

PAPER

Initial teacher training for infant teaching: insights from faculty, students and alumni of the Pedagogy Program at the Federal University of Ceará, Brazil***Formação inicial de professores para a docência com bebês: as perspectivas de docentes, discentes e egressos do curso de pedagogia da Universidade Federal do Ceará, Brasil.***

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of a study that aimed to analyze the contributions of the in-person Pedagogy course offered by the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Ceará to the initial training of teachers for infant education. The study, conducted on the insights from faculty, students, and graduates of the course, was underpinned by a deep understanding of teacher training for Early Childhood Education and infant education, drawing upon seminal works in the field (Barbosa, 2010; Barbosa; Fochi, 2015; Kishimoto, 2005; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2001), and employing a qualitative research methodology. The case study conducted revealed significant gaps and shortcomings in the initial training provided by the Pedagogy program, particularly concerning its inability to adequately address the complexity and nuances of teaching practices with infants. It was evident that the course offered limited opportunities, both within the formal curriculum and extracurricular activities, for Pedagogy students to delve deeply into crucial topics related to infant education and their development. Moreover, the study identified various weaknesses that undermine the quality of initial training for teaching with infants. These findings underscore the pressing need for curriculum reform and enhancement within the Pedagogy course. In the case of the focused course, the research indicated an urgent call for substantive changes to ensure that future educators graduating from this institution possess the requisite theoretical acumen and practical skills to deliver exemplary teaching to infants.

Palavras-chave: Initial Teacher Training. Pedagogy Course. Teaching With Infants. Early Childhood Education.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa que teve como principal objetivo analisar as contribuições do curso de Pedagogia presencial oferecido pela Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal do Ceará para a formação inicial de professores visando a docência com bebês, a partir das perspectivas de docentes, discentes e egressos do curso. A pesquisa foi fundamentada nos conhecimentos sobre a formação de professores para a Educação Infantil e sobre a educação de bebês (Barbosa, 2010; Barbosa; Fochi, 2015; Kishimoto, 2005; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2001), seguindo os pressupostos da abordagem qualitativa de pesquisa. O estudo de caso desenvolvido revelou que a formação inicial oferecida no referido curso de Pedagogia não contemplava efetivamente a complexidade e as peculiaridades da prática docente com os bebês; oferecia poucas oportunidades curriculares e extracurriculares que possibilitassem aos estudantes de Pedagogia a apropriação de temas importantes relacionados aos bebês e aos seus processos educativos e apresentava uma série de fragilidades que limitam a qualidade da formação inicial visando à docência com bebês. A pesquisa oferece elementos para enriquecer os debates sobre a elaboração ou reformulação de currículos para o curso de Pedagogia e, no caso do curso focado, indicou a urgência de mudanças em seu currículo a fim de que os futuros pedagogos formados nessa Faculdade tenham os necessários subsídios teóricos e práticos para desenvolver uma docência de qualidade voltada para bebês.

Keywords: Formação Inicial de Professores. Curso de Pedagogia. Docência com Bebês. Educação Infantil.

Introduction

Teacher training is a widely debated topic in Brazil and many other countries, given its pivotal role in ensuring educational quality. While ongoing professional development is crucial in such a complex and dynamic profession,

[...] initial teacher education holds paramount importance as it establishes the foundational knowledge for educators to engage effectively in educational activities with children and youth entering schools, shaping their professionalism and career trajectory (Gatti; Barreto; André; 2011, p. 89).

The theoretical discourse surrounding Early Childhood Education has expanded significantly in recent decades, particularly following the enactment of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDBEN), Law Nº. 9.394/96 (Brasil, 1996). This legislation recognized Early Childhood Education as the primary stage of basic education and mandated, in Article 62, that teacher training for children aged zero to five should be conducted at the higher education level, in a comprehensive teaching degree program – although a minimum education level at the secondary level was also accepted (Brasil, 1996). It was only ten years later that the National Curricular Guidelines for undergraduate Pedagogy courses (Brasil, 2006, p. 2) explicitly stated that Pedagogy degree programs should provide “teacher training to perform teaching duties in Early Childhood Education and in the initial years of Elementary Education.” However, the fact that LDBEN recommended the preference for higher education was widely celebrated and seen as a positive step, especially for its potential for deeper theoretical understanding and greater professional appreciation for teachers working in this stage of education.

