

## **EXTENSION OF FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION: WHICH DEMANDS DOES IT ANSWER? WHICH RULES DOES IT FOLLOW? WHICH RATIONALITIES DOES IT CORRESPOND TO?**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the present text is to analyze, based on a set of official documents and under a Foucauldian perspective, how the nine-year fundamental education (and the new curriculum organization implied by it) has become an emblematic effect of a process of “change in emphases” (Saraiva, Veiga-Neto, 2009) about the types of rationality guiding the social practices focused on small children. To this end, the article initially shows in what manners other “changes in emphases” have been operated in different national contexts. That is to say, based on works by Hultqvist (1998) and Baker (1998), the text describes how profound modifications have been carried out in Sweden and in the USA, respectively, concerning the care of, and service to, pre-school children, as well as in the proposal, and even in the form of organization, of early childhood schooling. Next, and taking those authors as its basis, the analytical discussion centers on three fundamental topics: firstly, we describe the seizure of childhood in the name of something that is denominated and presented under the aegis of *quality*; next (and following from it), we turn our attention to the relation between the State and the concept of *project-child* (a relation wherefrom springs a formula of ideal-child – ideal-society) and, lastly, we deal with the concept of *capable-child* as a discourse object that emerges simultaneously from the space left by the logic of rescue (Baker, 1998) and from the reciprocally constitutive tensions between early childhood education and fundamental education.

**Keywords:** Extended fundamental education – Childhood – Governmentality – Early childhood education

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The enrolment of six-year-olds in fundamental education (and the consequent restructuring of early childhood education) has undeniably produced a series of effects in the ways of seeing this level of teaching and its practices, as well as calling us to think, once again, about the relations, tensions and challenges established *between* these two initial stages of basic education. *Education and Research* has challenged authors to analyze a significant group of frictions that resulted from these new legal and institutional arrangements, prompting us to write this essay, in which we propose to discuss the wider logics to which such changes respond. In view of that, we asked ourselves how and to what ends these documents replicate long-standing tensions in field of child education (about the relations between care and education, about the specificities of each age, and about the dilemmas of early literacy, among others).

We took as material for analyses a group of publications by the Ministry for Education on the Nine-Year Fundamental Education (NYFE), with special attention to the following documents 1) *Ensino de nove anos: orientações gerais* (Nine-year education: general guidelines); 2) *Ampliação do ensino de nove anos: relatório do Programa* (Extension of the nine-year education: Program report); 3) *3º relatório do Programa: Ampliação do ensino de nove anos* (3<sup>rd</sup> Program report: extension of the nine-year education); 4) *Ensino fundamental de nove anos: orientação para a inclusão da criança de 6 anos de idade* (Nine-year fundamental education: guidelines for the inclusion of six-year-olds); 5) *Ensino fundamental de nove anos: passo a passo do processo de implantação* (Nine-year fundamental education: implementation process step-by-step).

In methodological terms, and following a Foucauldian theoretical framework, we shall proceed to a discourse analysis of these documents. As understood by the French philosopher, the concept of discourse does not relate so much to the act of speech as to an element that produces practices and subjects, that is, we assume the concept of discourse in its quality as a constitutor of that which it itself refers to. We understand, therefore, that analyzing the discourses refers to accounting for the precise relations between words and things; it means to capture within the documental fabric under investigation the regularities, the recurrences, and the nuances of the meanings of the subjects (child, teacher) and of the concepts constituted therein. It can be said, thus, that analyzing the documents under this perspective implies understanding them in their singularity and, simultaneously to understand them as documents that, alone, “invent” nothing. Above that, it is important here to show the way in which they

follow a few historical rules, affirm truths of the present, and reveal relations of power and knowledge that reverberate today within the social fabric.

Under such perspective, our intent is of showing the manner in which these documents function, at the same time, as orienting materials of a public policy and as drivers of wider discourses. We analyze the conditions through which the strategies of action (understood as *government practices*) proposed by the mentioned documents are supported not by what would be linearly “better” and/or “more adequate” to the children, but, above all, by specific forms of managing, conducting, and organizing the children themselves, their families, teachers and the school. Thus, the objective of this text is to analyze on the basis of set of materials how the nine-year fundamental education (and the new curriculum organization implicated by it) becomes an emblematic effect of a process of “change in emphases” (Saraiva, Veiga-Neto, 2009) about the types of rationality that orient the social practices today.

