

CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DOSSIER

ARTICLE - WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?¹

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to problematize how the future evaluation of K-12 educational offers and reflects on the guidelines that may ground quality parameters for childhood education after the determinations of the new Fundeb. We analyzed data from the School Census of K-12 Education done by Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (Inep) and the Demographic Census of IBGE. Based on this data, we discuss how far the wishful thinking of childhood education lies. We show that children's access to kindergarten and preschool needs to be more equitable, public investment needs to be guided towards public systems, and allocating resources is a key mechanism to reducing inequality. Finally, our findings point out the need to reinforce the concept of Custo Aluno Qualidade (CAQ- Student Quality Cost), sizing the necessary input to scale the access of all children to a quality childhood education.

Keywords: childhood education evaluation, educational funding, student quality cost, quality indicators.

ARTIGO - QUAL É O VALOR DE UMA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL DE QUALIDADE?

RESUMO: A presente investigação propõe-se a problematizar como se dará a avaliação da oferta da educação básica e a refletir sobre diretrizes que possam subsidiar parâmetros de qualidade para a primeira etapa dessa educação após as determinações do novo Fundeb. Para tanto, são analisados dados do Censo Escolar da Educação Básica do Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (Inep) e do Censo Demográfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), a partir dos quais discutimos o quão distante está o *wishful thinking* da educação infantil. Demonstramos que o acesso das crianças à creche e à pré-escola precisa ser mais equitativo, o investimento público precisa ser direcionado às redes públicas, e que a alocação de recursos se apresenta como mecanismo fundamental para a redução da desigualdade. Por fim, os achados sinalizam para reforçar o conceito do Custo Aluno Qualidade (CAQ), em que é preciso dimensionar os insumos necessários para prover o acesso de todas as crianças a uma educação infantil de qualidade.

Palavras-chave: avaliação da educação infantil, financiamento educacional, custo aluno qualidade, indicadores de qualidade.

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ARTÍCULO - ¿CUÁL ES EL VALOR DE UNA EDUCACIÓN INICIAL DE CALIDAD?

RESUMEN: La presente investigación se propone a problematizar cómo será la evaluación de la oferta de la educación básica y a reflexionar sobre directrices que puedan subsidiar parámetros de calidad para la primera etapa de esta educación tras las determinaciones del nuevo Fundeb. Para ello, son analizados datos del Censo Escolar de la Educación Básica del Instituto Nacional de Estudios e Investigaciones Educativas Anísio Teixeira (INEP – en portugués) y del Censo Demográfico del Instituto de Geografía y Estadística (IBGE), a partir de los cuales discutimos lo distante que está el wishfull thinking de la educación infantil. Demostramos que el acceso de los niños a la guardería y a la educación primaria necesita ser más equitativo, la inversión pública necesita ser direccionada a las redes públicas, y que el destino de recursos se presenta como mecanismo fundamental para la reducción de la desigualdad. Al final, lo que se encuentra señala para reforzar el concepto del Costo Alumno de Calidad (CAQ – en portugués), donde es necesario dimensionar los insumos necesarios para proveer el acceso de todos los niños a una educación infantil de calidad.

Palabras clave: evaluación de la educación infantil, financiamiento educacional, costo alumno calidad, indicadores de calidad.

lo *wishfull thinking* de la educación infantil. Se ha demostrado que el acceso de los niños a las guarderías y preescolares necesita ser más equitativo, la inversión pública dirigida a las redes públicas y que la evaluación de la asignación de recursos se presenta como un mecanismo fundamental para reducir la desigualdad. Finalmente, los hallazgos apuntan a reforzar el concepto de Costo de la Calidad Estudiantil (CAQ) donde es necesario dimensionar los insumos necesarios para facilitar el acceso de todos los niños a una educación inicial de calidad.

INTRODUCTION

We developed this article based on questions raised at the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in the State of Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ)² during the debates generated by the processing of the new Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education education (BRASIL, 2020a, 2020b). The question “What is the value of a quality early childhood education?” encompassed the central theme of the debates, which aimed to analyze and shed more light on the prospects for funding and its consequences in early childhood education. The new Fundeb, now permanent, guarantees a relevant part of the financing of basic education constitutionally; it increases the Union’s complementation and implements a new resource redistribution system. In addition to these characteristics, the legal text also innovates by putting in evidence the discussions about the quality of supply, including the Cost Student Quality (CAQ), and linking part of the investment to the performance of educational results. The intense debate around the right to education caused by different social movements and scientific entities, such as the National Campaign for the Right to Education, the Brazilian Inter-Forums for Early Childhood Education Movement (Mieib), the National Association for Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Education (Anped), the Association for Research in Education Financing (Fineduca), among others, led to this investigation, which sought to discuss how the evaluation of the supply will be carried out and to reflect on guidelines that can support the quality parameters in the first stage of basic education after the determinations of the new Fundeb. To this end, data from the Basic Education School Census of the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (Inep) and the Demographic Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) will be privileged sources. The article is organized into three parts. Initially, we summarized some conceptions and disputes that have revolved around financing early childhood education and that reflect evaluating the educational supply. Next, we construct arguments that define essential points for evaluating the supply that seeks to find the value of quality early childhood education. Finally, we reflect on the limitations and powers of the new regulatory frameworks for early childhood education.

FINANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: REVISITING CONCEPTIONS AND DISPUTES

The expression “The king is naked” is the title of the article written by Abramovay and Kramer (1984), in which the authors show how the official discourse of the 1980s, promoted by the implementation of the National Program of Preschool Education, a program implemented by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in 1981, refuted the criticism deft by the scientific community to this

2 The Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in the State of Rio de Janeiro (FPEI-RJ) brings together teachers, researchers, and education professionals from the municipal departments, public, private, and community entities around the recognition of the child as a subject of rights and of early childhood education as a child's right and a duty of the State. Some points that guide its actions: the opening of services to the effective participation of families; the expansion of services; the offer and flexibility of care in part or full-time; the transparency of access standards; the implementation of participatory pedagogical proposals based on knowledge that considers the child as an active and interactive subject and an integral part of the sociocultural context; the implementation of projects for the initial and continuing training of early childhood education professionals, aiming at their specific and broad qualification, and the inclusion of this stage in the funding policy.

mode of attendance, emptying the importance of early childhood education (in the case of preschool), under the allegation that it would have objectives in itself: “Since preschool is not responsible for performance in the 1st grade, it even does not need quality, and can be informal, unconventional, unsystematic, etc.” (ABRAMOVAY; KRAMER, 1984, p. 33). It was based on these ideas that the expansion of education for young children took place, in which the inconsistencies of this program — over a hundred children per unit, lay professionals and volunteers, precarious facilities — reproduced the compensatory policy and dismissed the questions about which educational model could bring contributions to children, especially those belonging to the poorest quartile of the country’s population.

The reasons for the MEC’s decision to act in the area of preschool education, in which it exercised a “supplementary function with the education systems through SEPS/SDE/COEPRE and MOBRAF” (BRASIL, 1981, p. 5), were the subject of many studies in the fields of history, sociology, and psychology (PILOTTI; RIZZINI, 1995; ROSEMBERG, 2002; LEITE FILHO, 2006; CARVALHO, 2015; among others), although those anchored in the perspective of funding and evaluation of care are still scarce. For this reason, going back to the past certainly helps us better understand the demands of the movements fighting for early childhood education that preceded the permanent Fundeb and the field of disputes in which they are inserted. As stated in the document that inaugurated the National Preschool Education Program (1981), it would be preferable “to distribute a little to many [people], ensuring its effectiveness, instead of a lot to a few, which would increasingly accentuate educational inequalities” (BRASIL, 1981, p. 6). Concerning goals, the Program provided for attendance by 500 thousand children a year and coverage of 50% of children in the preschool age group³ by 1985, being that, according to MEC, the population from 4 to 6 years was estimated at seven million children (BRASIL, 1981, p. 12). The motto question echoes: what was the value of this education?

The costs will vary from one unit of the Federation to another, from one municipality to another, as a function of many variables such as the levels of remuneration of the personnel involved, the number of children per teacher, the participation of the family, of tutors and primary and secondary school students, the type of physical equipment used, and other characteristics more or less close to the non-conventional forms of preschool education. Because of these variations, it is impossible to determine, a priori, the average cost of a child/year. It is known, however, that preschool education developed conventionally is expensive, making it necessary to use creativity in the application of means and forms of the lower cost that assure the necessary quality. In any case, the resources foreseen by the MEC, although greatly increased in relation to previous years, are not abundant for the intended goals. They do, however, constitute a major initial effort, through which the MEC is expected to pass on some 3 billion 200 million cruzeiros, with the hope that the school systems will contribute their share to this task (BRASIL, 1981, p. 12).

With the end of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, marked by the indirect election to the presidency of the republic in 1985, the idea of a new conceptual and legal basis for children and early childhood education grew: no longer as a problem, but as a person, a subject of rights. The legal definition in the Federal Constitution promulgated in 1988 (BRASIL, 1988) points to overcome the welfare character, until then dominant, and starts to require an effective action of the educational system in its different instances: federal, state, and municipal.

This constitution is considered innovative because it established education as a social right and, to this end, defined the responsible parties — family and State — for its provision. To fulfill this mandate, it also established the funding sources that would generate the resources the State would need to cover its expenses. Subsequently, the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education, promulgated in 1996 (BRASIL, 1996b), was also concerned with establishing funding sources for educational spending. Regarding the public action for education, the law attributed to the Union, the States, the Federal District, and the municipalities the responsibility for maintaining and expanding education and establishing a financing structure.

However, despite the very significant political, legal, and educational changes, in terms of funding, there was no repercussion for the increase in enrollments in the newly defined first stage of

3 It is worth remembering that education was still governed by Federal Law 5.692/71, promulgated in the context of the civil-military dictatorship, and that in order to enter primary school, the student had to be at least 7 years old.

basic education, early childhood education.⁴ In the context of the time, the MEC/FNDE financing norms (1996–1998) set as priorities for the release of resources the municipalities linked to the Solidary Community Program, created by the Federal Government as a strategy to combat hunger, poverty, and social exclusion, giving special attention to 1,368 municipalities characterized as pockets of poverty in 1998. In relation to municipal actions eligible for financing, the highlights were the construction of daycare centers according to the standards recommended by the program and the support for the purchase of didactic and pedagogical material for preschool students.