The aforementioned theoretical discourse reflects the ongoing efforts of researchers to understand the nuances of teaching in daycares and preschools, shaping initial and ongoing teacher

training for this critical stage of basic education (e.g., Barbosa, 2010; Barbosa; Fochi, 2015; Kishimoto, 2005; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2001). This presents a significant challenge, as it is necessary to ensure space within academia to address essential topics in Early Childhood Education without succumbing to an overemphasis on abstract knowledge, as cautioned by Formosinho (2008) – bearing in mind that training aimed at professionals who deal with human development should primarily promote interpersonal competencies.

While numerous studies have focused on initial teacher training for Early Childhood Education (e.g., Azevedo; Schnetzler, 2001; Bacelar, 2012; Drumond, 2014; Febronio, 2010; Micarello, 2003), there remains a noticeable gap regarding specific training for teaching with infants, encompassing children from zero to 18 months (Brasil, 2009). A survey of academic publications (Rodrigues; Cruz, 2017; Rodrigues, 2018) revealed a limited focus on this topic within Brazilian research:

An examination of the ANPED website, considering the working groups on Education for Children from 0 to 6 years old and Teacher Education (GT 07 and GT 08), identified sixteen articles on initial teacher training for Early Childhood Education. However, only three of these articles addressed initial teacher education for infants or daycare, while twenty-one focused on teaching in daycare settings, with ten specifically addressing teaching with infants.

Similarly, a review of the BDTD platform [...] yielded forty-six publications on initial teacher education for Early Childhood Education. Among these, seven focused on initial teacher education for infants or daycare, while twenty-four centered on teaching in daycare settings, with fifteen focusing on teaching with infants (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 25).

Recognizing the need to expand discussions and contribute to new studies in this area, the dissertation “Initial teacher training for infant teaching: the study case of the Pedagogy program at FACED-UFC (Rodrigues, 2018)” was developed within the Development, Language, and Child Education Research Line of the Brazilian Education Postgraduate Program at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Ceará (FACED/UFC). As its title suggests, this study aimed to analyze the contributions of FACED/UFC’s in-person Pedagogy course to the initial training of teachers for teaching with infants, drawing insights from faculty, students, and graduates of the course. This paper presents a synthesis of the key findings from this research.

Central to this work is the concept of infants as active social subjects entitled to rights (Barbosa, 2010). They are viewed as individuals capable of engaging with others and their environment, shaping and reshaping spaces and cultures they inhabit. Despite seemingly contradictory attributes of power and vulnerability:

[...] they are simultaneously powerful – “capable of feeling, thinking, emoting, imagining, transforming, inventing, creating, and dialoguing” (BRASIL; 2009: 23) – and vulnerable – “requiring attention, protection, nutrition, play, hygiene, listening, and affection” (ibid) – their potential to become subjects emerges through interactions with other people, children, and adults, in the interaction between biological structure and participation in a given culture, at a given time (Barbosa; Fochi; 2015, p. 60).

This perspective underscores the complexity of infant education as a social practice, involving various stakeholders responsible for fostering their holistic development through addressing their

diverse needs, with teachers playing a pivotal role. Given the unique and nuanced nature of infant education, professionals must undergo appropriate training that is suitable for the functions and complexity of this endeavor. Since in Brazil the Pedagogy course is the preferred space for initial training of Early Childhood Education teachers (hence, teachers of infants), it must encompass knowledge, skills, and values essential for teaching children from zero to eighteen months, integrating education and care seamlessly.

Some previous studies have focused on the training provided by Brazilian Pedagogy courses, seeking to assess their quality for preparing teachers who will assume roles in Basic Education (Gatti; Barreto, 2009), the versatile teacher who works in Early Childhood Education and the initial years of Elementary Education (Pimenta *et al.*, 2017), and specifically, for teaching in Early Childhood Education (Cruz; Martins; Ribeiro, 2023). These studies concluded that the broad range of professional possibilities that courses aim to encompass ultimately weakens the preparation for teaching in the initial years of elementary education and, especially, in Early Childhood Education.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on one such Pedagogy course in Brazil, specifically addressing training for teaching with infants.