For that, at first, we situate in what terms other “changes in emphases” were operated within other national contexts. In other words, we show based on the works of Hultqvist (1998) and Baker (1998) how in Sweden and in the USA, respectively, profound modifications in the care and service of young children took place, as well as in the proposal and form of organization of early childhood education – precisely because such proposals, each one in its own way, set gradually in motion different logics of thinking and of attributing responsibilities to the State, family, and to the child (herself) for the education of pre-school subjects. At the closure of our discussion, we resume briefly the Foucauldian concepts of governing, governmentality, and rationality, understood here as tools that allow us to describe and even operate with and upon the official texts.

In a second moment, we move to the analysis of the documents, and show the parallel lives of *two* distinct logics about the child and her education. We point out as foci of such analyses the formulations that refer to the State and its responsibilities and, above all to the tensions put in action and reactivated therein – for example, as to the organization of times and spaces, to the expansion of the meanings of “learning”, to the dyad care/education, to the (de)legitimization of education in early childhood as a role of the State and/or the family (where, once again, that which belongs to the order of the private becomes or turns toward the question of social and public management). Lastly, we observe in the analysis of the materials that they concentrate in them a series of questions that for many years have been permeating the discussion, particularly in the field of early childhood education. However, and

paradoxically, this happens through a material that guides the process of extension of one year of fundamental education. We therefore ask ourselves: what do these tensions put in play? What zones of indistinguishability are produced there (it is early childhood education, but it is not; it is fundamental education, but it is not)? What borders are here blurred, and in the name of what? Or, still, in the name of what exactly, and precisely now, are these tensions being reactivated?

At the end we describe clues that indicate in what way the extension of fundamental education is committed to a change, say, in the matrix of intelligibility that gives meaning to the relations between fundamental education and early childhood education. In this manner we ask: what does this suggest in terms of new questions, new directions, new perspectives? Without attempting to draw precise contours to the ideas outlined from the analysis of the documents that we took as the corpus of analysis here, we can, to a certain extent, affirm that the search for understanding the mechanisms through which the subjective constitution is produced in our days is to us one of the possible ways to cast an eye – perhaps a more suspicious, more restless one – upon the most simple and daily practices that permeate the space of education.

### **The child as a project, society as an end: narratives of pre-school education<sup>1</sup> in Sweden and in the USA**

Understanding the way in which child and childhood have been thought in culture implies necessarily situating them within broader discussions at a given time. This assertion is certainly based on very clear assumptions: the child and the childhood corresponding to it are not preexistent, nor do they exist in isolation. However clear this statement might seem, we would like from the start to bring to the forefront the dynamics that support it. In other words, we want to bring to the forefront the fact that asking about the concepts of child and childhood means to ask how they are conceived, to which alliances do they answer, and which other concepts does it connect with?

Thus we can say that such movement relates to an equally methodological process of thinking and acting upon the materials to be analyzed. Understanding child and childhood today involves describing, to some extent, historical movements in an attempt to locate discontinuities – or what can be translated into the question: how and in what form, at some

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<sup>1</sup> We have adopted the terminology “pre-school” only to be faithful to the original nomenclature employed by the authors.

moments in the history of pre-school education, did ruptures operated upon the ways of thinking the child and her education? It is, therefore, important to locate new surfaces of emergence with respect to the practices of infantilization – or that which, in its turn, can be translated into the question: what concepts of child and childhood emerge, come into existence, and how do they take on new aspects at given historical moments?

For that, it is interesting to bring to the debate some of the transformations that occurred in the way that the pre-school child is conceived within other geographical, and also historical, contexts. Bringing such experiences into play means understanding the discursive dynamics put in action in order to turn the child and her education, all at once, a target for control, an object of knowledge and a subject of discourses. In order to situate these experiences amidst the analyses that we shall make (in this case, about official Brazilian documents), we will make here an *interested* choice for two narratives on pre-school education: the first by Kenneth Hultqvist from Sweden, and the other by Bernadette Baker from the USA. By *interested* we do not mean inducing, but solely that from these reports we deliberately extract precise discussions which were already heralded, to a greater or lesser degree, by the materials that we analyze here. If in Hultqvist's case our emphasis shall lie upon the questions of language and its relation to the process of describing the child, childhood, family, and State, in Baker's analyses we turn our attention to the way in which "rescue practices" (moral, intellectual, and economic) are built aiming at the small children.

In *A history of the present on children's welfare in Sweden: from Fröbel to present-day decentralization projects*, Kenneth Hultqvist (1998), inspired by the themes of governmentality developed by Foucault, proposes to point out a change in the discourses about child and modern childhood in Sweden as a consequence of the decentralization of a political rationality. Drawing support from Nikolas Rose, the author understands "political rationality as the different means through which political reason tries to insert itself in the world as a practice" (Hultqvist, 1998, p. 92). The idea is that the exercise of power is always accompanied by an attitude towards the object of power (a *mentality*, or a *rationality*). Historically, a rationality articulates the exercise of a power to the need of knowledge about what must be governed: a child, a family, an economy, a society.