The creation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education and the Valorization of Teaching (Fundef) (BRASIL, 1996a, 1996c), which was automatically implemented nationwide as of January 1, 1998, induces the reorganization of municipal school systems. On the one hand, the Fund approximates the spending capacity — the value per student per year is the same in the state — and provides resources (60%) for the valorization of education professionals; on the other hand, it represents a brake on the commitment of municipal education systems in the process of incorporating kindergarten and preschool, since, being a fund specifically aimed at elementary school students, it does not include children enrolled in early childhood education and youth and adult education in supplementary courses. In this sense, the consultation of the then president of Inep, Prof. Dr. Maria Helena Guimarães Castro, to the National Education Council (CNE) about the possibility of including 6-year-old students in the elementary school census, with repercussions in the distribution of the Fundef, draws our attention. The opinion reported by the counselor João Monlevade (CNE, 1998) was favorable to the early enrollment of 6-year-old children, stating that, in public schools, States and Municipalities in a collaborative regime may adopt a nine-year elementary school. It also states that,

[...] starting in 1999, current students and possible candidates for the so-called “literacy classes” must be included in Primary Education, in the case of children seven years of age or older, and Infant or Elementary Education if they have turned six years of age by the beginning of the school year. Consequently, the 1999 School Census should not census enrollments under the denomination of “Literacy Classes” (CNE, 1998, p. 480).

As children enrolled in elementary school in the public networks represent funds, there was an almost automatic insertion of this age group in this learning phase, which also changed the very structure of this level, which now has nine grades instead of eight. It is important to point out that the opinion above brings a series of data to justify the incorporation of 6-year-old children into elementary school, claiming that

Regardless of the implementation of Fundef, which in 1998 may have accelerated the changes, thousands of families were already enrolling their 6-year-old children in elementary school in the cities, even before the current law allowed this. In fact, it is almost unanimous among teachers, confirmed by international experience, that the “proper age” for beginning literacy is six years, not seven (CNE, 1998, p. 478).

To the changes caused by the Fundef⁵ were added others of a political and pedagogical nature: the approval of the National Education Plan for the decade 2001-2010 (BRASIL, 2001) - which, due to the vetoes received by the FHC government, especially in relation to financial resources, became, in practice, a letter of intent or a declaratory act; the high rates of grade repetition and age/series distortion in the 1st grade; and the organization of elementary education in cycles, among others. As Esteves shows, when studying the implementation of Fundef in Rio de Janeiro, “what was perceived was the intensification of a series of pre-existing contradictions” (2007, p. 218), very far from a praised practice of “social justice”:

4 Only after LDBEN 9.394/1996, early childhood education became the first stage of Basic Education, and must be integrated with the teaching systems throughout the country.

5 We point out that it was only in 2006 that Law no. 11.274, of February 6, 2006, was instituted, extending elementary school to nine years, with the enrollment of six-year-old children, and establishing a deadline for implementation by the systems by 2010.

This is because the reallocation of funds promoted by FUNDEF penalized, in most cases, either the poorest municipalities or those located in the most impoverished regions of Rio de Janeiro. Their populations often have public school as the only form of access to systematized knowledge and/or space for sociability and interaction (ESTEVEES, 2007, p. 213).

Once again, early childhood education is faced with two major impasses in the supply, attendance, and expansion of places:

The first is made explicit in the very name of the Fund, which states that it is linked to “primary education”, excluding children’s education; the second arises from its budgetary management. Of the 25% of tax revenues and transfers destined for education, will the 60% allocated constitutionally be enough to cover the needs of primary education? Is it possible to guarantee that the remaining 40% will be channeled to the other education segments? (NUNES; ESTEVEES, 1998, p. 217).

According to Cury, reviewing these issues leads us to “a certain awareness that such plans are more an exaggerated optimism of *wishful thinking* (decision making based more on desire than on rational bases or considering a desire as if it were already a reality)” (CURY, 2011, p. 809). With this warning, facing these challenges mobilized the participants of FPEI-RJ and Mieib to draw arguments around the inclusion of early childhood education in the distribution of resources. As this is a ten-year Fund, there was the possibility of mobilization for the inclusion of early childhood education in the public agenda, deepening studies, and exercises in favor of its viability. It is worth noting that in the discussions in the House and Senate for the approval of the 2005/2006 Fundeb, daycare was not present, only preschool. This is a problem since, in the dispute for resources, daycare represents the weakest link in basic education. The speeches highlighted the power of this space in child development but underestimated its ability to influence the schooling path of individuals. “The slogan of the Painted Diapers Movement,⁶ led by Mieib and the National Campaign for the Right to Education, was “The right to education starts in the cradle and lasts a lifetime. At the time, only 11% of children had daycare, and only 6% in the public network — it was known what inclusion and expansion represented.

Today, after more than twenty years of a fund policy, what is at stake with the new Fundeb refers, among others, to: (i) becoming permanent; (ii) incorporating the concept of the Cost Student-Quality (CAQ), an indicator that defines the amount that should be invested annually per student in each stage and modality of basic education; (iii) increasing the complementation of Union resources from 10% to 23%, representing greater redistributive capacity — it is evaluated that about 70% of municipalities will be able to access this complement to ensure the investment that is minimally necessary for them (ALVES; PINTO, 2020); (iv) ensure greater investment in salaries, incorporating education workers who were uncovered from the guarantee of remuneration; and (v) institute a hybrid system of redistribution that continues to consider a minimum value per student in each state and Federal District, but now also considers minimum values in each public school network and values conditioned to the evolution of attendance indicators and improvement in learning that reduce inequalities.

In this scenario, new questions arise, issues from the past emerge with other demarcations, and the question about the value of quality early childhood education still echoes. In the current context, this question gains new and important contours that tension the debate around evaluating the supply of early childhood education. This stage continues to require investments for its expansion, and it is necessary to prioritize the allocation of available resources to reduce inequalities and ensure the essential rights of all children from 0 to 6 years, such as access, inputs, and processes compatible with their specificities. In this direction, with the permanent Fundeb, new criteria for evaluating supply come into effect in the funding policy since the resources will now be linked to a minimum value per student estimated by the CAQ and to the performance of the education networks.