Case Study of the Pedagogy Program at FACED/UFC

The research methodology adhered to the principles of a qualitative approach, designed to address nuanced inquiries about objects, realities, or phenomena that resist quantification (Minayo, 2009; Pradanov; Freitas, 2013). Among the diverse research methodologies within this framework, a case study was selected, which, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1994), is characterized by its meticulous examination of a specific context.

The comprehensive teaching degree in Pedagogy, delivered in a face-to-face format at the Faculty of Education of UFC, became the focal point of this research due to several criteria: its affiliation with a public institution of higher education, reflecting the socio-political role of public HEIs in educational democratization and access to cultural resources; inclusion of compulsory courses in Early Childhood Education within its curriculum; existence of alumni cohorts, facilitating insights from former students; and logistical feasibility for conducting field research.

Established in 1963, this program has undergone multiple curricular revisions. Its initial iterations, influenced by the era of military dictatorship, emphasized training specialists in Education with curricula structured around rationality, scientific objectivity, and technical proficiency. This technicist educational paradigm, as noted by Gatti, Barreto, and André (2011), underscored a specialization-oriented approach prevalent at the time. Subsequent reforms, following the country's political liberalization in the 1980s, aimed to transcend disciplinary boundaries and move towards teacher education characterized by diversity, critical inquiry, and socio-political competence (Fernandes, 2014).

Reflecting broader trends in educational philosophy, FACED/UFC embraced the notion that effective teaching should form the cornerstone of an educator's professional identity, as articulated by Cruz (2002, p. 225):

Within the Pedagogy curriculum, teaching serves as the cornerstone of every educator's professional ethos: we are, or should aspire to be, educators foremost, preceding our roles as technicians or specialists. This pivotal decision, implemented in 1987 with the introduction of a revamped undergraduate curriculum, marked the discontinuation of traditional specializations (educational guidance, supervision, and school administration).

This understanding led to the establishment of specialized areas, including training for teaching in Early Childhood Education. Although optional, all courses and internships in this area consistently experienced high demand among students, indicating their perceived importance in the curriculum.

During the period of this research (between 2017 and 2018), two pedagogical projects were active within the daytime and evening Pedagogy programs at FACED/UFC: one implemented in 2007, which remained in effect for remaining students from this project, and another, more recent one approved in 2013 and implemented in 2014. It is noteworthy that in the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) of 2007, courses and internship activities in the Early Childhood Education specialization became mandatory for the first time; however, this mandate only applied to the daytime curriculum, remaining optional in the evening curriculum, which emphasized Elementary Education for Youth and Adults and School System Management. The PPP approved in 2013, in alignment with the National Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Pedagogy Programs, Resolution CNE/CP Nº. 1 (Brasil, 2006), mandated equivalent curriculum integrations for both Daytime and Evening programs, requiring two courses ("Early Childhood Education" and "Pedagogical Proposals and Practices in Early Childhood Education") and supervised internships as mandatory components of the Early Childhood Education specialization.

Considering that data about the research subject could only be constructed through the contribution and dialogue with individuals linked to the face-to-face Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC (faculty, students, and alumni) and acknowledging the concurrent curricular frameworks implemented in 2007 and 2014 for face-to-face Pedagogy programs (daytime and evening), the following criteria were established for composing the subject groups in the case study:

1. Faculty members specialized in Early Childhood Education;
2. Students who enrolled in the program under the 2007 (daytime) or 2014 (daytime or evening) curricula, having completed the two mandatory courses in the Early Childhood Education specialization and currently undergoing or having completed supervised internships;
3. Alumni of the daytime in-person Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC, having completed the 2007 curriculum integration and currently or previously engaged in teaching children aged zero to eighteen months.

The participation of these three subject groups was deemed crucial for achieving the research objectives, as it facilitated dialogue among different perspectives and aimed to capture the relevance of information provided by each group, recognizing that while unique, their experiences and expectations are shaped by the roles they play. Simultaneously, capturing the diverse experiences of students resulting from the two different curriculum frameworks of the program was deemed relevant.