Hultqvist, in this effort to situate the discourses about child and childhood, says that the "pre-school child" is a product of a way to conduct her which is inscribed within a rationality of power that establishes her affiliation both to the world of culture and to the world of nature. That, however, is present under profound variations that express themselves

in changes of emphasis and in the weight given to these “fundamentals” in different moments in the history of pre-school education in Sweden. The author then highlights three references for his discussion of the shifting discourses that constituted the children in his country: the Fröebelian child of the pioneering experiences with the kindergartens, the child seen as a psychobiological being from the 1930s to the 1970s, and the capable child of the 1970s onwards.

The implantation of kindergartens was associated to a group of social reforms initiated in that country mainly from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: those of the elementary schooling, of the expansion of welfare and psychiatric institutions, of the temperance and workers movements, and those promoted by the organizations of the Evangelic Church. All of them, by producing countless practices, albeit with different objectives, had in common a new (more liberal) way of conceiving the relation between individuals and society: an autonomous individual in relation to his individual life, but also strongly committed to the organization of social and community life. That was the matrix from which the model of the welfare society was created.

Fröebel’s ideas at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century had success do to the emergent governmentality; they functioned as regulatory ideals in relation to the way of governing children from a “natural” point of view, reinforcing the belief in development as a natural process and in the inherent child kindness. The *kindergarten*, seen as a program of social remediation, would have as its objective to reorganize the souls of the children for the demands of a new era. New principles to reorganize the family originated in this program, and were put in practice with the help of the children, but aiming indirectly at mobilizing the community. This was made through a strategy of regulated freedom, whose goal was to guide and develop the actions of free individuals, allowing the management of souls and of social relations.

That child was a blueprint, a plan for a new era, for a reality to be built; as renovator of the race, it would be a landmark in human development. The author emphasizes convergences and intersections between the moral discourse of the pioneers and that of psychology, connecting moral language and technical language.

From the 1930s onwards, there was a growing demand for the modernization of the discourse on the kindergarten; the old order should be replaced by a new deity: the

psychobiological order. Alva Myrdal<sup>2</sup>, in a book on city children (1934), calls for a rational upbringing of a scientific basis. A new language takes shape, and themes such as *child development* and *adolescence crises* begin to be seen as referring to processes susceptible to intervention. Whilst issues such as values and ethics were associated to the political field, the social sciences were regarded as neutral instruments of change, an art of social engineering. The *social engineers*, endowed with a universal knowledge, should calculate and regulate the social, economic, and moral affairs, and a new language opened space for the rational governing of individuals, of family and population. By the 1960s, the Piagetian discourses emphasized the importance of infantile activity, seeing the child as co-responsible for his/her development, and the teacher as an active agent capable of guiding and influencing the actions of that developing being. Until the 1970s the child was the universal child; since then, the borders between nature and environment have been blurred.

Whilst Alva Myrdal's book emphasized the context with constant references to the social changes, a testimony of the 1970s, in the *Relatório sobre Centros Infantis* (Report on Child Centers) such references are rare, almost obliterating the relations directly associated to the historical context. The child in the *Report* is purely psychological, with no connections with society or history. Since children begin earlier to do innumerable things, more can be demanded from them, they can receive greater responsibilities. This conceptual change inscribes the new political rationality into the practices of the individuals. Basically what the author call decentralization is a rationality of governing on the basis of the subjects' responsiveness. "This presupposes a subject that not only follows universal rules (the welfare subject), but also knows how to interpret them and apply them in relation to changeable circumstances or contexts (Hultqvist, 1998, p. 108).

Thus, the map of childhood is being drawn (by the researches on the child, by the way in which teachers are prepared by the way in which the pedagogical space of crèches and pre-schools is organized, a space that functions as a transmitter of concepts such as autonomy and self-fulfillment). The pre-school child relates, therefore, to the shifting rationalities of governing, without any necessary relations between the child of the *kindergarten* and the pre-school children of today.

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<sup>2</sup> The author highlights the role of social scientists in the processes of change in the 1930s and 1940s Sweden, represented by the Myrdal couple (Gunnar and Alva) and by the creation of the *Population Committee* and of the *Investigation about the population*, and by her work entitled *The crisis of the population issue of 1934*.

