offered by the school district.

Regarding the teacher who joined in 2015, Diana (interview, 2017), when asked about the project, she stated that she received "superficial information from the coordination." According to her, the information was about "[...] a playful project for children, and that I had to have fluent English proficiency to work with the children, and that was all I was told" (Diana, interview, 2017). Since she joined in 2015, when the project was still ongoing, we asked her if she received any guiding materials, resources, or portfolios: "I didn't receive any resources, so I build the lessons myself" (Diana, interview, 2017). She also mentioned that she did not participate in any training provided by the school district.

The case of the two teachers who joined the project in 2014, Kelli and Aurora, had some specificities. They were the only ones, among those interviewed, who actually participated in some form of *Early Bird* training. Both had been involved in the project in their schools when they were called to attend the training held at EFAP in 2014. Teacher Kelli informed us that she had previously received *Early Bird* documents from the coordination: "They were specific materials from *Early Bird*, all in PDF format. From these materials, I extracted what would work in my daily school routine and adapted it for my students" (Kelli, interview, 2017). On the other hand, teacher Aurora did not receive any specific *Early Bird* materials and reported that it was only after the training at EFAP that she began to understand what she considered the methodological principle of the project: "You can't speak Portuguese with the students, only English" (Aurora, interview, 2017).

In this context, after analyzing the documentary and empirical data gathered by the research, it seems possible to affirm that gradually, the presence of the Dutch outsider in the school district was erased. The partnership/consultancy announced in 2013 did not materialize in several aspects, including the lack of teaching materials, the absence of guiding documents and methodological support, and, most importantly, the absence of training opportunities for teachers. What was left for the Dutch agent to do? The longitudinal analysis of the *Early Bird* implementation process suggests that the São Paulo State Department of Education (SEE-SP) considered the inclusion of the European institute as a legitimizing element for its initiative to incorporate English language teaching into the São Paulo State Public School System. The symbolic value attributed by SEE-SP to this partnership with an outsider was so high that even after its termination, it could lend legitimacy

to subsequent actions related to English language teaching. The remnants of the partnership, with only a mere “methodological spectrum” (Assis, 2018) in the schools – a few scattered didactic-pedagogical recommendations attributed to the project, such as the focus on oral communication – would be enough to ensure the implementation of English language teaching in the curriculum.

For the TEYL teachers in the São Paulo system, who lacked specific professional training to teach English to children and did not receive more systematic methodological guidance, the only recourse left was trial-and-error to face the challenge assigned to them. When asked about the didactic-pedagogical procedures they adopted in class, they explained, “By instinct” (Kelli, interview, 2017), “I manage with the available materials I have” (Valentina, interview, 2017), “I prepared the materials, but there are many children in the classroom, and I had no idea where to start” (Margot, interview, 2017), “I was very afraid to work, but I had to develop these classes somehow. My confidence came from my knowledge of the language, and I think that’s already very important” (João, interview, 2017), or “I felt a bit apprehensive about the children. It wasn’t related to the language, methodology, or anything like that, it was about the audience” (Leandro, interview, 2017). For some of the teachers, the difficulties were compounded by the concern to remain faithful to the initial project:

My insecurity is about the lack of training to work with this project, which leads me to rely on the information I have acquired through my practice. We don’t have any training other than what our coordinator and the PCNP from the education department have provided us with. We haven’t been trained for this project (Diana, interview, 2017).

The gradual exclusion of teacher training initiatives in the *Early Bird Project* became a source of anguish for the interviewed teachers. In their testimonies, terms such as “terrified”, “frustrated”, “lost”, “apprehensive”, and “scared” were recurrent in explaining how they felt facing the responsibility of teaching TEYL classes in the São Paulo State Public School System (Assis, 2018). They all showed willingness and interest in participating in training activities: “I believe it would be crucial to have some lectures or workshops at the beginning of the year” (Valentina, interview, 2017), or as Selena stated (interview, 2017):

No, I didn’t receive specific training, but I would have liked to. I think it’s important to develop a different perspective on the project, not just dive into it without any guidance. I would actually be interested in undergoing that kind of training, and if it were available, I would definitely participate.

