

Evaluation, gender and quality in Early Childhood Education: concepts in dispute¹

Avaliação, gênero e qualidade na Educação Infantil: conceitos em disputa

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to undertake an historical review of the process of the consolidation of the debate between evaluation, quality and gender in public policies on Early Childhood Education, before then presenting some aspects of the São Paulo City Early Childhood Education Quality Indicators, a participative institutional self-evaluation tool that includes gender as part of the dimensions of quality. Quality is understood as being negotiated and a concept in dispute (BONDIOLI, 2004; MOSS, 2002; DAHLBERG; MOSS; PENCE, 2003). We consider it essential to highlight, among the research findings, the configuration of this quality assessment policy devised by women-teachers who shared theoretical concepts of childhoods and Early Childhood Education agreed on in national and international documents in this area from a gender perspective (SCOTT, 1988). In a dimension that emerges with the demand for racial issues, the gender dimension enters the intersection. The group of women-teachers responsible for building this specific dimension, referred to as “guardians of the issue”, used the document as an instrument of struggle and, as a political option, put gender and ethnic-racial differences and inequalities on the agenda in Early Childhood Education in São Paulo. In this sense, their reflections pose some important challenges for the necessary intersection between evaluation, gender and quality in Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Gender. Evaluation. Public policies. Quality.

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RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo fazer um recuo histórico sobre o processo de consolidação do debate entre avaliação, qualidade e gênero nas políticas públicas de Educação Infantil para, então, apresentar alguns aspectos dos Indicadores de Qualidade da Educação Infantil Paulistana, um instrumento de autoavaliação institucional participativa (AIP) que insere gênero como parte das dimensões de qualidade. Qualidade é entendida como negociada e um conceito em disputa (BONDIOLI, 2004; MOSS, 2002; DAHLBERG; MOSS; PENCE, 2003). Consideramos imprescindível destacar, entre os achados da pesquisa, a configuração dessa política de avaliação de qualidade elaborada por mulheres-professoras que compartilhavam de concepções teóricas de infâncias e Educação Infantil consensuadas nos documentos nacionais e internacionais da área a partir da perspectiva de gênero (SCOTT, 1988). Em uma dimensão que nasce com a demanda por questões raciais, a dimensão de gênero entra na intersecção. O grupo de mulheres-professoras responsável pela construção desta dimensão específica, nomeadas “guardiãs da questão”, utilizou-se do documento como um instrumento de luta e, como opção política, pautou as diferenças e as desigualdades de gênero e étnico-raciais na Educação Infantil de São Paulo. Nesse sentido, suas reflexões nos colocam alguns importantes desafios para a intersecção necessária entre avaliação, gênero e qualidade na Educação Infantil.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Gênero. Avaliação. Políticas públicas. Qualidade.

We are living in the so-called “quality era”. Everyone talks about quality, all the time, and, moreover, as if quality were something to be measured. On the contrary, what is understood by quality can vary according to values, traditions, knowledge and historical, social, and economic context. This notion that there is a reality called quality – objective, real, universal, known and immeasurable – is a legacy of modernist, positivist ideas and Developmental Psychology theories, globally influenced by the United States (MOSS, 2002). However, since the 1990s, this concept has been questioned, highlighting the importance of the process of defining quality based on an understanding of context, complexity, plurality and subjectivity (MOSS, 2002).

This is why the debate about quality is linked to evaluation processes and is a concept in dispute. When identifying the process of defining quality, it is necessary to ask who is involved and how this is done (DAHLBERG; MOSS; PENCE, 2003). Ana Bondioli (2004), an Italian researcher, when reflecting on the experience of Italian Early Childhood Education since the 1990s, states that the conception of quality that has been built has a transactional, participatory,

self-reflective, contextual and plural, procedural and transformative nature. As such, we reach the understanding that quality is negotiated.

Understanding the transactional nature of quality is not to place it as an absolute value, something given, an *a priori* standard set and coming from above. Rather, it is transactional, and that means “recognizing the ideological, evaluative nature of quality and considering the clash between points of view, ideas and interests, a resource rather than a threat” (BONDIOLI, 2004, p. 15, our translation).

The participatory nature of quality is what makes the actors and actresses involved seek shared goals and, because it is a political, democratic task, it enables the possibility of achieving them. This shared reflection on consensually defined goals characterizes quality as self-reflective. Therefore, it is not enough just to act, but also to reflect on the practices, habits, usages and traditions of a concrete reality. Therefore, its character is contextual and also “plural”, as are realities; and this characteristic is not out of keeping with the premise of sharing purposes and values in the quest for quality. “On the contrary, contextualization of quality amplifies and enriches the meaning of sharing and constitutes, at the same time, a device for verifying and controlling the possibility of achieving the participatory model” (BONDIOLI, 2004, p. 16, our translation).

Quality is also procedural since it is not something that is given, a product. It (re)builds itself over time. Its transforming nature is a decisive aspect. Quality is a “co-construction” of shared meanings, which enriches the subjects that participate in it and produces “a transformation for the better” – or of what it believes it is in a given historical moment –, marked by exchanges, reflections, confrontations, cooperation, examinations of reality. Therefore, quality also has a transforming nature (BONDIOLI, 2004). In this sense, we can state that:

- 1) quality is a relative concept, based on values and beliefs;
- 2) defining quality is an important process in itself, providing opportunities to share, discuss and understand values, ideas, knowledge and experience;
- 3) the process should be participatory and democratic, involving different groups that include children, parents[families], relatives and professionals from the area;
- 4) the needs, perspectives and values of these groups may differ at times;
- 5) defining quality should be seen as a dynamic and ongoing process, involving regular review and never arriving at a final statement (MOSS, 2002, p. 20-21, our translation).