On the other hand, one can say that it is in a perspective of suspicion about the modes of operation of the relations between childhood and schooling (as stable categories) that Bernadette Baker's analysis about the schooling process in the USA is directed. That is the reason why the author is interested in showing the way in which schooling and childhood can be taken as classification systems, and as social practices that are mutually reinforcing or, furthermore, are mutually *supporting*. Therefore, instead of taking the child as given (or as data), it is important to the author to show how she is a continuously produced concept, in this case by the public school movement in the USA. This analysis is relevant here precisely because it indirectly brings us to the following question: what (concept of) child are we, after all, talking about when the issue is schooling?

The understanding about the child – morally vulnerable, dependant – establishes the childhood, at the same time, as a period of life that necessitates protection and as a state of waiting for adult responsibilities – it is exactly from this apparently simple, yet complex, relation that the singularity of the illuminist notion of childhood stems. In the USA, “histories about the simultaneous emergence of modern childhood and of common schooling fall initially within the field of psychohistory” (Baker, 1998, p. 119). In a first moment, it is important to understand that, among other factors, it is this notion of childhood that allows the emergence of schooling – and it is the emergence of schooling that allows, say, the “refinement” of the concept of child. Thus, understanding one presupposes understanding the other.

Among the most important elements to understand such relations within the psychohistorical context of schooling in the USA, the so-called “ideology of rescue” (Schnel *apud* Baker, 1998) deserves special attention. It is a concept that permeates the school and even its reason for being: by conceiving the child as an innocent, but vulnerable, subject it creates a logic based on which it becomes necessary to proceed, in one way or another, to a *rescue* of these subjects. Initially, we talk about a rescue focused on guaranteeing the separation or division adult/child (to steer the latter away from the risks of the former's world). However, the very notion of rescue cannot be seen as immutable. In the USA, particularly at the turn from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it undergoes profound changes, taking on broader contours and, thus, relating to other strategies, now more focused on the government of the rising middle class.

In this context, “child as rescue” involves (and is involved with) new meanings, precisely because it relates to broader dynamics: one deals now with *economic* rescue, *moral*



rescue, *intellectual* rescue. Indeed, it does not imply the mere substitution of one logic for another, but rather its reinforcement and even reorganization. To put it in another way, in the name of new outward looks, the concept of rescue acquires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century new and entangled meanings that eventually renew, albeit in different ways, the adult/child separation.

The activism of the American middle class mobilizes aspect so fundamental to the society of that time that its effects can be seen precisely in these notions of rescue, and of “child as rescue”: 1) economic rescue as inseparable from the social-economic development, from the increase in opportunities, and from social evolution. The romantic notion of child allied to the notion of childhood as a period of training acquires new meanings here; 2) moral rescue, supported by the preferences of a model of Protestant middle class that sees in the nuclear family the ideal and safe space for the formation of the desirable morality. Permeated by religious discourses, the practices of moral rescue ended up describing the child as a weak being, in need of permanent rescue; 3) intellectual rescue implies, first of all, “believing in the necessity of intellectual salvation” (ibidem, p. 122). Childhood is here understood as a time in which intellectual abilities are inferior – and in order that they follow the direction of their improvement intervention is fundamental.

It is therefore as a result of these initial questions and in response to the challenges made by these two authors that, in the present article, the analysis of the materials is directed. Taking the Brazilian materials focused on the expansion of fundamental education we must ask: how can we think about such expansion amidst the operation of dynamics that tie the child to a larger concept of social engineering? In what way does the use of a specific language favor (and even promote) such bond? Or, still, is it possible to think about new images for the so-called “rescue practices”? How would they be implemented in the official texts?

We therefore intend, to some extent, to deal with an urgency pointed out by Baker (1998): “while much educational work flows around assumptions about children and their development, what is meant by being a ‘child’ is not debated” (p. 118). Thus, in the contact with the empirical material, we have tried to bring to the forefront the tensions existing in it and, above all, how the concept of child is constructed therefrom. How, and in the name of what, after all these changes upon the ways of thinking the relation between child and school are operated? And, lastly, answering to a higher premise of this kind of approach, we can still ask: *which demands does it answer? Which rules does it follow? Which rationalities does it correspond to?*

In view of these last questions, we should make a comment about the concept of rationality as it is employed throughout this section, permeating the whole discussion carried out here, and which appears as crucial for the analyses that follow. Michel Foucault, in his investigations about government, has taught us that he referred to the processes through which other people's conduct is directed. In opposition to a conception that identifies power to repression, the idea of government under a Foucauldian perspective is associated to mechanisms of incitement, of consorting, of seduction, in the exercise of power. It deals with power in its productive character, in its insinuating aspect, in the way the institutional capture operates on the individuals to make them respond adequately to the social imperatives. This idea of government also implies a set of power relations that do not emanate from a center, but are exercised in a network, coming from various places within the social spectrum.