In order to adhere to the above-mentioned criteria, the research commenced with a preliminary phase involving the distribution of a targeted questionnaire to the Pedagogy students. This phase aimed to identify students who had completed all mandatory courses in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) domain of the Pedagogy program, including the internship in this area (or were currently enrolled), and who were available for interviews regarding their experiences. The questionnaire was administered during visits to classrooms at FACED/UFC, with the respective professors' permission, conducted during both daytime and evening sessions in October 2017. Twelve classes enrolled in the last four semester courses or activities in the Pedagogy program were visited, and forty-eight students completed the questionnaire. Out of these, twenty-six expressed willingness to participate in the subsequent research phase. Eventually, nineteen students confirmed and actively engaged in the next stage, which entailed semi-structured individual interviews conducted at the Faculty of Education. These participants were typically in their sixth to eighth semesters, ranging from 21 to 28 years old.

Additionally, six graduates of the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC, meeting the previously mentioned criteria, were involved in the interview phase. The search for these graduates employed three strategies: 1) reaching out via email addresses provided by the Pedagogy program coordination, adhering to research data confidentiality terms; 2) promoting and inviting participation through teacher groups on social network Facebook; and 3) making phone calls to Early Childhood Education institutions in Ceará's capital city of Fortaleza, identifying potential research subjects. The group comprised six teachers aged between 25 and 30, with teaching experience in classes for one to two-year-old children. Interviews with this group were arranged at various locations and times based on their preferences.

Furthermore, the group of faculty members responsible for the Early Childhood Education area within the mentioned program, consisting of five Ph.D.-qualified professors with at least four years of teaching experience in the field, was invited to participate in interviews during the second research phase. Since one of them served as the dissertation advisor, only the remaining professors were invited for interviews regarding their perspectives on training for teaching with babies. Ultimately, three professors participated in the interviews, conducted at the Faculty according to agreed-upon schedules. This selection from the Pedagogy program faculty considered their significant role in the initial training of teachers for working with babies, given that the disciplines they taught primarily focused on enhancing knowledge about Early Childhood Education and teaching practices specific to this educational stage.

All interviews followed predefined scripts containing common and group-specific questions.

The key findings of the conducted case study are presented below, based on the insights gathered through this methodology.

The teacher training for infant education within the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC: Perspectives from faculty, students, and alumni

The data synthesized here, as previously mentioned, derives from field research, offering insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and needs within the initial teacher training for infant education in the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC.

The comprehensive approach to course content in the Pedagogy program

According to various participant groups, the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC delivers a robust foundational education in Early Childhood Education, especially in terms of theoretical underpinnings for this field. However, when focusing specifically on infant education, all participants unanimously highlighted the program's inadequacy in addressing initial training for teaching infants.

Faculty members emphasized that the approach to Early Childhood Education course content was broad, covering the age range typical of this stage but lacking specificity in addressing infant teaching nuances. They attributed this generalized approach to the extensive curriculum and workload of mandatory courses and internships in the field. Faculty explained the challenges of covering a wide range of topics in just two mandatory courses, considering that the internship's theory-practice integration often doesn't directly involve infant pedagogy. Consequently, the limited opportunities hinder more in-depth studies on this subject.

In contrast, students felt that the program's approach to infant education lacked depth, as it did not delve into the specific needs of children aged zero to eighteen months or their unique educational requirements. They noted that infant education received minimal attention, typically discussed briefly in a few classes using supplementary materials like texts, videos, or daycare discussions.

Students noted that, drawing from general literature in Early Childhood Education, they could establish correlations with the intricacies of infant instruction, as evidenced in certain materials covered in unrelated courses within the Early Childhood Education domain. Nonetheless, as articulated by one student, these correlations consistently unfolded through a "macro to micro" lens, signifying the connection of overarching concepts to the nuances of teaching infants—an endeavor demanding individual student effort. This observation, emphasized by students, primarily stemmed from the limited platform for discourse on infant education themes and the predominant focus on older children across diverse program courses.