In the realm of education, one can say that quality is negotiated only when it is built internally, with participation, based on each educational institution’s

Political-Pedagogical Project and on the challenges that each reality presents. Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss & Alan Pence (2003) expand the debate by pointing out the importance of gender, racial, cultural and other differences when thinking about quality and evaluation, by dialoguing with the field of Sociology of Childhood, and, based on the Italian experience of Reggio Emilia, inspire the international debate.

In this article, our goal was to undertake a historical review of the process of the consolidation of the debate between evaluation, quality and gender in public policies on Early Childhood Education, and then present some aspects of the São Paulo City Early Childhood Education Quality Indicators, a participative institutional self-evaluation tool that includes gender as part of the dimensions of quality.

Gender is understood here not only as one of the dimensions of quality in the document examined, but also as a category of analysis that helps problematize the construction of sexual difference that, through norms and symbols, organizes social structure and constitutes subjective identities (SCOTT, 1988).

Gender and evaluation in national policies for Early Childhood Education: ruptures and continuities

In the field of policy struggles, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is still recent, if we compare it to the other stages of Basic Education. Issues such as the welfarist character that still prevails, on one hand, and the bringing forward of Elementary Education, on the other; in addition to the working conditions and training of educators, the multiplicity of functions, with unequal nomenclatures and salaries, among other issues relating to the care and education of young children, from babies on, still put ECE in an unequal relationship when compared to other stages of Basic Education.

The great achievement of ECE was the recognition of motherhood as a social function and the guarantee of care and education of children from zero to six years of age in daycare centers and preschools as a duty of the State. By incorporating this need, the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988) does so under the sign of Law and no longer under the sign of Charitable Support and Social Welfare, as was the case of previous legislation. Therefore, from 1988 onwards, Early Childhood Education becomes a duty of the State.

In particular, the right to daycare centers has a dual character: “women having the right to daycare centers and preschools for their daughters and sons,

and children having the right to an educational, pedagogical and extra-family care apparatus as an effective measure of articulation of family, occupational and social responsibilities” (VIANNA; UNBEHAUM, 2006, p. 411, our translation). A right that reflected the struggle of working-class mothers who, initially, sought a public space where their sons and daughters could stay while they were at work, and which later extended to the quest for the guarantee of a quality space (SCHIFINO, 2012).

In a movement of continuities and ruptures, a theoretical framework has been built since the Federal Constitution when education in daycare centers and preschools became a right of children, a responsibility of the State and not only of the family. However, even before that, in the 1970s, when the concept of “quality” had not even been coined, the debate already mobilized Brazilian Early Childhood Education. Historically, it was concerned with “legal and political order, the minimum conditions necessary to propose evaluation strategies aimed at achieving quality standards” (ROSEMBERG, 2015, p. 217, our translation).

Launched in 1987 and 1988, the booklets entitled “*Creche Urgente*” [Daycare, It’s Urgent] already focused on dimensions related to quality by presenting “directions for specific issues concerning children (their needs, the needs of their families, their education, toys, health and nutrition), the organization of the daycare space, legislation on daycare centers and their staff” (BRASIL, 1987a). Seven booklets were published that already outlined quality indicators, even though the debate about this concept or the proposal to build indicators were not present at that time. There was an “intense mobilization for the expansion of the availability and improvement of their quality based on evaluations that did not always go by this name” (ROSEMBERG, 2013, p. 48, our translation). They put on the agenda the debate about children’s rights, seen as citizens full of desires and needs. Childhood thus came to be seen in the documents as a social category and daycare as a social and educational facility.

Gender issues appear in the documents when they question mothers’ sole responsibility for caring for children and the home, and the lack of possibility of professional fulfillment for women. They denounce gender inequalities by pointing to the mothers’ sole responsibility for children and daycare as a “necessary evil”. However, even though the debate on equality between the sexes was already present, the concept of gender (SCOTT, 1988) and its epistemological and political power as an analytical category of social relations was outside the debate on the pedagogical work carried out in daycare centers or on the construction of children’s identity. It is interesting to think that this characteristic of the documents marks the context of the time. Likewise, the debate on evaluation and quality as a social problem in the field of Early Childhood Education was not present (CAMPOS; FULLGRAF; WIGGERS, 2006).

Before the first term of the then President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the *Coordenadoria Geral da Educação Infantil do Ministério da Educação* [Ministry of Education General Coordination of Early Childhood Education] (Coedi/MEC), was already preparing a policy document on ECE, known as “*cadernos das carinhas*” [Little Face Booklets], due to their booklet-like format and their covers with drawings of children’s faces that represented all of Brazilian diversity. After they were prepared in 1993, the “*Cadernos das Carinhas*” were published according to several separate themes between 1994 and 1996 (VIANNA; UNBEHAUM, 2006; FINCO, 2010; PALHARES; MARTINEZ, 2005).