At a point of virtual exhaustion of the studies about government processes – as a way of guiding other people's conduct – Michel Foucault turned to what he considered to be the objective of his work, the ways in which human beings become subjects and, in this transition, he offered us the concept of governmentality (Veiga-Neto, Traversini, 2009). “Governmentality can be described as the effort to create governable subjects through various techniques developed for the control, normalization, and molding of people's conduct” (Fimyar, 2009, p. 38). In this concept the relations between the State government and the government of the self would be implied, building a bridge between the political field and that of morality. Thus, governmentality would explain the importance of school education for the fulfilling of the objectives of modern States.

The concept of governmentality is therefore crucial to understand how the articulations between state administration and the institutions of educative nature have been taking place. To the extent that laws, regulations, government guidelines, education institutions, and the specialized knowledges focused on childhood aim at producing certain manners of being, we notice how such purposes connect to a political rationality that runs through Modernity.

What seems central to us here is the amplitude that the very concept of government takes when it is articulated, and merged, by Foucault with that of mentality. In this perspective “governmentality arises as an activity distinct from the art of State government, which rationalizes the exercise of its power resorting to areas of Human and Social Sciences that become an integral part of the State itself” (Fimyar, 2009, p. 38). In this sense, one of the most important shifts executed by Foucault on the analytics of power becomes visible: it is

not the case of seeking in the institutions, in the figure of the State itself, the origin or explanation of the relations of power. To limit oneself to that discourse would mean, somehow, to speak of determinism and coercion (Foucault, 1995).

The rationalization of the exercise of power implied by the notion of governmentality can be situated within the scope of the constitution of modern States (late 18<sup>th</sup> century), corresponding to the imperative of the organization of population phenomena. The establishment of biopolitics has been destined to political management in order to guarantee the life of the social body. Among such biopolitics we could point out the dissemination of school education, its organization, its rules, its periodic reforms geared towards the emerging social imperatives.

What is meant here is that the forms in which we govern ourselves *emerge from* or *resonate in* the production of truth about the very role of the school, about education, about the State, about what is understood by a child. Therefore, to take notice of the ways in which we govern ourselves and are governed means, first of all, to take notice of the truths of our time, of our own existence. Or still, as Dean (*apud* Fimyar, 2009, p. 41) says, “we govern ourselves and the others by exercising our thinking on ‘what we regard as true’”. As a theoretical-methodological tool, analyzing official documents under the perspective of government is, therefore, in certain way, to accept the truth regimes that constitute us.

In this perspective, seeking to understand, to some extent, what is the rationality that orients the policies focused on the education of small children is the movement that we undertake next.

### **Childhood as project, one more year in fundamental education as an end: narratives of the child in Brazilian official documents**

Turning initially our attention to the description of how two countries (Sweden and the USA) operated significant transformations upon their ways of conceiving (and, therefore, educating) the pre-school child, our interest lies at this moment in thinking how, in Brazil, the emergence of a new discursive object is outlined: the early childhood education child, now a pupil at fundamental education. Thus, taking into account the specificities of each geographical context, such experiences allows us not to describe an equivalence of phenomena, but, rather, to point towards the strategic changes in the manner in which the alliances between the concept of child and the schooling processes are effected; the concept of child and the forms of management of family and society.

In that way, the movement of analyzing the official documents is built upon the way in which the concept of child is articulated in these materials, questioning to what extent and in which way around it strategies to manage, conduct, and even think about the child, the family, the State and society are produced. To deal adequately with these problems, our analytical discussion departs from three fundamental topics: initially, we describe the capture of childhood in the name of something that calls and presents itself under the effigy of *quality*; next (and following from it), we focus on the relation between State and the concept of *project-child* (a relation from which is born a ideal-child – ideal-society relation), and, lastly, we deal with the concept of *capable-child*, as the discursive object that emerges, at once, from the space left by the logic of rescue (Baker, 1998), in which are engendered mutually constitutive tensions between early childhood education and fundamental education.

To consider such topics implies, at the outset, to understand that the movement to implement the nine-year fundamental education has been justified by two main arguments, if we look closely at what the documents that we analyzed propose. The first is that the project imposes itself as a strategy to include six-year-olds in school – since in 2000 (according to the IBGE Census) only 81.7% of children at this age were in school, and 29.6% were already attending fundamental education<sup>3</sup> – and the other answers to the purpose, as advertised as it is obscure, of guaranteeing what has been called quality education. Therefore, the mottos of change in the structure of fundamental education revolve around two concepts widely employed today in the field of political, social, and educational debates: *inclusion* and *quality*.