Similarly, the alumni cohort recognized the comprehensive educational approach offered by the Pedagogy program in Early Childhood Education. Their collective experiences indicated that the curriculum content, particularly in specialized courses, exhibited a generalized nature spanning the entire Early Childhood Education spectrum, including children aged zero to five years, without differentiation among distinct age groups within this phase, such as infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Furthermore, alumni remarked that infant-related discussions were infrequent, and topics concerning infant instruction were consistently listed as “optional,” lacking integration into course outlines or the Pedagogy program’s educational framework. They also noted the scarcity of discussions on infant education even within Early Childhood Education courses, underscoring the limited visibility afforded to infants within the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC.

The Cycle of Infants’ Invisibility

A salient aspect that emerged from the discourse of both students and graduates of the program was their pronounced sense of unpreparedness when considering assuming a teaching role with infants.

According to the students, the educational experience they underwent in the courses and supervised internship activities of the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC failed to instill in them the confidence required to work effectively with infants and very young children. In fact, it did not even provide them with the foundational skills necessary to commence such teaching experiences. Some students went so far as to express that, due to their feelings of insecurity, they actively avoided engaging with infants during their supervised internships, despite the availability of mentorship from experienced educators.

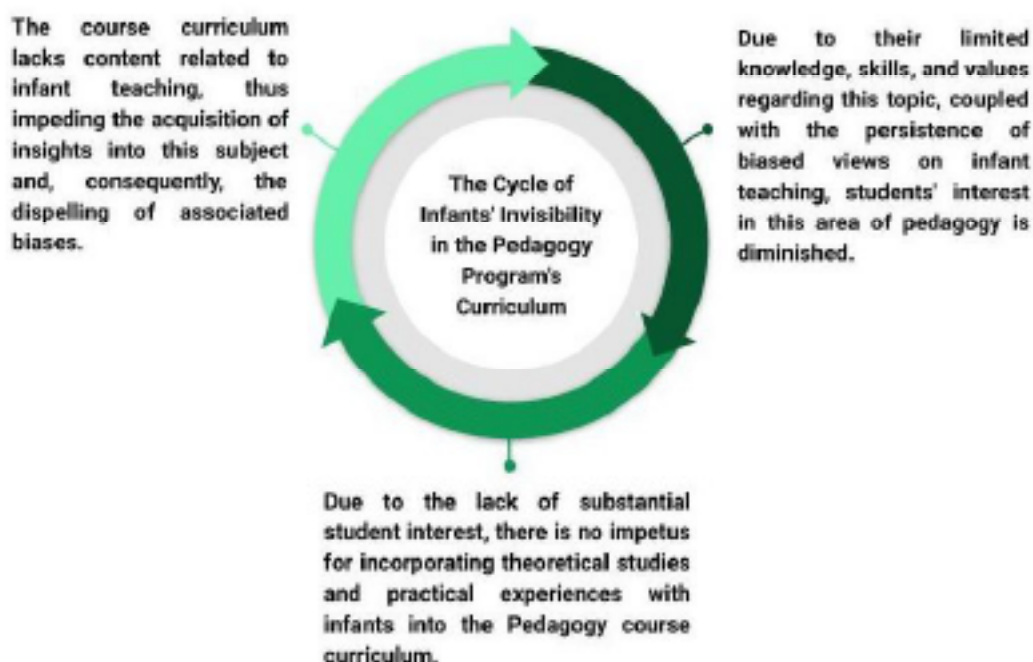
This reluctance to engage with infants during the supervised internship in the Pedagogy program is closely linked to the observation that those who undertook such roles had to invest significantly more time and effort into research and study. This was in stark comparison to their colleagues working with children in other age groups within Early Childhood Education. The goal was to gain insights into the intricate care-education routines required for infants and to develop pedagogical practices that were both engaging and appropriate. Students believed that this additional effort was primarily necessitated by the need to compensate for the gaps in their education related to infant care and education, rather than a genuine deepening of their existing knowledge, which they viewed as the appropriate focus for a supervised internship activity.

Similarly, graduates of the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC emphasized that the absence of comprehensive theoretical studies on teaching with infants and the lack of practical experiences in classes with children aged zero to eighteen months contributed significantly to their deep-rooted reluctance to interact with infants and very young children.