The “*Política de Educação Infantil: proposta*” [Early Childhood Education Policy: A Proposal], dated 1993, published as the first of the “*carinhas*” series in 1994, listed seven priority actions to meet the objective of “promoting the improvement of the quality of care in daycare centers and preschools” (BRASIL, 1993, p. 21, our translation). These actions covered, in a nutshell, the expansion and improvement of the quality of ECE provision, funding, pedagogical and curricular proposals, training and valuing of staff, interdisciplinary and intersectoral actions, an information system on ECE, and production of knowledge about the area.

In 1994, the *I Simpósio Nacional de Educação Infantil* [1st National Symposium on Early Childhood Education] was held prior to the *Conferência Nacional de Educação para Todos* [National Conference on Education for All]. At this meeting, a proposal of the Early Childhood Education Policy was steered forward, with nine recommendations and five motions, one of them being in defense of the urgent need to approve the new *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* [Law of Directives and Bases for National Education] (LDB), enacted in 1996. Through various debates and seminars, in the search for a new conception of education for children from zero to six years old, focusing on both education and care, from among the documents that make up the “*Políticas Nacionais para a Educação Infantil*” [National Policies for Early Childhood Education] we highlight the Criteria for daycare center service provision that respects the fundamental rights of children (BRASIL, 1995, 2009a). These documents, fruit of the recognition of what had already been produced in the area, represented an attempt to overcome the dichotomy between education and social welfare and to respect the rights of children, at a historical moment when the increase in demand for and supply of ECE was happening in a disorganized way (PALHARES; MARTINEZ, 2005).

The document entitled “*Crítérios para um atendimento em creches que respeite os direitos fundamentais das crianças*” [Criteria for childcare that respects the fundamental rights of children], first published in 1995 and reissued

in 2009, was inspired by a 1992 European Community document entitled *Quality in Services for Young Children*, which at that time was already articulating the debate about Early Childhood Education, evaluation and gender (BALAGEUR; MESTRES; PENN, 1992). This process also dialogued with the field of research in Early Childhood Education and with the various forums and movements fighting for the education of young children, from babies upward.

In 1996, the inclusion of ECE in the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* [Law of Directives and Bases for National Education] (LDB) brought a new dimension to Basic Education: articulation between education and care (ROSEMBERG, 2010). The LDB innovated and broke with previous legislation. This innovation brought consequences ranging from the development of national guidelines to concern with the training of professionals who until then had worked in educational institutions.

In this field of disputes, the inclusion in the LDB of the debate on evaluation of/in Early Childhood Education was permeated by tensions between opposing theoretical and practical viewpoints. Some were closer to the other stages of Basic Education, placing value on tests, concepts and grades; while others advocated for the development process of each child, through observations and records (DIDONET, 2012). Therefore, as a legal landmark, when consolidating a vision of evaluation in Early Childhood Education, article 29 of the LDB advocates that “early childhood education, the first stage of basic education, aims at the full development of the child up to 5 (five) years old, in its physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community” and, in article 31, item I, it advocates that evaluation shall take place “by monitoring and recording the development of children, without the goal of promotion, even for access to elementary education (BRASIL, 1996).

It is important to emphasize, however, that the LDB does not address evaluation of early childhood education, but only evaluation in early childhood education, which shows the fragility of the understanding that the quality of education goes beyond the individual dimension of child development. However, in this field of disputes and tensions, other documents from the 1990s, such as the “*cadernos das carinhas*”, already pointed out the importance of thinking about the evaluation of early childhood education, that is, an evaluation of context.

In the 1990s, in view of the concern with the quality and infrastructure offered by the institutions that cared for children, there was investment in the training of educators, most of whom were laypeople until then, but also prioritization of part-time services to the detriment of full-time services. Following the enactment of the LDB, in 1996, with the inclusion of ECE as the first stage of Basic Education under the responsibility of municipal governments, albeit in collaboration with the state governments and the Union, joint action

between the different levels of government was needed so that the transition from daycare centers and preschools to the education system would meet the quality criteria defended in the documents. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the National, State and Municipal Education Councils, prepared the document entitled *Subsídios para o credenciamento e o funcionamento das instituições de Educação Infantil* [Guidelines for Accreditation and Operation of Early Childhood Education Institutions] (BRASIL, 1998a).

Also in 1998, however, following the reconfiguration of the Coedi/MEC team, the ideal that sought to overcome the dichotomy between education and social welfare was disregarded and, in this context, the *Referencial Curricular Nacional da Educação Infantil* [National Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education] (RCNEI) (BRASIL, 1998b) was approved. The way it was built and conceived was criticized as “veering off course” (PALHARES; MARTINEZ, 2005; FINCO, 2010). The pathway that had been being built by the Ministry of Education, with the creation of the “*Políticas Nacionais para a Educação Infantil*” [National Policies for Early Childhood Education], was to “seek to overcome the dichotomy between education/social welfare, encouraging strategies of articulation of various sectors and/or institutions committed to Early Childhood Education” (PALHARES; MARTINEZ, 2005, p. 6, our translation). Furthermore, despite being an important Ministry of Education initiative, for having been built by nationally and internationally renowned specialists, for incorporating national proposals and those from other countries and for contributing to a new concept of ECE, the document is far-removed from the reality of Brazilian children and Brazilian preschools and daycare centers. If the expectations of the Curricular Reference are not met, there is a risk of putting the blame for this on the relationships that occur between Early Childhood Education professionals, mothers and children (PALHARES; MARTINEZ, 2005).