This strategy of inclusion via advancing the access to school does, however, aim at more than that: by adopting an extended period of mandatory schooling, one is betting on the possibility of “contributing to change the school structure and culture” (*ibidem*), thereby becoming a trigger or igniter of innovative practices, of the construction of what is seen as a *school with social quality* through a movement of pedagogical renovation.

Thus, the initiative of extending the period of schooling for the children that start today in fundamental education would not just result in greater opportunities of being with other children and also of bigger opportunities to learn and in wider kinds of learning, but it would itself become the icon of a movement for the requalification of Brazilian school that would be reshaping itself amidst this restructuring. It can be seen here that, in these documents, conceiving quality is then inseparable from a concept of the child as someone

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<sup>3</sup> According to the official document, 81.7% of six-year-olds were in school, with 38.9% attending early childhood education, 13.6% attending literacy classes, and 29.6% already attending fundamental education, according to IBGE data collected by the 2000 Demographic Census (Brasil, 2004a, p. 17).

who must learn more, who must have more opportunities etc. It is not, of course, the case of being against this, but of showing how the working of such dynamics takes place. In other words, we understand that none of these concepts (either that of quality or that of child) can exist in isolation, or even *a priori* – but, rather, they only make sense when strongly related and in permanent support.

Still, and now turning to the second analytical topic, it is important to pay attention to the fact that this reform, which we have examined according to the texts that presented it, emphasizes its commitment to “the formation of a solidary, responsible citizenship, committed to the construction of a national project of social quality” (Brasil, 2004a, p. 13) and, along with that, it states that ensuring that the access, participation and permanence of everyone in school<sup>4</sup> “is a responsibility of all levels of government, of the Ministry for Education<sup>5</sup>, of state and municipal secretariats, and of civil society” (*ibidem*). In this sense, this reform of the education system can be characterized by what many call a work of *social engineering or management*, in a clear reference to the fact that there is here a deliberate effort to organize and conduct social experience towards useful ends. It is directed at the production of an *ideal child* to a new project of society (*project-child*). The use of a new vocabulary – children in situation of risk, social vulnerability... - highlights new modes of reasoning about the child that represent effects of power. They are discourses about children which, in this case, allow the constitution of a whole storyline of social and educational intervention, not just to guarantee what was seen as their right, but also to promote changes in the school structure and education system with the purpose of overcoming the historic deficits of the sector.

The short excerpt below indicates more clearly the purpose of turning the school into the engine of social transformation, the disseminating center not only of knowledge, but of new bases for social life:

The pedagogical renovation experienced by many Brazilian schools during the last years has transformed the school surroundings also in a school, that is, it is gestating the reconstruction of that old community. (Brasil, 2004a, p. 12)

The document *Ensino Fundamental de 9 anos – orientações gerais* [Nine-year Fundamental Education – general guidelines] (Brasil, 2004a), by reaffirming the need to

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<sup>4</sup> The 2001-2011 National Education Plan (PNE) establishes that fulfilling the goal of expanding fundamental education to nine years beginning at the age of six requires the initiative of the Union (Goal 2, chapter on fundamental education).

<sup>5</sup> According to the 9<sup>th</sup> Article of the LDB (Law of Guidelines and Bases), it is the responsibility of the Ministry for Education to establish, in collaboration with the states, municipalities and Federal Government, the competences and guidelines for basic education (Brasil, 2004a).

construct a Brazilian school with social quality, formulates questions to situate the six year old children that come to fundamental education: who is she, what moment does she live, what rights, interests and needs characterize her? This characterization aims at clarifying a profile of this *project-child* and at constituting a narrative about a desired childhood that is intended to be articulated in the project of society that was supposed to be implemented. This is made by creating a place for the children in their relation with the State: “to consider the specificity of the age group of the children means to recognize them as citizens, and therefore as owners of rights, among them a quality public education, protection, and care on the part of the public power” (Brasil, 2004a, p.22).

That is the reason why political utopias gain effect. The proposition of a new society implies changes in the concept of child, but also the reaffirming of marks/characteristics that need to be emphasized. This leads us to understand that the change of the education system favors, to a large extent, the emergence of a new discursive object: “the six year old children as new subjects of mandatory formal schooling” (Brasil, 2004a, no page). Adopting a Foucauldian perspective, this means to say that, in this condition, new looks and words are applied to the child, to her childhood and education – producing them in a different form, through needs, importance and cares which, likewise, “emerge” from it (apparently “natural”).