We conceive evaluation here as a “[...] systematic examination of any planned interventions in reality, based on explicit criteria and through recognized procedures for collecting and analyzing

⁶ The idea for the movement came up at the FPEI-RJ, in 2005, and gained national relevance after the creation of a logo produced by cartoonist Claudius Ceccon to protest against the PEC 415, which excluded children's education from the distribution of resources from the fund for enrollment of children aged 0 to 3.

information about its content, structure, process, results, quality and/or impacts [...]” (RUA, 2014, p. 103). In the case of government programs such as Fundeb, we also understand that this evaluation should include formal technical procedures

[...] to produce information and knowledge, in an interdisciplinary perspective, for ex-ante design, implementation, and ex-post validation of social programs and projects, through the different methodological approaches of social research, in order to ensure the fulfillment of the objectives of programs and projects (effectiveness), their broader impacts on other social dimensions, i.e., beyond the target audiences served (effectiveness) and at costs consistent with the scale and complexity of the intervention (efficiency) (JANNUZZI, 2020, p. 43).

The primary character of the evaluation is to verify whether the proposed objectives were achieved and subsidize actions that redirect trajectories and propose new paths (SOUSA, 2018b). When it comes to financing early childhood education, we could go further and say that this evaluation should point to the extent to which governments are responsive to the care needs of children aged 0 to 6 years (ROSEMBERG, 2001; RUA, 2014). However, we need to be aware of the quality benchmarks that sponsor the evaluation process: they will condition the information produced, inducing policies and practices that do not take place without consequences (SOUSA, 2018a; SOUSA; PIMENTA, 2018). The concept of quality is linked to the values and perspectives of those who observe them. Evaluation, consequently, “[...] supposes value judgment based on criteria that express a given notion of quality [...]” (SOUSA, 2014, p. 72) and that have political direction, thus not being free from human subjectivity (BAUER, 2019).

Unlike the exacerbated focus on the proposition of indicators that evaluate the performance of children in early childhood education that research has shown (RIBEIRO, 2016; PIMENTA, 2017; BAUER; HORTA NETO, 2018; SOUSA, 2018a), we intend, in this article, to achieve other purposes of national education for which resources from the permanent Fundeb cannot be lacking, in which we highlight the equality of conditions for access and permanence in school; the gratuity of public education in official establishments; and the guarantee of a minimum standard of quality (BRASIL, 1996b; 2020b). With these guidelines as focus, we develop below some ideas and arguments that should guide an evaluation that seeks to find the value of quality early childhood education.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN NETWORK EXPANSION AND MORE EQUITABLE ACCESS

If we analyze the access to early childhood education between 1999 and 2019, a period marked by the beginning of Fundef and the entry of early childhood education in Fundeb in 2006, we will see that over these twenty years, both the attendance to daycare and preschool has grown considerably. We highlight these two segments in Table 1, which make up the first stage of basic education, and see that the number of daycare centers practically quadrupled and preschools increased by 23%. In addition, to meet this new contingent of children arriving at school, hiring five times as many teachers for daycare was necessary, and the preschool staff was expanded by more than 50%. In a similar analysis of these numbers, Vieira and Falciano conclude that they

[...] are impressive, especially in the care of children 0-3 years of age. It is as if Brazil had increased, on average, over 20 years, 400 enrollments in daycare every day, opened 7 schools per day, and hired 36 teachers daily just for this stage (VIEIRA; FALCIANO, 2020, p. 791)

Undoubtedly, these are considerable increases, and, as a result, in 2019, early childhood education will gain a significant share of the enrollments, schools, and teachers of all basic education, more precisely, 19%, 64%, and 27%, respectively. Nonetheless, this expansion of places was not fully reflected in the expansion of access, which was subject to different demographic movements throughout this period.

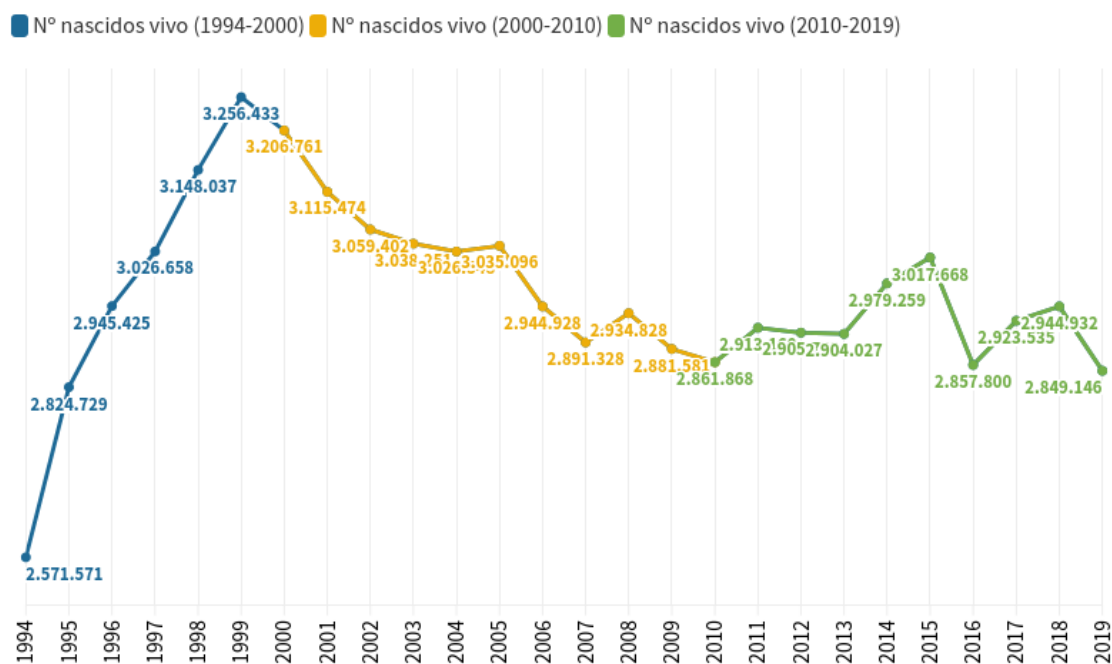
Table 1 - Absolute number of enrollments, schools, and teachers of regular education in daycare and preschool and its variation between the years 1999 and 2019