The lack of mobilization by SEE-SP regarding training activities for TEYL teachers, contrary to what initially seemed, indicates that the Secretariat was not interested in establishing *alternative routes* (Zeichner, 2013) for teacher education. In a more radical move, even the *illusio* that drives this space was called into question: the need for specific education for teaching. From a Bourdieusian perspective, it is the

illusio that ensures the agents' adherence to the game, being "bound to the game, bound by the game, believing that the game is worth it" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 140). Thus, the apparent ataraxia of SEE-SP in the face of teachers' specific knowledge for the introduction of TEYL in the São Paulo State schools acted towards suspending the game of teacher education.

However, the gathered data suggest that the teachers remained, perhaps due to a hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 2005), in the game, demanding the training they considered necessary to work in the TEYL discipline in the São Paulo System. Despite the "methodological spectrum", which made increasingly faint references to the influences of the Dutch program, the teachers acknowledged that they lacked specific professional knowledge to work with children. They considered this to be a problem to be addressed through specific and valuable training. However, their demands, echoed in the interviews conducted, were not able to affect the emerging scenario. As Sarti (2012, p. 332) explains, in Brazil, teachers have been occupying the "place of the dead" in the game of teacher training, "a passive reference for the other players", showing their cards but not having enough capital to effectively interfere in the course of actions, as is the case here.

Thus, it seems possible to assert that the scenario that emerged in that case - the São Paulo version of the *Early Bird Project* - points to a certain emptying of disputes over teacher education for TEYL. In this process, the State - represented by SEE-SP - hinted at the implementation of an *alternative route* of teacher education (Zeichner, 2013) by leveraging its metacapitals - "[...] with power over other types of capital and their holders" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 99) - in the game of teacher education, excluding universities and introducing an outsider into the context. In this scenario, if the outsider had indeed remained in the São Paulo State Public School System as a trainer and SEE-SP continued to carry out the series of training activities it had announced, albeit sporadic and disconnected, they could have constituted indications that SEE-SP was promoting a kind of *alternative route* of teacher education, as suggested by Lima (2016). However, through a certain sleight of hand, SEE-SP subverted the logic of the game, challenging the need for training - the *illusio* that guides it - thus failing to recognize the value of the dispute (Bourdieu, 1976) and, therefore, the game itself - as it removed both universities and the insinuated "alternative route" from the project.

Thus, the *Early Bird* case explored here, by revealing certain ruptures in the game of teacher education, offers elements for the discussion of broader processes that have been affecting other established disputes in the educational field and, consequently, their future developments.

Some final thoughts, seeking to conclude

The possibilities of rupture in the game of teacher education, discussed in this article based on the *Early Bird* case, have direct implications for the two interrelated movements in the educational field: the professionalization of teaching (Bourdoncle, 1990; 2007; Tardif, 2013) and the university integration of teacher education (Bourdoncle, 2007; Sarti, 2012). It is known that historically, the path of professionalizing teaching has been marked by “[...] continuities, deviations, setbacks, and temporary advances” (Tardif, p. 553, 2013), facing numerous difficult obstacles for its stability, such as the precarious working conditions of teachers in schools. The case discussed here reveals another one of these obstacles: by assuming a reformative perspective, as anticipated by Zeichner (2013), SEE-SP breaks with the *illusio* of the teacher education game and, thus, with the complicity historically established with other players, teachers, and education instances (Sarti, 2012), and therefore with the game itself (a fundamental element in the professionalization of teaching, according to Bourdoncle, 1990).