These movement can be observed not only at the level of the documents and laws, but above all as a function of that which they determine, conduct, orient, suggest, in other words, of that which is of the order of the (practical) effects they produce. To understand that the discursive objects are nothing but correlates of the practices (Foucault, 2000), leads us to understand precisely what in this case *makes* the extension of fundamental education by producing differently the child: the extension participates in the production of new configurations of childhood through a different way of conceiving it and, consequently, of acting upon it.

Thus, what is important here, coming to the last topic of the discussion, is to describe among which other relations the concept of child becomes evident. The analysis of the materials allows us to affirm the production of a notion of *capable-child* that seems to come to existence from a “whisper” of the rescue-child (as described by Baker). With that, we mean to say that, as much as there is a concept of child involved in/with the intellectual, economic, and social rescue (through the early access to mandatory education), we must reveal the shift in emphasis in its description. To put it in another way, it is not the case of simplifying the maxim of education as responsible for the payment of social debts, but, above all, of revealing

a child (being) instrumentalized, *describe her in all her positivity*, in short, to narrate her as an idealized being whom, along its development, the social predicaments do not seem to impact.

For that, as if from the outside, it is the pedagogical proposal that must be “adequate”, “so as to ensure to the six-year-olds their full development in their physical, psychological, intellectual, social, and cognitive aspects” (Brasil, 2004a, p. 9). The children described here “establish [...] social and affective bonds and build their knowledge in the interaction with other children of the same age, as well as with adults with which they relate”; equally, they “make full use of their possibilities to represent the world, building from their own logic magical explanations to understand it” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 19). It is also an interested child who “has a strong desire to learn, added to the special meaning she attaches to the fact of attending a school”. More than that: “Observing these children we can see that from an early age they display a great interest for reading and writing” (*ibidem*, p. 21).

The “whisper” we referred to relates to the attempt of providing new forms of schooling for children and youngsters “in delicate situation” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 14), of “compensating for the observed deficit”, of “contributing significantly to the further learning of the students” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 17). That is, it is observed that the capable-child emerges not from the erasure of the rescue-child – the already hegemonic discursivity about the decisive role of the school for the “low-income and low-schooling families” (*ibidem*, p. 20) does not even allow it. On the contrary, it will be placed within a different logic, so that the child can be thought about and understood based on new conceptions.

Indeed, we see a precise form of situating the infantile order, now founded on a logic that insists slightly on Fröebelian discursivity under new clothes. In other words, it expresses a different matrix of fundamental intelligibility: it is not the case of stopping the “evil” from spreading, but of allowing only the “good” to manifest, to rise, to emerge (Hultqvist, 1998). It is not a matter here, in our discussion, of this being true or false, but of what it *produces* in terms of the conception of childhood (and even of education).

Now, where is this *capable-child* situated? In what spaces does she move? It is interesting to observe, in this aspect, the way in which by bringing in the capable-child the documents open the door to the emergence of clear tensions between early childhood education and fundamental education: what is due to each of them? How do we make sure of the achievements in one field whilst showing the specificities of the other? In short, how do we make good the warrant of mandatory fundamental education without breaching basic prerogatives of early childhood education?

Early childhood education is affirmed by showing that “the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education give important elements to reveal the Pedagogical Proposal for Fundamental Education” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 15) – which involves the preoccupation with the ludic aspects amidst a “context in which care and education are carried out in a pleasurable way” (Curriculum Guidelines *apud* Brasil, 2004b, p. 16); the attention to avoid “the monotony, the excess of ‘academic’ activities or of a sterile discipline” on the part of educators whose role is the “participation and not absolute guidance of every activity and their centralization around them” (*ibidem*).

However, at the same time, the way to describe and qualify the new fundamental education rekindles longstanding debates on previous conquests of the field of early childhood education:

The first year of a nine-year fundamental education does not aim exclusively at literacy. Even if the first year represents a possibility to *qualify the teaching and learning* of the contents of literacy, this learning *should not be prioritized* as if they were the only way to promote the development of children of that age group. It is important that the pedagogical work implemented should allow the pupil to develop diversified expressions and the access to knowledge in their various areas. (Brasil, 2004a, p. 9, our emphasis)

[...] the possibility that the child enters earlier in fundamental schooling *does not mean* to accelerate her process of exit, but to *give to this child better conditions of teaching-learning*. (Brasil, 2004a, p. 8, our emphasis)