	Daycare Center			Preschool		
	1999	2019	Variation	1999	2019	Variation
Number of enrollments	831,978	3,755,092	+2,923,114	4,235,278	5,217,686	+982,408
Number of schools	18,603	71,403	+52,800	80,878	102,335	+21,457
Number of Teachers	48,284	312,615	+264,331	214,123	327,699	+113,576

Source: prepared by the authors based on the synopses of Inep's Basic Education School Census.

If on the one hand, the latest Demographic Censuses of the IBGE in 2000 and 2010 point to a reduction of around 16% in both the population aged 0 to 3 years old who can attend daycare, and the population aged 4 to 5 years old who can attend preschool, on the other hand, we saw changes in the trend of childbirths that put pressure for more vacancies. We register these movements through Figure 1, in which we can see that there was indeed a reduction in the number of live births between the years 2000 and 2010. However, this movement decreased in intensity, registering a significant increase from 2010 to 2015.

Figure 1 - Number of live births in Brazil in the periods 1994-2000, 2000-2010, and 2010-2019



Source: prepared by the authors based on Datusus data.

The dynamics of these numbers have reduced the intensity of the rates of population decline, even promoting growth in the 0- to 5-year-old population in recent years, contrary to assumptions that it would no longer be necessary to expand the supply of places in early childhood education since there would be progressively fewer children to be attended. Below are some of these effects in the latest IBGE projections (IBGE, 2021b). Table 2 shows the projection of the population from 0 to 3 years old and from 4 to 5 years old in 2020, where we point out that in 14 of the 27 states of Brazil, there is an indication of a real increase in the population from 0 to 3 years old in the last decade and, likewise, an increase in the population from 4 to 5 years old in 11 of the 27 states of the Federation.

Table 2 - Population from 0 to 3 years and 4 to 5 years old per Federation Unit according to the Demographic Census in 2010 and according to IBGE projections for 2020

Units of the Federation	Population aged 0 to 3 years		Variation 2010 vs. 2020	Population 4 to 5 years old		Variation 2010 vs. 2020
	2010	2020		2010	2020	
Brazil	11,796,673	11,789,720	-0.1%	6,160,763	5,942,008	-3.6%
Acre	71,725	66,645	-7.1%	37,408	33,529	-10.4%
Alagoas	231,583	201,665	-12.9%	122,183	101,588	-16.9%
Amapá	63,535	63,838	0.5%	31,106	32,847	5.6%
Amazon	321,770	323,634	0.6%	156,293	163,578	4.7%
Bahia	899,691	822,231	-8.6%	474,566	409,086	-13.8%
Ceará	542,496	525,655	-3.1%	282,584	262,600	-7.1%
Federal District	168,113	166,928	-0.7%	86,292	78,334	-9.2%
Holy Spirit	212,558	230,537	8.5%	109,109	115,375	5.7%
Goiás	364,043	410,721	12.8%	191,814	212,532	10.8%
Maranhão	533,233	471,292	-11.6%	286,839	234,067	-18.4%
Mato Grosso	210,912	227,179	7.7%	111,732	114,149	2.2%
Mato Grosso do Sul	160,526	175,509	9.3%	82,466	88,277	7.0%
Minas Gerais	1,058,305	1,063,998	0.5%	566,275	533,733	-5.7%
Pará	633,288	575,036	-9.2%	327,094	288,982	-11.7%
Paraíba	239,639	229,013	-4.4%	128,546	115,021	-10.5%
Paraná	600,576	631,821	5.2%	313,171	316,780	1.2%
Pernambuco	587,245	548,237	-6.6%	305,149	278,952	-8.6%
Piauí	207,669	190,491	-8.3%	113,093	94,484	-16.5%
Rio de Janeiro	846,140	900,358	6.4%	435,460	453,533	4.2%
Rio Grande do Norte	203,907	189,885	-6.9%	107,386	97,109	-9.6%
Rio Grande do Sul	538,306	563,961	4.8%	294,658	288,939	-1.9%
Rondônia	108,024	112,400	4.1%	57,204	55,688	-2.7%
Roraima	41,004	48,091	17.3%	19,527	22,596	15.7%
Santa Catarina	340,152	389,562	14.5%	176,504	193,615	9.7%
São Paulo	2,365,893	2,423,717	2.4%	1,216,417	1,239,047	1.9%
Sergipe	142,187	136,180	-4.2%	73,147	67,913	-7.2%
Tocantins	104,153	101,136	-2.9%	54,740	49,654	-9.3%

Source: prepared by the authors based on IBGE population projections.