The document does not represent the debate of the time, as it does not include, for example, the recommendations on funding, quantity and quality of care and professional training made at the *I Simpósio Nacional de Educação Infantil* [1st National Symposium on Early Childhood Education] in 1994. Therefore, in addition to not dialoguing with the debate and the previous work of Coedi/MEC, this departure from the route disseminates the RCNEI as “the” curriculum for Early Childhood Education, even though it was proposed only to be a guidance document (AMORIM; DIAS, 2012).

The RCNEI draws attention to the social character of gender and sexuality, problematizes biological determinism and stimulates perceptions about the cultural character of being a boy or girl (VIANNA; UNBEHAUM, 2006). However, despite this move forward, the document has also received numerous criticisms from a gender perspective for confusing gender identity with sexual

identity and treating segregations between girls and boys as “spontaneous” (FINCO, 2010). However, on the other hand, it uses language that is more inclusive, using the words girls and boys, not just children.

From a gender perspective, denying these specificities of childhood is to dismiss the feminist struggle that articulates education and care. Therefore, despite the moves forward, the RCNEI leaves ECE with a legacy of a model based on schooling, traces of which still remain to this day. While the Ministry of Education was preparing the RCNEI, the *Câmara de Educação Básica* [Basic Education Chamber] (CEB) of the *Conselho Nacional de Educação* [National Education Council] (CNE) defined the first version of the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* [National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education] (DCNEI), published in 1999, which are mandatory.

Despite the move forward, from the gender point of view, there is no mention of these issues in CNE/CEB Resolution No. 1/1999 (BRASIL, 1999) which sets out the DCNEI. However, CNE/CEB Opinion No. 22/1998 (BRASIL 1998c), which precedes the publication of the DCNEI, makes mention of gender, although in a dichotomous way: “young children and their families, more than at any other stage of human life, are defining identities influenced by issues of **male and female gender (...)**” (BRASIL, 1998c, p. 11, our emphasis, our translation).

According to Ana Luisa Amorim & Adelaide Dias (2012), the preparation of these guidelines was an indication that the previous route needed to be returned to. And they point out that the route was, indeed, returned to in the early 2000s, starting with the Luís Inácio Lula da Silva Administration, when other documents were published giving value to each ECE institution building its curriculum locally, according to its pedagogical proposal.

Moving on along the course of this brief historical recap, prompted by the goal related to ECE contained in the 2001-2011 *Plano Nacional de Educação* [National Education Plan] (PNE), with effect from 2005 the Ministry of Education published other documents, fruit of the debate in regional seminars. The *Política Nacional de Educação Infantil: pelo direito das crianças de 0 até 6 anos à educação* [National Policy for Early Childhood Education: for the right of children from 0 to 6 years to education] (BRASIL, 2006a), establishes guidelines, objectives, goals, strategies and recommendations. None of them refer to gender, only to differences, but in its introduction the document does not shy away from emphasizing the importance of this discussion when considering the curriculum for early childhood education.

The preparation of parameters relating to quality marks a historical fact for Early Childhood Education because it is part of a context of achievements in relation to legislation. Chapter II, item 19 of the topic Objectives and Goals of Early Childhood Education contained in the 2001 PNE (BRASIL, 2001), when

stipulating for the first time goals for early childhood education, now considered as the first stage of Basic Education, aims to “establish quality parameters for early childhood education services, as a reference for supervision, control and evaluation, and as a tool for the adoption of measures to improve quality”. Therefore, the provisions of the *Política Nacional de Educação Infantil: pelo direito das crianças de 0 até 6 anos à educação* [National Policy for Early Childhood Education: for the right of children from 0 to 6 years to education] (BRASIL, 2006a), comply with this determination of the 2001 PNE when referring to the forms of organization and operation of ECE institutions and the (re)organization of ECE spaces that already existed.

The documents are anchored in a debate that was getting stronger at the time they were written - 2006 - about the notion of the child as a subject of rights, a producer and product of history and culture. Based on this new view of the child, the document also points to another conception of a Pedagogy of Early Childhood Education:

While the school has the *student* as its subject and the *teaching* of the different areas through *lessons* as its fundamental object, the daycare center and preschool have as their object the *educational relationships* that take place in a *collective living space* that has the *child* aged 0 to 6 as its subject (ROCHA, 2001, p. 31, our translation).

This reflection brings up the specificity of the pedagogical work of ECE, the centrality of which is the education and care of young children, from babies on, while denouncing, at the same time, the polarization between social welfare and education in daycare centers, on the one hand, and a preschool education that prepares for Elementary School, on the other. In that context, the objective of the second volume of the *Parâmetros Nacionais de Qualidade para a Educação Infantil* [National Quality Parameters for Early Childhood Education], by establishing standards for both ECE institutions and the education systems, enables the exercise of “reciprocal social participation and monitoring of the bodies involved in the care and education of children from 0 to 6 years of age” (BRASIL, 2006b, p. 9, our translation).

When looking at the document from the point of view of social gender relations, we start from the premise that Early Childhood Education is marked by this dimension when relating the expansion of access to daycare centers and preschools to men and women being more equally included in the world of formal work. Therefore, when defining national quality parameters, it was

stated in these documents that respect for children's rights, including the right to gender equality, is one of the prerogatives of such quality.