[...] *more constructive* schooling (Brasil, 2004b, p. 17, our emphasis)

[...] *greater learning opportunities*. (Brasil, 2004b, p. 17, our emphasis)

Care or education; learning or play; teaching reading and writing or not; meaning of the concept of *learning*: the documents reveal a zone of indistinguishability that is characterized by the elusive way of conceiving what is insistently repeated: “It is not the case of transferring to six year old children the contents and activities of the traditional first grade, but of conceiving a new structure to organize the contents in a nine-year Fundamental Education, considering the profile of its pupils” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 17). So, more than revealing particularities, one should turn this zone into a motivation for work and constant reflection:

Implementing a Fundamental Education, consisting now in nine years, leads necessarily to rethink it as a whole. Thus this is a precious opportunity for a new praxis in educators, being essential that it deals with knowledges and their time, as well as with the work methods [...]. (Brasil, 2004b, p. 18, our emphasis)

Having in mind the discussions established here (situated around three topics of analysis), we tried to show, by unraveling the threads that constitute the concept of child in the official documents, that the extension of fundamental education brings forward a



significant group of changes that are not restricted, in any way, to the domain of school. As argued by Fimyar (2009), in the process of policy-making as government technologies, the Nation-States respond to pressures coming from other national contexts, from claims imposed by economic globalization or by global discourses around issues to which education should be responsible for answering.

By using the idea of governmentality as a theoretical operator in this study, our intention was to emphasize how the education reforms, such as they were discussed here, are characterized as educational technologies, that is, as instruments to produce subjects according to the principles of a political rationality acting in our time. In this perspective, the reforms *as texts and as discourses* (Ball *apud* Fimyar, 2009) are justified through truth regimes already established, producing specific forms of reasoning about the populations (children, in the case of this reform), in the sense of proposing certain ways of organizing the tactics of governing the subjects with a view to what is considered to be social welfare, quality, improvement, perfecting – concepts that deserve, at least, debate and suspicion. Suspicion that is necessary for, as stressed by Ball (*apud* Fimyar, 2009), because the effect of these policies is primordially discursive, it “deconstructs the possibilities of different thinking, thereby limiting our responses to change” (p. 44).

### **Final considerations**

At this moment, in order to conduct our work to its final proceedings, we would like to highlight some of the elements of our discussion and, at the same time, use them to spark a few last questionings about the theme under investigation. We can say that we proposed here to think, from different viewpoints, the problem of the extension of fundamental education; we proposed to think, also from different viewpoints, about what is (and can be) at stake when we operate changes in education systems, with special attention to those dedicated to the education of children.

By bringing to the forefront, in the analysis of official documents, the concept of child, it was possible to capture a series of tensions between early childhood education and fundamental education, especially in what they produce, demand, restrict, modify; or, in a single phrase, in what they *put in perspective*. However, what we want to bring into the debate would not be a concealed claim for the strengthening of determination of the fields or even their ultimate division (on one side early childhood education, on the other fundamental education). Rather, showing the workings of such logics and, perhaps, even to locate the

paradoxes existing therein, means also to affirm that the tensions present are *mutually constitutive*. To put differently, we could venture to say that, for a long time, the conceptions of child/childhood defended inside the territory of child education were responsible, to some extent, for tensioning current pedagogical concepts and practices applied to the initial grades of fundamental education. Even if this argument is challenged, we can contrast it with another, showing that bringing six year old children to fundamental education also puts early childhood education in the spotlight. If formerly the fundamental education and its practices were point of concern (which they still are), it is interesting to observe that rearrangements like the one we analyze here are expressed through new matrices of intelligibility that migrate from the education of older children (older than six). Nevertheless, it must be said that these matrices, at the same time, also open new opportunities, and introduce a demand for attention to the early childhood education segment, proposing new questions: could it be the case that freeing a considerable number of places would allow the expansion, the inclusion of more children in childhood education with its extension to younger age groups? Or, still, could it be the case that the pressures formerly acting in favor of literacy could be substituted by the reaffirming of a commitment to the contact of children with multiple languages? Do we not have the chance here of somehow stripping early childhood education from its schooling aspect? Could this be a privileged moment to reorganize early childhood education, and make it more flexible in its times, spaces, and curricula?

Obviously, the questions raised here do not encompass the whole complexity of the effects of a change of such order in the education system. Our intention by bringing them forward was only that of pointing to the mobilizing and dynamic character of these relations – that is, of reflecting on the fact that the centers of such frictions emerge from within the system itself, whilst being representative of demands beyond it.

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Received 30.09.2010  
Accepted 19.11.2010

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