It is noteworthy that, despite initial contradictions, this resistance to engaging with infants in pedagogical settings likely stems from the educational experiences they received. These experiences instilled in them an awareness of the critical importance of ensuring high-quality Early Childhood Education and the pivotal role educators play in achieving this quality, which is a fundamental right for all children. The absence of such awareness could potentially lead students or graduates to undertake teaching roles with infants without due consideration, even if they are inadequately prepared, which is not what we witnessed.

Based on this comprehensive analysis, it became possible to understand and delineate the process referred to in this research as **the cycle of infants’ invisibility within the Pedagogy program’s curriculum:**

Figure 1 – The Cycle of Infants' Invisibility in the Pedagogy Program's Curriculum



Source: Figure created by the authors.

The consequence of this continual cycle of invisibility is that every semester, numerous Pedagogy graduates are awarded diplomas without having discussed or experienced teaching practices with children aged zero to eighteen months during their educational journey. Consequently, they obtain a diploma that qualifies them for teaching with infants, even though they have not received adequate training for this task.

It is noteworthy that all three subject groups assessed that the incorporation of new Early Childhood Education courses into the Pedagogy curriculum is often hindered by intense disputes among departments at FACED/UFC. According to the subjects, these disputes impede student formation by obstructing curriculum reformulation and efforts to address the actual formative needs of students, such as studying infants and their education.

Curriculum reforms within the Pedagogy program was identified by all three subject groups as one of the alternatives to overcome weaknesses in initial teacher training for teaching with infants, constituting an urgent demand. It is essential to highlight that this need for Pedagogy program reform is not limited to the case at hand: recent research focusing on initial teacher education in Early Childhood Education found that among Brazilian public Pedagogy programs (at federal, state, and municipal levels), specific courses for teaching with infants account for less than 1% of the total number of courses (Cruz; Martins; Ribeiro, 2023), which is deeply concerning.

Advancements and Needs to Overcome Weaknesses in Initial Teacher Training for Infants

Despite the previously identified weaknesses, research subjects acknowledged that the Pedagogy program at FACED/UFC provides some valuable contributions to initial teacher education for working with infants, particularly regarding theoretical knowledge. These contributions were less emphasized by alumni, given their limited experiences during their education, but were more prominently recognized by faculty and students due to recent initiatives aimed at highlighting infant education within the Pedagogy program.

The successful initiatives within the program, endorsed by faculty and students as enhancements for initial teacher education focused on infants, included:

1) Incorporating the discussion topic “Infant Education” and hosting the seminar “Working with Infants in Daycare Centers” in the curriculum of the Pedagogical Proposals and Practices in Early Childhood Education course;

2) Prioritizing Early Childhood Education institutions with daycare classes, offering opportunities for interaction with one-year-old children during the Early Childhood Education Internship activity;

3) Establishing the FACED/UFC Toy Library;

4) Forming specific study groups on infant education;

5) Approving the elective course “Pedagogical Proposals and Practices for Infant and Toddler Education.”

It is worth noting that these changes implemented to address infant education in the program were appreciated by faculty and students. However, they were not considered adequate to overcome all identified weaknesses. Similarly, while the contributions provided by the program were deemed important by the research subjects, they were never deemed sufficient.

The participants’ input in the research has illuminated certain elements that can contribute significantly to addressing the unsatisfactory situation concerning initial teacher training for infants. This extends beyond the research locus, encompassing not only the FACED/UFC community but also other institutions offering the Pedagogy program. These elements provide a foundation for discussing necessary and viable changes:

- Facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration to foster discussions on infant education by integrating various disciplines within the Pedagogy program.
- Cultivating the theoretical-practical nexus from the early semesters of the course through activities like observing infant classrooms in daycares, developing small-scale research and intervention projects based on observations and inquiries, providing opportunities for dialogues with infant educators about their experiences, challenges, achievements, etc., and engaging in practical activities and discussions utilizing university amenities such as toy libraries, diaper-changing stations, and laboratory schools.
- Integrating at least one mandatory course in the Pedagogy program focused explicitly on infant development processes, learning, and educational practices pertinent to infants.