There is no doubt of the importance achieved by early childhood education as the first stage of basic education — the advances in this direction in recent years are notorious. However, there are still challenges to be overcome, especially if we aim to achieve goal 1 of the National Education Plan for the decade 2014-2024, which is to universalize access to preschool for children aged 4 to 5 years and meet at least 50% of children aged 0 to 3 years in daycare (BRASIL, 2014).

To size up the size of this challenge, we estimated the populations of 0 to 3 years old and 4 to 5 years old for 2020 based on IBGE data. This estimate was made by breaking down the total population of the municipalities (IBGE, 2021a) by the same proportion of the age pyramid of the 2010 Demographic Census and adjusting the final value in each age group to match the projection (IBGE, 2021b) when totaled in each UF. We then compared the data from our estimate with the number of existing enrollments in both kindergarten and preschool in each of these municipalities.

The result of this analysis is summarized in Table 3, in which we can see that in more than half of the municipalities, we need an increase of +50% in the number of enrollments in daycare centers to meet goal 1 of the PNE 2014–2024 and that in 14.9% of the municipalities, this increase should be

of the order of +200% if compared to the data for 2020.⁷ Regarding preschool, we see that in large part of the municipalities (42.6%), there is still a small need for expansion, that is, an increase of less than +10% in the number of enrollments, although in practically every third municipality, we should have an increase equal to or greater than 25% in order to achieve the universalization foreseen in the PNE 2014–2024.

Table 3 - Distribution of the number of municipalities according to the range of expansion of enrollments in kindergarten and preschool, necessary to achieve goal 1 of the PNE 2014-2024 as of 2020

Enrollment Expansion Range	Day Care Center		Preschool	
	No. of Municipalities	Proportion in relation to the total	No. of Municipalities	Proportion in relation to the total
Expansion below 10%	1,152	21.3%	2,373	42.6%
Between 10 and 25%	472	8.7%	1,390	25.0%
Between 25 and 50%	795	14.7%	1,178	21.1%
Between 50 and 100%	1,189	22.0%	535	9.6%
Between 100 and 150%.	605	11.2%	69	1.2%
Between 150 and 200%.	395	7.3%	17	0.3%
Expansion above 200%	804	14.9%	8	0.1%
Total	5.412	100.0%	5.570	100.0%

Source: prepared by the authors based on IBGE population estimates and the synopses of Inep's School Census of Basic Education.

Note: no daycare services were available in 158 municipalities.

Early childhood education requires considerable investments to ensure the expansion of the attendance network. Evaluating the supply quality at this stage requires assessing whether the essential rights of every child, such as access, are assured. The new Fundeb determines that 50% of the complementation of the total annual value per student must be invested in this stage of education, and at least 15% must be destined to investments in the respective education networks. We, therefore, need indicators that monitor the effective allocation of these resources with the effect of promoting guaranteed access for all children.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN THE PUBLIC NETWORK: A NECESSARY PATH

The State's duty to education, as provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988, must be put into effect, among other aspects, with the guarantee of a compulsory and free basic education from 4 to 17 years of age, constituting in this range a subjective public right, that is, "an inalienable good, legally confirmed and that guarantees the interested party to demand its fulfillment by the public power" (NASCIMENTO; CURY, 2020, p. 688). Education is expected to be provided following the principles of free public education in official establishments and offered by private initiative, provided that it complies with the general rules of national education and is authorized and has its quality assessed by the government. However, there are differences intrinsic to what is public and private that directly impact the conditions of educational supply. While it is the nature of the public sector to guarantee equal conditions for the access and permanence of children in school, aiming at the common good of all citizens indiscriminately, it is the nature of the private sector to aim primarily at the economic and financial return on its activities. How, then, can the population's right to access to daycare and preschool be equated, given that the cost per student in these stages is among the highest in basic education and, at the same time, is precisely the poorest part of the population that is disadvantaged in terms of access?

The new Fundeb has innovated by establishing the Cost Student Quality (CAQ) as a mechanism that unites quality, social control, and adequate financing for education. The CAQ can be

⁷ In 2020, the data reported in the 1st stage of the School Census survey had March 11 as the reference date, the date immediately prior to the suspension of in-person classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

compared to a calculation methodology that identifies the minimum amount spent to provide quality education. To calculate it, we must estimate what this cost would be, and to do so, we need to establish which inputs are needed, their characteristics, and their reference values. For instance, how big would it be if we needed a school building? How many children would it hold? What would be in the classrooms? What would the human resource needs be? How many teachers, coordinators, and support staff would we have? What is the ratio of teachers per student? What is the training of these professionals? What kind of remuneration should they receive? According to the Campaign for the Right to Education, one of the major proponents of the CAQ concept, the cost per student represents

[...] an inversion in the logic of educational financing policies in Brazil: the investment, previously subordinated to the minimum budgetary availability provided for in the constitutional binding of resources allocated to the area, is now guided by the need for investment per student to ensure, in fact, a minimum standard of quality in all Brazilian public schools (CNDE, 2018, p. 14).

Fighting for the need for investment per student, emphasizing what we need, is entirely different from limiting this debate to the minimum budget availability governed by the redistribution of resources, regardless of whether they are not sufficient for what we need. In a recent study, Alves, Silveira, and Schneider (2019) analyzed the adoption of national quality parameters to calculate the CAQi and the CAQ, with the former aiming to guarantee minimum conditions, while the latter would represent the increase in these minimum standards in order to meet various goals such as those of the PNE 2014-2024. From this work, we extracted the data from Table 4. We found that the estimated CAQi for part-time urban daycare is twice as high and for preschool is around 20% higher than the cost reference for primary and secondary education. If we consider the full timetable, when attendance is equal to or greater than seven hours a day, these proportions increase even more.