Years later, the *Indicadores da Qualidade na Educação Infantil* [Early Childhood Education Quality Indicators] (Indique-EI) were produced by the Ministry of Education as a participatory institutional self-evaluation document, comprised of seven dimensions that unfold into indicators regarding the political-pedagogical bases and aspects about the operation of an Early Childhood Education institution. With the goal of assisting daycare centers and preschools throughout the country in their self-evaluation processes in order for them to have transformative potential, Indique-EI guides them to "find their own path towards educational practices that respect the fundamental rights of children and help build a more democratic society" (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 14, our translation). Therefore, while arguing that there are many ways to improve educational work in Brazilian preschools, Indique-EI points out that this transformative potential needs to be built between family, community and staff in daycare and preschools.

Despite the many possible paths, some principles were put forward, among them "the recognition and appreciation of gender, racial-ethnic, religious and cultural differences, as well as differences related to people with disabilities" (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 14, our translation).

Also published in 2009, the second version of the DCNEIs was a breakthrough for the field of Early Childhood Education, since, by guiding organization, articulation, development and evaluation for Early Childhood Education institutions, it emphasized interaction and playing games as guiding axes for the pedagogical practices that make up the curricular organization of Early Childhood Education, based on the assumption that young children, right from when they are babies, are historical subjects with rights and desires. The DCNEIs consolidated the view that the quality of early childhood education involves evaluation of processes and not of results. This idea is present in article 10 of the document, when it states that "procedures must be created to monitor the pedagogical work and to evaluate the development of children, without aiming to select, promote or classify" (BRASIL, 2009c).

Contrary to the LDB, the document builds the notion that evaluation of provision of education cannot be done exclusively by evaluating the development of children. On the contrary, evaluating the context, anchored in the principles of democratic participation, negotiation, self-reflexivity and transformation, makes it possible to problematize the evaluation of children's learning by articulating the educational goals achieved with the quality of the education they receive (BRASIL, 2015; SOUZA; MORO; COUTINHO, 2015; MORO; COUTINHO, 2018).

As part of the pedagogical proposal, the new version of the DCNEIs places value on playing games and interaction as central to the curriculum for the education of young children, from infants on, and provides guidance, in Article 7, item V (BRASIL, 2009c), that educational institutions should build “new forms of sociability and subjectivity committed to ludic activities, democracy, sustainability of the planet and breaking away from relations involving age, socioeconomic, ethno-racial, gender, regional, linguistic and religious domination”.

However, this is the only reference to gender issues that might delineate conceptions of evaluation and quality; in the rest of the document we only find diffuse references to diversity. Regarding pedagogical practices, the DCNEIs provide guidance that educational institutions should ensure experiences that “enable ethical and aesthetic experiences with other children and cultural groups, which broaden their patterns of reference and identities in dialogue with and knowledge of diversity” (BRASIL, 2009c).

On the other hand, in CNE/CEB Opinion No. 20/2009, which gave rise to this new version of the DCNEIs (BRASIL, 2009c), the gender perspective is made clear. When dealing with the socio-political and educational function of the pedagogical proposals of ECE, it gives rise to what is described in Article 7, Item V, of the Resolution (BRASIL, 2009c), which reinforces the need to break away from relations of domination, including gender domination. Among the fundamental principles (ethical, political and aesthetic) of the DCNEIs, gender stands out in the ethical principles. Based on building a worldview that values differences and equality, it proposes that children need to learn to “question and break away from forms of age, socioeconomic, racial-ethnic, gender, regional, linguistic, and religious domination that exist in our society and which are recreated in the relationship between adults and children, as well as between children” (BRASIL, 2009c).

In 2010, the *Seminário Internacional sobre Qualidade na Educação Infantil* [International Seminar on Quality in Early Childhood Education] was held, organized by *Fundação Carlos Chagas* (FCC), in São Paulo, among other events organized by the Ministry of Education, having as guiding principles evaluation of context and the notion of negotiated quality. However, in 2011, things veered off course again, as had happened in 1998 during the building the RCNEI. The Secretariat for Strategic Affairs, linked to the Presidency of the Republic, proposed the use of a large-scale child development evaluation instrument, developed by the Americans Jane Squires and Diane Bricker, known as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3). After strong opposition to the instrument by professionals in the Brazilian Early Childhood Education field, several working groups were subsequently appointed to return to the principles

already established in other documents, especially the 2009 DCNEIs, and provide continuity to the work that had been done thus far.

Also in 2011, a working group was created by the Education Ministry's Secretariat of Basic Education to guide the policy on *Educação infantil: subsídios para construção de uma sistemática de avaliação* [Early Childhood Education: elements for building an evaluation system] (BRASIL, 2012). In 2012, three events were held in a manner articulated with each other: a technical meeting sponsored by the *Ministério da Educação* [Ministry of Education] (MEC), the *Organização dos Estados Ibero-Americanos* [Organization of Ibero-American States] (OEI) and the *Universidade Federal do Paraná* [Federal University of Paraná] (UFPR); the *Seminário Internacional: Educação e Avaliação em Contextos da Educação Infantil* [International Seminar: Education and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education Contexts], sponsored by the *Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Infância e Educação Infantil* [Center for Studies and Research in Childhood and Early Childhood Education] (NEPIE/UFPR/MEC); and the *Seminário Internacional Avaliação da Educação Infantil: Tendências e Perspectivas* [International Seminar Evaluation of Early Childhood Education: Trends and Perspectives], sponsored by the FCC (BRASIL, 2015).

