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# Equity, systemic inequality and learning in early childhood education: teacher training in focus<sup>1</sup>

#### **ABSTRACT**

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The social isolation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has suspended classes since March 2020 in most cities in Brazil and started to demand a critical and creative attitude from educators, capable of generating alternatives in the face of the unpredictable that has become present in our lives. In this context, the work of this article, which is part of broader research, proposes to understand the processes of teacher education as part of the multidimensionality of the functioning of a municipal Early Childhood Education system, through the understanding of how teachers subjectify a training experience. Based on the Theory of Subjectivity and the corresponding Qualitative Epistemology by González Rey, subjective meanings produced by the teachers as a social group and the way in which this production was configured, in this context of exception, as a possible response to professional training and the imposition of technology in their everyday practices. In addition to aspects that single out the experience of this social group, the interpretative construction also brings the particular production of individual subjectivity of one of these teachers, considering that the training experience was constituted for the teacher as a favourable context for learning about the function and the processes of early childhood school education in relation to its teaching trajectory.

KEYWORDS: Teacher training. Subjectivity. Early Childhood Education. Pandemic.



#### **INTRODUCTION**

Due to the unexpected situation engendered by the new coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) that began in Brazil in March 2020, we are now living in a time of great social and educational transformation. For this reason, educators were required to display a critical and creative attitude capable of generating alternatives in the face of the unpredictable that shaped our lives and work context. A new educational modality, emergency remote teaching, was organized to enable the continuity of the child-teacher bond which, in turn, would allow for some kind of pedagogical experience. Thus, in the unequal precariousness of the digital world, digital learning platforms have imposed themselves as a solution for social distancing, although printed material has also been used for the many who do not have access to technology.

Libâneo and Santos (2010) point to the new challenges about knowledge of using different platforms and new technologies, as well as the dilemma that involves understanding the nature and role of education and teaching. New conceptual representations demand that theories, practices, and relationships transgress the existing models, so as to bring the educator closer to the different realities, the diverse educational practices, the different ways of learning and the personalization of what is learned. This article recognizes that this transformative process is not exempt from the emotional-symbolic production of those who experience it, favouring (or not) the facing of such challenges.

This work is part of a broader research project called "Understanding educational complexities: equitable and transformative teaching and learning processes in a municipal Early Childhood Education system.". This project was developed by the University of Brasília, funded by the Lemann Foundation, in partnership with Teachers College, Columbia University, in which teaching and learning processes involved in the equitable and transformative construction of educational programs and structures are investigated, in articulation with the professional development of day-care and pre-school teachers of a municipality in Central Brazil that is part of the Federal District's Integration and Development Network—RIDE/DF.

In this broader research, we propose to understand the multidimensionality of educational processes involved in the functioning of a municipal Early Childhood Education system – ECE. Researchers originally investigated how ECE managers, teachers and community members of the studied municipality subjectify the epistemological changes proposed by the Common National Curriculum Base for Early Childhood Education - BNCCEI (BRASIL, 2017) and verified changes in the relationships between teachers and children in daily pedagogical practices that result from the epistemological changes proposed by this new document. Part of the referred educational complexity is the theme of teacher education, which will be the focus of this paper.

With this thematic breadth, our research is characterized by a strong social engagement in the educational community of the partner municipality and since its elaboration and systematization, as well as, throughout the research's development, there was transparency with regards to the social challenges that would be articulated with the educational issues that were the research's focus. In this aspect, this research dialogues with a critical perspective, grounded in a cultural-historical framework, which analyses implications of social in/equity and



in/justice, specifically cultural aspects, as well as pedagogical, theoretical and methodological dilemmas - all themes that inform researches characterized by their social commitment (SOUTO-MANNING, 2010; SOUTO-MANNING; MARTELL, 2019).

Our framework, however, seeks to articulate such implications to the singular productions of groups and people involved in these contexts and conflicts by adopting the concept of subjectivity as developed by González Rey (2009, 2017). Thus, stemming from the scope of the umbrella research, the questions addressed are: What kinds of professional development foster teaching and learning processes that favor equity, disrupt systemic inequality, and deepen learning and what is the value of such processes for teachers of a municipal system at the ECE stage?

Among the structural aspects that compose the public education system in Brazil, the importance of a teacher education policy that differentiates itself from those limited to the application of methodological techniques and strategies is highlighted. In our perspective, this is a training context that enables teachers to reflect on their social commitment, produce new knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values and, thus, rethink their pedagogical work.