As mentioned earlier, teachers have traditionally occupied the “place of the dead” in the game of their education (Sarti, 2012), while throughout the 20th century, the place occupied by universities gradually gained power. However, this configuration is being altered, as in the case of *Early Bird*, due to actions undertaken by the “right hand of the State” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 9) that subvert capitals legitimate to the university and accentuate its crises (Sousa Santos, 2011). By losing financial capital and institutional prestige (Cruz; Souza, 2020), the university may be on the verge of becoming the new agent to assume the “place of the dead” (Sarti, 2012) in the game of teacher education - through the establishment of *alternative routes* of education (Zeichner, 2013), from the perspective of de-university integration (Bourdoncle, 2009), or, in a more definitive outcome, through the dissolution of the teacher education game. Faced with this more radical possibility, we must question: what reactions will the university take? And what impact will it have on the process of professionalizing teaching? Regarding the case focused here, we are informed that in October 2020, a group composed of university researchers, basic education teachers, and language students from all over Brazil released the manifesto “A Educação Linguística na Infância: em Defesa do Direito à Formação Cidadã e à Aprendizagem” (Rocha; Tonelli; Santos; Gattolin, 2020) through the YouTube⁵ platform, which, among other demands, calls for urgent public policies that recognize the importance of institutionalizing language teaching in the early years of schooling nationwide, officially recognizing “the courses of Language and Literature and their respective specializations as responsible for the linguistic-pedagogical education of professionals who will work in the teaching of additional languages in the early years of schooling” and establishing “fruitful dialogues between public authorities, universities, and schools to enable ways of meeting future demands more effectively” (Rocha; Tonelli; Santos; Gattolin, 2020, para. p.).

The manifesto seems to point towards an attempt to strengthen/restore the *illusio* of the teacher education game, thus preserving its viability. Through it, the university and school teachers form an alliance that is not common in the history of teacher education. They indicate possibilities for the emergence of another model of teacher education, with professional contours, resulting from the union “between two vertices of the training triangle – school teachers and university professors – that historically have maintained fragile connections” (Sarti, 2012, p. 334). This maneuver allows us to consider, with risky optimism in the face of such an adverse scenario, that the direct involvement of school teachers in the issue of teacher education, making efforts, even for its subsistence, brings an important counterpoint to the more conventional configuration of the teacher education game (Sarti, 2012), marking a position (Nóvoa, 2017) on the part of these teachers. Moving away from a position of passivity is a condition for teachers to increase control over the processes related to their work (Freidson, 1998) and, thus, move towards the professionalization of teaching (Bourdoncle, 2000).

In this sense, assuming that the game is still ongoing, we must question: what new moves in the game of teacher education (in TEYL and beyond) can we expect? What positions and strategies will its agents adopt? What new configurations for the game of teacher education? *Alea jacta est*.

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Notes

- 1 All data was collected in compliance with the procedures established by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), which approved the study. To preserve the participants' identity, they were identified using pseudonyms.
- 2 More information about Early Bird Dutch Center and its methodology can be accessed at: <https://www.earlybirdie.nl/>. It is worth noting that, according to the information available on the center's website, it is a private initiative that has been serving various educational systems and schools in the Netherlands since 2003, including universities, colleges, and publishers.
- 3 All data resulting from oral sources in this study, such as those collected at the project launch ceremony or in video conferences conducted by CEFAL and transmitted by the SEE-SP's Rede do Saber, as well as the data collected from research participants, are transcribed in Assis (2018).
- 4 According to Santos (2005), despite researchers' warning about the theoretical and methodological education gap of these teachers, the legislation remains unchanged to this day, and TEYL teachers continue to work in classrooms across Brazil, whether in private or public schools, without specific education for such.
- 5 The manifesto transmitted through YouTube can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gI1CEji8pk>.

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Emanuelle Perissotto de Assis holds a degree in Language and Literature from the São Paulo State University (UNESP), campus Araraquara, and a master's degree in Education from the same university, campus Rio Claro. Currently, she works as a Pedagogical Consultant at Artbee Educacional (Centro Universitário Belas Artes – São Paulo).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8530-9749>

Email: emanuellep.assis@gmail.com

Flavia Medeiros Sarti has a Ph.D. in Education from the University of São Paulo (USP) and a postdoctoral degree from the University of Cergy-Pontoise, France. She is a faculty member in the Department of Education at São Paulo State University (UNESP), Rio Claro campus.

ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-2926-5873

Email: flavia.sarti@unesp.br

Editor in charge: Fabiana de Amorim Marcello