Table 4 - Values for 2019 of the initial cost student quality (CAQi) for urban schools considering stage and shift

	Annual CAQi value for urban schools		Proportion in relation to the smallest value	
	Partial Hours	Full Time	Partial Hours	Full Time
Day Care Center	R\$ 10.622	R\$ 19.132	2.0 x	2.7 x
Preschool	R\$ 6.324	R\$ 11.147	1.2 x	1.6 x
Elementary School Early Years	R\$ 5.690	R\$ 7.666	1.1 x	1.1 x
Ens. Fundamental. Anos Finais	R\$ 5.292	R\$ 7.008	1.0 x	1.0 x
High School	R\$ 5.329	R\$ 7.198	1.0 x	1.0 x

Source: adapted by the authors from Table 1 of the study conducted by Alves, Silveira, and Schneider (2019).

The minimum costs for a quality offer in early childhood education are significantly higher than in other stages of basic education. There is a huge disparity in access to early childhood education between the richest and poorest parts of the population. Data from 2018 show that only 26% of the poorest quintile of the population aged 0 to 3 years attended daycare compared to 51% of the richest quintile, as well as only 92% of the poorest quintile of the population aged 4 to 5 years attended preschool compared to 98% of the richest (BRASIL, 2020c).

We add to this scenario that the public network guarantees access to early childhood education in most of the country's municipalities. Table 5 shows that in more than 48% of the municipalities, the public network provided daycare and preschool services exclusively in 2020. Furthermore, in that year, public attendance was equal to or higher than 75% in 87.1% of the municipalities when we analyzed daycare, and in 92% of the municipalities when we analyzed preschool.

Table 5 - Distribution of the number of municipalities according to the range of enrollments attended by the public network in kindergarten and preschool by the year 2020

Public network enrollment range	Day Care Center		Preschool	
	No. of municipalities	Proportion in relation to the total	No. of municipalities	Proportion in relation to the total
Fulfills below 75%	696	12.9%	444	8.0%
Between 75 and 80%	194	3.6%	282	5.1%
Between 80 and 85%	299	5.5%	435	7.8%
Between 85 and 90%	442	8.2%	547	9.8%
Between 90 and 95%	566	10.5%	674	12.1%
Between 95 and 100%	584	10.8%	510	9.2%
Meets 100%	2,631	48.6%	2,678	48.1%
Total	5,412	100.0%	5,570	100.0%

Source: prepared by the authors based on the synopses of Inep's Basic Education School Census.

Note: no daycare services were available in 158 municipalities.

Suppose we want to minimize inequalities in the supply of early childhood education. In that case, we must give priority to an evaluation of this supply that uses input and resource indicators, such as the CAQ methodology, and that ensures the allocation of public investments in public education, because it is the public network that guarantees access and has the necessary conditions to reach the poorest part of the population.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND REDUCING INEQUALITY: AN URGENCY

Education is a right for all and a duty of the State, which must attend to everyone without distinction. Moreover, for Cury (2002, p. 261), “the dissemination and universalization of quality school education as a citizenship right are the civil presupposition of a universal citizenship.” To verify the quality of education should be, therefore, one of the mechanisms that guarantee the indispensable balance between vital rights for the enjoyment of full citizenship, such as access, permanence, and learning, with the essential duties of the State to provide inputs, processes, and results. In any case, if this definition of quality is imprecise and requires pondering, Cury proposes that we can easily at least be clear about what it is not, and this would mean stating that it “is not the lack of access, it is not the lack of resources” (CURY, 2014, p. 1055).

The inclusion of the CAQ concept in the new Fundeb changes the logic of financing and encourages discussion of the quality of supply. It creates an opportunity for new social control mechanisms. Suppose the allocation of resources will now be subject to quality parameters. In that case, we can relate the funding to the evaluation of the education network since the minimum value to be transferred will be linked to minimum requirements for the quality of supply. Defining the items that make up the CAQ allows us to assess which ones have not yet been met, and which groups may be at the margins of these conditions and, thus, provide a less unequal supply.

We hope that there will be a broad public debate that will allow the CAQ parameters to translate, in fact, the expectations and demands for each stage of basic education. However, in early childhood education, we can anticipate some issues that we consider extremely urgent since we still live with the supply of places without the minimum essential conditions for this first stage of basic education.

In Table 6, we present a small overview of the schools and municipalities that provide early childhood education according to their lack of infrastructure conditions and adaptations necessary for the care of children from 0 to 5 years of age. The data focus on the lack of conditions, not because the authors are pessimistic, but for methodological reasons. When a certain variable is declared in the school census as existing, we should always question its adequacy, if there was a sufficient quantity or if it was available; however, when the answer is negative, it is because there was no evidence of this input.

Table 6 - Absolute number and proportion of total schools that did not present minimum conditions of infrastructure or adaptations for early childhood education in 2020

	No. of schools that attended daycare	Proportion of total daycare	No. of schools attending preschool	Proportion of total preschool
As for the minimum conditions of infrastructure				
Without drinking water	2,103	3.0%	5,220	5.2%
No water supply	1,199	1.7%	2,463	0.0%
Without power	405	0.6%	2,291	2.3%
No sanitation	2,171	3.1%	5,761	5.7%
Regarding adaptations to education child				
No adapted toilet	23,384	33.2%	48,031	47.9%
No playground	29,562	42.0%	54,724	54.5%
No teaching materials Specific	15,881	22.6%	31,914	31.8%

Source: prepared by the authors based on microdata from Inep's Basic Education School Census.