In our research trajectory, the original issue about implementing the BNCCEI has been expanded with the challenging reality that Brazil and the whole world has had to deal with: the declaration of the pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, (PAHO, 2020). This challenging reality impacts in a much more direct way educational processes and curricula, professional performance and development of ECE teachers in the studied municipality. They had to face emergency remote teaching, which especially impacted teachers, children and guardians all isolating in their respective homes and connected (?) via digital platforms.

BNCCEI recognizes pedagogical practice with babies (0 to 1 year and 6 months), very young children (1 year and 7 months to 3 years and 11 months) and young children (4 years to 5 years and 11 months) (BRASIL, 2017) as a fundamental, establishing guidelines that highlight the essential aspects of educational practices. These different moments in children's lives are articulated by six children's rights, namely the right: to togetherness, to play, to participate, to explore, to express oneself and know oneself. Such rights are related to and are connected with fields of experience, which, based on the child's daily needs and educational experiences, can favour learning and development processes.

The five fields of experience organized as "I, the other and us", "Bodies, gestures and movements", "Traces, sounds, colours and shapes", "Listening, speaking, thinking and imagination" and "Space, time, quantities, relationships and transformations", all which have in common the educational premise that experience guides the construction of children's knowledge, which demands the aforementioned understanding of an epistemological change. It also proposes that these experiences should be developed based on diversified and structured intentional practices in order to guarantee the gradually developed, educational objectives.

The fields of experience emphasize the importance of aligning ECE not only with the place these children occupy in the world, but with how they experience it. In this way, we can identify a break with the pedagogical tendencies of

Page | 57



traditional and content-based teaching, in which, at times, the protagonism remains linked to the teacher's role. In the BNCCEI proposal, the protagonism is centred on children and their productions, evidencing an ECE that values observation and continuous monitoring of childhood learning.

These conceptions, objectives and structures specified by the BNCCEI, require new articulations with the development of local curricula that result from the debate and involvement of the entire ECE school community, rather than being a mere administrative attribution - for if it was limited to being an administrative attribution, it may not entail significant changes. In the partner municipality that is part of our research, this construction process has not yet been completed due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, and, therefore, ECE in the municipality is guided by a state document, by the new Curriculum Document for Goiás - DCGO (GOIÁS, 2019).

This paper refers to a period of 13 months of research, between May 2020 and June 2021, and brings together interpretative constructions arising from the group of the ECE teachers, also highlighting the subjective experience of the participants. This represents a possible channel to understand the teachers' experiences pertaining to the training process planned for all teachers of Early Childhood Education in the partner municipality.

#### PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

The guarantee of access to enrolment and the expansion of supply brought new demands to the country's states and municipalities, as well as new challenges for professionals in Early Childhood Education, especially with regards to the discussion of the school's role in this stage of teaching. It is important to highlight the differences regarding two moments of Early Childhood Education: first, preschool that encompasses education provided for children from 0 to 3 years old, and which is not mandatory for the public system to offer; and, secondly, kindergarten, which contemplates children aged 4 and 5, that integrates primary education, and is mandatory for the public system to offer. These differences maintain a segregation that reproduces historic aspects regarding institutions involved managing and providing childcare, shared by both welfare and education sectors.

In Brazil, primary public education is composed of different stages and teaching methods. In the country, since 1996, in accordance with the Law of National Education Guidelines and Bases (No. 9.394), Early Childhood Education has been established as the first stage of Primary Education. The referred law also established the minimum qualification required for Early Childhood Education teachers, establishing their training should be carried out in secondary school or higher education (BRASIL, 1996).

This dates back to the fact that the first establishments intended for the care of young children in Brazil were characterized as an institution to provide basic needs, focusing on supplying food and physical safety to children. Those institutions operated without specific legislation, with no clear concern for those who worked with children. In this context, the Early Childhood Education profession emerges without the requirement for specific pedagogical training, thus ignoring the complexity of working pedagogically with children, which is an intentional activity that requires a broad knowledge of learning processes and



human development, as well as an awareness of the cultural universe of children and the languages they use to carry out their learning.

Resulting from the partnership created between the Federal, State and Municipal governments, the Initial Training Program for Teachers Working in Early Childhood Education – 'Proinfantil' was created in 2005, under the responsibility of the Coordination of Early Childhood Education/Secretary of Distance Education / Department of Primary Education/Ministry of Education. 'Proinfantil' was a distance learning course, with a duration of two years, aimed at professionals who worked in preschools and kindergartens and that did not meet the minimum qualification required by law. In 2005, 'Proinfantil' met the demands of about 25,000 students in 18 states, but, as others public policies, it was discontinued in 2010.