In 2013, the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira* [Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research] (INEP) formed a Working Group for the Evaluation of Early Childhood Education with the goal of developing an evaluation proposal for this stage of Basic Education. In 2015, this group approved a *Minuta de Portaria da Avaliação Nacional de Educação Infantil* [Draft Ordinance for National Evaluation of Early Childhood Education] (ANEI). This was to a large-scale but innovative evaluation, according to Luiz Carlos de Freitas (2015), focusing on monitoring the provision and infrastructure of daycare centers and preschools but not on the development of children. This proposal dialogued with what was being built in the PNE, published in 2014, Goal 1 of which referred to preschool universalization by 2016 and expansion of daycare provision by at least 50% by the end of that PNE (2014-2024). Standing out among the strategies contained in PNE Goal 1 is the quality of early childhood education, as provided for in Strategy 1.6:

to implement, by the second year of this PNE, **evaluation of early childhood education**, to be carried out every two years, **based on national quality parameters**, in order to evaluate physical infrastructure, personnel, management conditions, pedagogical resources, accessibility status, among other relevant indicators (BRASIL, 2014, p. 49, our emphasis, our translation).

Strategy 7.4, part of Goal 7, which deals with the *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* [Basic Education Development Index] (IDEB), includes early childhood education by stressing the importance of self-evaluation processes:

to induce a **continuous process of self-evaluation of basic education schools, through the creation of evaluation instruments** that guide the dimensions to be strengthened, highlighting strategic planning, continuous improvement of education quality, continuing training of education professionals, and enhancement of democratic management (BRASIL, 2014, p. 62, our emphasis, our translation).

This principle has been built over the years, through seminars, meetings and research in the field of ECE. In 2013, NEPIE/UFPR and MEC held the *Seminário Internacional: Avaliação como Promoção da Qualidade: Política e Formação na Educação Infantil* [International Seminar: Evaluation as Promotion of Quality: Policy and Training in Early Childhood Education], and FCC held the *II Seminário Internacional Avaliação da Educação Infantil: Tendências e Perspectivas* [II International Seminar Evaluation of Early Childhood Education: Trends and Perspectives]. In 2015, MEC and NEPIE/UFPR held the *Seminário Avaliação de Contexto: Participação, Restituição e Formação* [Seminar on Context Evaluation: Participation, Restitution and Training] and the *Seminário Internacional Avaliação de Contexto na Educação Infantil: Perspectiva Formativa e Reflexiva* [International Seminar Context Evaluation in Early Childhood Education: Formative and Reflective Perspective]. These seminars were held in the scope of the Technical Cooperation Project between MEC/SEB/Coedi and UFPR, between 2012 and 2015, when two documents on the quality of Early Childhood Education were launched, strengthening the debate on the evaluation of ECE based on context evaluation (BRASIL, 2015).

As a new departure from the route that was being following, now in the context of the Parliamentary Coup, in August 2016, the Temer government revoked Ordinance No. 369, dated May 5, 2016 (BRASIL, 2016a), which created the National System for Basic Education Evaluation (SINAEB), provided for by PNE article 11, on the grounds that the review of the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* [National Common Curricular Base] (BNCC) was still in progress and that putting SINAEB into place should be guided by the recommendations emanating from the BNCC. Ordinance No. 981, dated August 25, 2016 (BRASIL, 2016b), was signed by the then Minister of Education, Aloízio

Mercadante. Article 8 of the repealed Ordinance provided for the following with regard to ECE:

National Evaluation of Early Childhood Education, with a biannual evaluation cycle, starting in 2017, with the purpose of performing diagnoses on the **conditions under which early childhood education is provided** by public and private education systems in Brazil, evaluating physical infrastructure, staffing, management conditions, teaching resources, accessibility status, among other relevant contextual indicators, in addition to providing elements for education systems for building public policies that enable improvements in the quality of early childhood education (BRASIL, 2016b, our emphasis, our translation).

Although the BNCC does not specifically address the conditions of ECE provision, once Ordinance No. 369 (BRASIL, 2016a) was revoked, the ANEI was suspended, the central purpose of which was to have been be the monitoring of ECE provision. This fact that mobilized a motion of repudiation signed by several entities:

SINAEB is a legal instrument destined to qualify the evaluation of basic education, making it capable of truly assisting the improvement of educational policies in their different dimensions, including making better use of existing evaluation mechanisms and fostering a new evaluation culture in education, besides creating others that are extremely necessary (UNDIME, 2016, our translation).

Although the ANEI is an historical achievement and constitutes a step in the broader process of ECE evaluation, it is worth noting that, despite the setback caused by the Ordinance being revoked, context evaluation opens up possibilities for reflection and debate on quality, focusing on the conditions of provision and on educational actions in practice. More than asking whether “we do our work well or badly”, it is necessary to pay attention to “why do I do what I do?” and “what, in fact, do I get out of what I do?” In this way, from a formative and self-evaluative perspective, with the participation of internal and external agents, the processes of evaluation and reflection on quality become interconnected (BRASIL, 2015c).