Surprisingly, as recently as 2020, we had 2,103 schools in Brazil serving daycare centers and another 5,220 serving preschools that declared they did not have potable water. Similarly, it seems unlikely that 2,171 daycare centers and 5,761 preschools had no sanitary sewers. When we analyze the adaptations of schools for early childhood education, the numbers reveal even more adversity. The schools declared, for example, that they did not have adapted bathrooms in 33.2% of the daycare centers and 47.9% of the preschools, as well as no playground in 42% of the daycare centers and 54.5% of the preschools.

We have had a huge expansion in the number of places, but we still live with essential infrastructure problems. We have made little progress in the adaptations necessary for early childhood education. It is the function of an evaluation of the supply committed to quality education to point out the weaknesses of this service so that a correct allocation of resources can contribute to minimizing the enormous inequalities that exist.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The close look at the micro and macro issues of early childhood education policy emanating from the daily meetings of the Permanent Forum on Early Childhood Education in Rio de Janeiro State by teachers, pedagogical coordinators, and teams from the Education Secretariat, in addition to those who work in non-governmental organizations, propelled this study, which sought to enter the recent field of financing and evaluation of supply in order to foresee and signal the limitations and potentialities of the new regulatory frameworks for early childhood education.

Not coincidentally, we begin by using the expression “the king is naked,” originally a statement uttered, shouting, by a child in the short story “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen (ANDERSEN, 2011), which finishes the narrative about a vain king whom outsider swindlers persuade to wear a magical garment, which costs a small fortune and is invisible to the eyes of the intelligent few. So when the king asks about the beauty of his magic garment, worn at a celebration, everyone settles down so as not to pass themselves off as fools. In analogy to the ideas brought by Andersen, we live the challenge of analyzing how far the wishful thinking of early childhood education, built and fostered in recent decades, is from the present situation, meaning more equitable access of children to daycare and preschool, public investment materialized in public networks and evaluation of resource allocation as a fundamental mechanism for reducing inequality.

The question about the value of quality early childhood education continues to echo. However, we found in this research relevant subsidies for the elaboration of quality parameters for the first stage of basic education, as determined by the new Fundeb:

- In 2019, early childhood education gained a significant share of the enrollments, schools, and teachers of all basic education, more precisely 19%, 64%, and 27%, respectively. However, this expansion of places was not fully reflected in the expansion of access, which was subject to different demographic movements throughout the period. We note that there was, in fact, a reduction in the number of live births between 2000 and 2010, but this movement had its intensity progressively reduced. We even registered a significant increase in the period from 2010 to 2015. The projections of the population aged 0 to 3 years and 4 to 5 years in 2020 show that in 14 of the 27 states, there was a real increase in the population aged 0 to 3 years in the last decade and, likewise, an increase in the population aged 4 to 5 years in 11 of the 27 states.
- Bringing elements to the evaluation of the allocation of resources in the search for more equitable access, we estimate that in more than half of the municipalities, we still need an expansion of more than 50% in the number of enrollments in daycare to meet goal 1 of the PNE 2014–2024 and that in 14.9% of the municipalities this increase should still be of the order of +200%. Regarding preschool, we see that in most of the municipalities (42.6%), there is still a small need for expansion, that is, an increase of up to 10% in the number of enrollments, but practically every third municipality should still have an increase of 25% or more in order to achieve the universalization foreseen in the PNE 2014–2024.
- An evaluation of the supply of water and sanitation services should point out the weaknesses in this service so that a correct allocation of resources can contribute to minimizing the enormous inequalities that exist. Surprisingly, as recently as 2020, there were 2,103 daycare schools and 5,220 preschool schools in Brazil that declared they had no potable water. Likewise, there were no sanitary sewers in 2,171 daycare centers and 5,761 preschools. When we analyze the adaptations of schools for early childhood education, the numbers reveal even more adversity. The schools declared, for example, that they did not have adapted bathrooms in 33.2% of the daycare centers and 47.9% of the preschools, as well as no playground in 42% of the daycare centers and 54.5% of the preschools.
- Taking the cost reference of primary and secondary school as a parameter, we see that the estimated CAQi for urban part-time childcare is about twice as high, and for preschool, about 20% higher. If we consider the full timetable, when attendance is equal to or greater than seven hours a day, these proportions increase.
- The public network guarantees access to early childhood education in most of the country's municipalities. We saw that in 2020, in more than 48% of the municipalities, both daycare and preschool services were provided exclusively by the public network. Suppose we intend to minimize inequalities in the supply of early childhood education. In that case, we must give priority to an assessment of this supply that uses input and resource indicators, such as the CAQ methodology, and that ensures the allocation of public investments in public education since it is the public network that ensures access and has the necessary conditions to reach the poorest part of the population, thus seeking more equitable access.

Finally, the findings indicate that it is up to the public manager to determine the costs of providing access to daycare and preschool for all children and the inputs required for educational quality. They also indicate that, based on this evaluation, it is possible to make decisions, inverting the logic of financing, until then subordinated to budget availability, from the focus on the real investment needs to ensure a minimum quality standard. The logic of evaluation centered on performance, the siren song of many education secretaries, who prefer to blame children for educational success or failure, is also inverted. They, however, in many corners of the country, are shouting that “the king is naked”!

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Author 2 - Project coordinator, participation in data analysis and review of final writing.