In 2009, the Teacher Training General Coordination prepared the Project for the Teaching in Early Childhood Education Specialization Course, in partnership with the Early Childhood Education General Coordination, the Board of Curriculum Concepts and Guidelines for Primary Education and Universities implementing 'Proinfantil'. The course, aimed at teachers from the public Early Childhood Education network, was live and free of charge. It began in 2010, in which 13 universities adhered, and ended in 2014, at which time 33 higher education institutions were involved. Among countless initial and continuing education policies, it represented the intention of developing an integrated and collaborative policy for teacher training throughout their professional trajectories.

It should be noted that our conception of teacher training is in line with that present in previous investigations (MADEIRA-COELHO, 2012; OLIVEIRA, 2016; MADEIRA-COELHO; OLIVEIRA; PINTO, 2017), which associates training experiences with the teachers' educational practice and production of knowledge. Teacher training must overcome the notion that limits it to mere preparation, which "... denies the teacher, their story and their professional trajectory, based on the idea of a single way or single approved model of teaching well, in a way that disregards the teacher and their current experience" (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 163). The work of teachers in Early Childhood Education should not be romanticized. It is crucial to recognize the adversities present in everyday life that sometimes emerge with regards to the work conditions, the infrastructure of institutions, the wages received, the minimum wage set for the professional category, the social value of the profession and public policies. For Paulo Freire (2004), every pedagogical act is a political act and thus represents a chain of complex dimensions.

Closely linked to the teaching practice are the conceptions regarding early childhood, which presuppose children as an active, historical persons, beholders of rights who, through interactions, relationships and daily experiences, build their identity and perform numerous activities developing meanings and producing culture (CORSARO, 1997). In this sense, "childhood does not allow for essentializing conceptions, as children always live in concrete, contradictory contexts and are open to diverse and different ways of being and existing" (MADEIRA-COELHO, 2020, p. 115). Therefore, social practices are central in the context of ECE and need to be intentionally thought out, planned and organized by the teacher, prioritizing the development of social activities in the school context. In this way, they constitute a set of experiences linked to the challenges of collective life, to the discussion of learning processes and child development.



#### THE THEORY OF SUBJECTIVITY IN A CULTURAL-HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity (1990, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2010) was developed as part of a historical process in the context of psychological theories and opposed the dominant paradigm at the time in psychology, which was guided by Cartesian dualism and by the dichotomization of concepts.

In this perspective, subjectivity is organized by the articulation between theory, epistemology and methodology and does not correspond to the mere internalization of processes (from outside to inside), or to the reflection of something, but is understood as a characteristically human process, produced in culture, at both the individual and social level, in face of what is experienced in the different spaces of a person's social life (GONZÁLEZ REY; MITJÁNS MARTÍNEZ, 2017).

Therefore, the concept of subjectivity is manifested in the dialectic between the social and the individual in a procedural configuration that constitutes the very dynamics of subjectivity that, at the same time that it is generated, generates this processuality. Thus, González Rey places a magnifying glass on the complex forms through which human phenomena occur, in a theoretical construction that comprises human processes as historical and cultural processes, from which the theory's conceptual categories derive. In this text, two categories are specifically privileged: the concepts of individual subjectivity and social subjectivity.

According to González Rey, individual subjectivity "represents the processes and forms of subjective organization of concrete individuals" (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2005b, p. 241). This dynamic that constitutes the social and individual dimensions simultaneously in a unit, results from the proposal of a symbolic-emotional unit, the subjective sense, which "characterizes the various cultural delimitations of different human practices at a subjective level" (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2005a, p.43). The subjective sense is a category that enables a complex representation of subjectivity and to transcend any type of linear relationship between the internal and the external, always referring them to a complex network of subjective configurations in which the recursive relationship between social and individual subjectivity is inevitable." (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2013, p. 265).

In order to specify the subjective dimension of the social, the author gives visibility to phenomena disregarded by traditional psychology with the concept of social subjectivity, which he defines as a system of subjective configurations that are articulated at different levels of social life, involving institutions, groups, collectivities and formations of a given society (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2013).

The social-historical genesis of this complex subjective system, produced simultaneously at the social and individual level, is not only associated with the current experiences of a person or social setting, but with the way in which this current experience acquires meaning and significance within the subjective constitution of the history/story of the one who signifies, which can be both social and individual (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2005a). The author also states that "the study of institutions, communities and forms of behaviour in a concrete society represents a privileged forum for the knowledge of social subjectivity as a system" (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2004, p. 147).