In general, we can say that in the last two decades, parameters, indicators and guidelines, in addition to their strengthening the link between quality and evaluation, have also made explicit the issues of gender and differences as both a value and an end, although plural and often under the umbrella of diversity. Thus, the current debate on quality in the field of ECE converges towards “contemporary conceptions that can be considered first-rate on the world stage” (ROSEMBERG, 2015, p. 221, our translation), by means of conceptions of child, early childhood education and quality and the ethical, political and aesthetic principles that guide early childhood education, despite movements that go against the grain, with the removal of gender and sexuality issues in the PNE (2014-2024), with the intensification of the gender dispute in State Education Plans (VIANNA; BORTOLINI, 2020) and the recent implementation of the BNCC.

Specifically in the field of the curriculum, the building and approval of the BNCC have meant a setback for ECE for two reasons. Despite the efforts of specialists and researchers in the preparation of its first and second versions, trying to ensure the specificities of the field, in dialogue with the DCNEI and the Italian fields of experience, giving visibility through its language to babies covered by a public policy (OLIVEIRA, 2019), the third version, rewritten and approved by the Temer government in 2017, went against the efforts that had been made and reduced the document to a vision of schooling with a psychologizing bias, representing yet another departure from the route. The second reason was the removal of the concepts of gender and sexual orientation, as a result of pressure from conservative groups (ARERALO, 2017).

This change occurred in a context of the strengthening of the anti-gender discourse and the dispute for the approval of conservative agendas manifested in the latest documents described here, with the omission of the term “gender” and all words related to it, such as woman/girl, man/boy, sexuality. And also in the removal and/or limitation of the LGBTTQI+ agenda in several Plans and in the veto to work on gender and sexuality issues in schools, under the argument that the “gender ideology” would be harmful to the education of children, in the case of Early Childhood Education.

It is necessary to denounce the “narrow formula”, expressed by a triangle the vertices of which are comprised of the BNCC, teacher training and large-scale evaluation. Who is interested in the development of a minimum curriculum that determines learning objectives? How can this process not be related to what has already been taking place as a process of apostilization, privatization and homogenization of education? A project that is contrary to democracy, standardizes and eliminates differences. But as it is a dispute, even in such an adverse context with the advance of the *Movimento Escola Sem Partido* [School Without Party Movement] and the anti-gender discourse at the national level,

it has been possible to build a gender agenda in Early Childhood Education policies, systematized in the document entitled *Indicadores de Qualidade da Educação Infantil Paulistana* [São Paulo City Early Childhood Education Quality Indicators] (SÃO PAULO, 2016), although permeated by tensions and power relations that sometimes favor it, sometimes disfavor it.

Gender in the São Paulo City Early Childhood Education Quality Indicators

Between 2013 and 2016, during the administration of Mayor Fernando Haddad, under the coordination of Sonia Larrubia Valderde, director of the then *Diretoria de Orientação Técnica de Educação Infantil* [Early Childhood Education Technical Guidance Directorate] (DOT-ECE), of the São Paulo City Education Department (SME-SP), among the six documents built, the São Paulo City Childhood Education Quality Indicators were published (SÃO PAULO, 2016).

The São Paulo City document was built based on the Indique-EI, in a process in which a committee, besides having reviewed each dimension already existing in the national document, updating the theoretical debate and including the specificities of the São Paulo City education network, added two new quality dimensions: Dimension 2 - Participation, Listening and Authorship of Infants and Children and Dimension 5 - Ethnic-Racial and Gender Relations.

The official documents about how the document was built showed the richness and complexity of its preparation, but did not point out the tensions and disputes that were certainly part of the writing process, among negotiations, concessions, and challenges. In this way, through semi-structured interviews with teachers who participated in the committee that wrote the document, it was possible to go beyond the official discourse and delve into its construction process in order to understand how, under what conditions and with what force gender was included in the São Paulo City document as a dimension of quality (ALVARENGA, 2020).

The objective was to perceive in the political game how political force and heritage could explain the form and force with which gender issues became included in the document. In this sense, the research revealed that the gender configuration of the document occurred as a result of the webs of interdependence established between the subjects involved and the structural

conditions (institutional, political, legal and normative) existing at that moment in time (ELIAS, 1994).

For this article, we consider it essential to highlight, among the findings of the research, the configuration of this quality evaluation policy developed by women-teachers who shared theoretical conceptions of childhood and Early Childhood Education agreed upon in national and international documents in the area. In a dimension that was born alongside the demand for racial issues, the gender dimension entered the intersection, although race had had more political force and theoretical basis. The group of women-teachers responsible for building this specific dimension, named “guardians of the issue”, used the document as an instrument of struggle and, as a political option, focused on differences and gender and ethno-racial inequalities in ECE in São Paulo. In this sense, their reflections pose some important challenges for the necessary intersection between evaluation, gender and quality in ECE.

Specifically regarding Dimension 5 of the Indicators, we highlight three achievements that can be considered important strategies in the gender configuration of a public policy: the importance of political articulations with a group of women teachers in defense of the inclusion of race/ethnicity and gender; the intersectional approach to race/ethnicity and gender differences, even though the gender issue had less political force than the ethno-racial issues; the highlighting of ethno-racial and gender relations in the title of Dimension 5, which translates the debate between the subcommittee members on differences and inequalities, permeated by power relations. A feminist language was used in all the government administration documents, even if there were some “escapes” from it along the way. We emphasize that this is one of the many strategies that should be used in addressing gender inequalities, since, on its own, it does not have the political force to change pedagogical practices in ECE.