- Offering elective courses encompassing topics related to infant education, such as the daycare-family relationship.
- Ensuring practical exposure with zero to eighteen-month-old children through supervised internships.
- Initiating extension projects in daycare settings that encourage student engagement.
- Expanding avenues for studying infant education through establishing or reinforcing study and research groups.
- Encouraging faculty and student participation in Early Childhood Education events, particularly those centering on infant education.
- Orchestrating and endorsing scientific events spotlighting infant education within the institution (e.g., lectures, seminars, workshops, etc.).
- Recruiting new faculty members specializing in Early Childhood Education to enrich the course offerings.
- Establishing an affiliated laboratory school tied to the Pedagogy program.

The enumerated elements represent a diverse array of possibilities and needs, some more specific while others are more central, particularly emphasizing the integration of theory and practice. These elements are aimed at equipping future educators with both theoretical and practical resources to conduct effective pedagogical work with children aged zero to eighteen months. This ensures that the teaching practices developed by educators meet the necessary quality standards expected of a pedagogue, distinguishing them from professionals without specific training. Therefore, this education should foster the professionalization of teachers working with infants, leading to higher-quality teaching and subsequent social recognition of the teaching profession.

Conclusion and final remarks

This article aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse concerning the training of infant educators, a topic of study justified by its relevance and timeliness. On one hand, infant education represents a contemporary social imperative that has gained strength in recent decades. On the other hand, there is a growing recognition of the critical role played by the early years of life in holistic development, as well as the significance of teacher training in ensuring the quality of pedagogical practice. Consequently, there is a profound necessity to contemplate the initial training of educators who will engage with children aged zero to eighteen months.

Considering the perspectives articulated by the diverse groups involved in this study, it is imperative to clarify that when they advocate for the pedagogue's readiness for infant teaching, they are not suggesting that initial training alone can suffice for professional readiness. Rather, their contention is that it is unacceptable for graduates of a Pedagogy course to lack the requisite knowledge, skills, and values necessary to guide their initial interactions with infants in Early Childhood Education settings and to support their ongoing professional development.

The recurrent theme echoed by the research participants throughout the study is that if a Pedagogy course aspires to prepare educators for Early Childhood Education, including those specializing in infants, then the curriculum must necessarily facilitate the acquisition of a robust foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge pertinent to the education of children aged zero to eighteen months. Furthermore, it is crucial to bear in mind, as articulated by Formosinho (2009, p. 91),

Teaching is a multifaceted endeavor encompassing intellectual, technical, moral, and relational dimensions. As a profession of service, teaching entails both instructional and caregiving aspects, blending technical expertise with artisanal, intellectual, and artistic dimensions in daily practice.

All these elements undoubtedly contribute to the inherently challenging task of teacher education within higher education institutions, as it involves cultivating professionals in human development while integrating the ethical and technical dimensions of their mission within a culture that emphasizes abstract knowledge production and strict disciplinary specialization (Formosinho, 2008).

Through this study, a coherent understanding emerged regarding the intricacies of teaching infants, which embodies a complex social practice encompassing various stakeholders (infants, families, educators, administrators, etc.) and is significantly influenced by the unique characteristics of children aged zero to eighteen months. For instance, infants communicate through diverse languages such as movement, crying, laughter, and babbling, necessitating infant educators to hone their observation and listening skills. Considering this, we advocate for a comprehensive university-based teacher training program, as the caliber of this training directly impacts the educational quality delivered to these young learners. Simultaneously, there is a need to avoid what Formosinho (2008) termed as the “academization” of academic education, which involves deviating from the professionalization aspects of training, establishing limited dialogue with the professional community, and inadequately integrating the study of real-world challenges encountered in students’ future professional endeavors. Overemphasis on theories can also “impede the ability to generate novel knowledge that substantially contributes to enhancing teaching practices” (Cunha, 2004, p. 71).

Lastly, it is crucial to emphasize that teacher education is a fundamental right for professionals to access educational and cultural resources that instill confidence in their teaching roles. It is equally a fundamental right for children to have competent professionals capable of effectively meeting their needs (Silva; Rossetti, 2000). With this perspective, the Pedagogy course, serving as a privileged domain for the initial training of infant educators, must uphold its commitment to safeguarding the rights of these diverse stakeholders. Therefore, the exploration of infant teaching should not be disregarded or marginalized in its training framework.

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