According to the women interviewees, the public policies built during Fernando Haddad’s administration are in dialogue with the national field of ECE, but cannot be thought of outside the political and ideological conceptions of a particular governmental administration. As one of them says: “*evaluation does not happen in a conceptual vacuum, so depending on the conception I have of the child, of childhood, of the curriculum, of the teacher, that will determine the way in which I will evaluate this*”. Moreover, as Fúlvia Rosemberg (2015) noted earlier, having the most sophisticated and contemporary policy documents does not guarantee immediate results or effects for the context in which practice takes place. Considering the complexity of our scenario of inequalities of class, gender, race, ethnicity, location, age, these being inequalities that are reflected in ECE, there are as many disputes, ruptures, tensions, as there are achievements and continuities.

It is therefore worth mentioning another challenge articulated with the inclusion of gender issues: the problematization of the adult-centered model: “the model is the adult and everything is seen and felt according to the adult’s point of view, the adult is the center” (GOBBI, 1997, p. 26, our translation). In this other logic, in which young children, right from babies, question the world, life, adults and even the curriculum, it is necessary to recognize, according to Loris Malaguzzi as cited by Edwards, Gandini & Forman (1999), the “hundred languages” a child has and no longer a child “without language”. On the contrary, we have a “competent, active and critical child, full of potential right from birth” (SÃO PAULO, 2015c, p. 11, our translation). It is necessary to deconstruct the logic that “children are all the same, it’s only their address that changes”, since “the address and socio-historical-cultural scenario of children directly and permanently influence the ways they live their childhood and produce their identity” (SÃO PAULO, 2015c, p. 10, our translation). As one of the teachers stated:

All our studies drank from the spring of Sociology of Childhood, and if you have this inspiring source to look at, to produce the documents, this theoretical line, it will say that these children are not only children. They have social markers, they live in a certain neighborhood; so, this was very strongly marked in all the documents.

To move forward in a policy that articulates evaluation, gender and quality, continuing education for teachers is also considered fundamental, as one of the interviewees recalls: “it was our understanding that the trainings, in the city of São Paulo, had to dialogue with the documents that were being published; therefore, the trainings served to strengthen the document that would reach the schools”. The same teacher emphasizes the political option underlying this decision:

A document that will be published in 2015-2016 has to reflect what we believe in! (...) We needed to emphasize that position showing what we understand in relation to children, childhood. We believe that childhood has these markers of difference, that need to be talked about. I can’t talk about Early Childhood Education without talking about gender relations, without thinking about how this boy and girl is being constituted today, and the power relations that are given in this sense, beyond children, but also between adults as well (our emphasis).

Despite the conservative context in which we were living in Brazil – which continues to increase currently – including gender issues in a document about quality was a political decision: “*if Early Childhood Education has a **political role to play in addressing inequalities**, we could not leave gender issues out of it*”. Another teacher reiterates that it was a milestone, from the point of view of the history of public policies on Early Childhood Education:

The São Paulo City Government cannot publish a document in 2015, or any other year, in which these issues do not appear, taking into consideration the entire national political context, of research that has already been conducted. If it wants to do so, it can, but we will be making an option. You can't say that you didn't know, according to that political option.

Considering that the theoretical framework on which the City Education Department based itself to build all the documents was Sociology and Pedagogy of Childhood, these being fields that expand the understanding of childhoods, articulating social markers with the specificities of children, it would indeed be contradictory if this dimension did not exist in the documents. However, if it were not for the “*guardians of the issue*”, most probably the debate would have been diluted in the document or Dimension 5 would have been a big umbrella on differences or even with a focus on diversity, as it is set out in most federal public policies. “*It was a place of resistance for this issue*”.

So they took this and defended it and dealt with the issue with a lot of emphasis, with a lot of force. Throughout these discussions, what seemed like it was going to be diluted in all dimensions gained a lot of strength so that it would be a specific dimension, you know?

Finally, we highlight the positive effects arising through the participative institutional self-evaluation policy and the inclusion of Dimension 5. According to the interviewees, both the document drafting process and the participative institutional self-evaluation moments were formative, from both the individual and the collective point of view. At the same time, one of the greatest demands arising from the action plans was for continuing training. This process denounced the lack of initial and continuing education on gender issues, given the silencing, invisibility, fear, and taboos found in the accounts given by the teachers. This

generated a movement that deserves to be further explored in other studies and that can be considered as another strategy: the proposal to use action plans for training about context, by making possible actions in the ECE facilities, starting with the reformulation of their Political-Pedagogical Projects, as they have become the subject of studies in collective moments, such as activities with children's families.

There are many challenges and strategies to be articulated for the inclusion of gender issues in public education policies, in general, and more specifically in Early Childhood Education. It could not be any other way, because when we talk about the social quality of Early Childhood Education, we are referring to a project of society. And in the warp of new possibilities, even in such adverse times, may we build a society in which differences are valued and equal rights are guaranteed! Starting with babies and children!

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Text received on 12/04/2020.
Text approved on 06/01/2021.