He states:

Page | 60



[...]history appears in the practices and forms of social organization that are materialized in traditions, rites, discourses, patterns of relationships and social representations to mention just a few categories used to express the diversity of phenomena that are articulated in the social subjectivity of which are part of both social practices and their various current forms of institutionalization, as well as the individual subjects who participate in these practices and social organizations. (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2013, p. 265).

In order to comprehend moments of a transformation and development process in Early Childhood Education in a municipality, triggered by the implementation of the BNCCEI and by the crisis imposed by the pandemic, we believe that it is essential to address the dimensions of individual subjectivity by considering the expressions of the participating teachers, as well as subjectivity that is configured in the set of people who play different roles and have different practices within the system. That is, to understand changes in educational public policies, we recognize that it is necessary to consider the value that the active role of people involved in these institutional processes represent.

With regards to the political field, González Rey (2012) points out that the relation between social subjectivity and individual subjectivity acquires a particular form, in which subjective implications and forms of political institutionalization tend to "desubjectify" political processes, generating a non-critical, normative and scarcely reflexive world, with a massification of social behaviour. However, as "behind institutional-normative systems, systems of subjective sense exist (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2012, p. 133), we seek, in this text, to understand how teachers of this municipal education system subjectify challenging processes arising from both the implementation of the BNCCEI and the pandemic.

We therefore consider that a study that recognizes and considers this complexity, seeking to understand the intertwining between the forms of subjectivation of individuals involved with the Early Childhood Education public policy, envisions a form of research that points, in addition to legal considerations, to the symbolic-emotional processes involved in the dynamics of people who make Early Childhood Education happen in the municipality.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This research explores the subjective production of teachers in relation to their professional training and was inspired by the guiding principles of Qualitative Epistemology and by its expression in the constructive-interpretative methodology (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2010, 2011). Emphasis is given to the relation between theory-epistemology-methodology throughout the research processes so as to distance itself from an empirical-instrumental perspective (GONZÁLEZ REY, 2020).

Qualitative Epistemology differs from other epistemological conceptions, due to its specificity, oriented towards the production of scientific knowledge on subjectivity, in a cultural-historical perspective. Three general principles integrate this Epistemology: the constructive-interpretative character of knowledge, the dialogic character of the knowledge construction process, and the recognition of the singular as a legitimate locus for the production of knowledge (MITJÁNS MARTÍNEZ, 2019).



All three principles are expressed in the constructive-interpretative methodology throughout the investigation process. Effectively, in the context of teacher training, during the pandemic, this research was organized and unfolded as follows:

- 1st moment: Identify elements of the ECE teachers training social space in the educational context of the school and municipality.
- 2nd moment: Understand how information and communication technologies participated in teaching practice and in the teaching and learning processes.
- 3rd moment: Create indicators that allow for understanding how one of the teachers subjectified her experience of the training process.

In 2020, as part of a broader research strategy, after answering a survey about structural aspects of the group, an Extension Course called "Teaching Processes: formative journey for Childhood education teachers" was organized for the ECE teachers in the partner municipality. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a model of weekly online meetings was adopted throughout the second half of 2020. The meetings were carried out using the Google Meet platform. Each meeting lasted approximately 3 hours. With the teachers' permission, all meetings were recorded. The teachers were organized into virtual classes in the morning and afternoon, depending on their teaching schedule.

Four modules, consisting of four meetings each, were taught, namely: Module 1: Childhood, Children, Education: Concepts and Processes, Module 2: Early Childhood Education Policy and Curriculum, Module 3: Childhood Learning and Development, and Module 4: Pedagogical Strategies in Early Childhood Education. Each module was taught by one of the main GPEIS researchers, who are also the authors of this article.

The online meetings were based on material developed for this purpose, with short theoretical texts, guiding questions for discussion, blank space for notes and various tips on other materials that could be accessed. The Municipal Department of Education received the file in PDF format and printed copies for the teachers participating in the course, so that everyone could follow the meetings utilizing the physical material.

In the responses to the survey, we identified that the set of teachers who attended the course during the morning was characterized as follows: 25 bachelors in Pedagogy and 2 in Languages, seven of them had a specialization postgraduate degree, 20 attended college on-site and seven in distance learning modality. Regarding the roles performed by them: 1 was a Elementary Education Coordinator, 1 was a Special Education/Inclusion Coordinator, 1 was a Shift Coordinator, 1 was a Pedagogical Coordinator, 1 was a Director, 1 was a Pedagogical Supervision, 15 were teachers on temporary contract and 6 teachers held a permanent position.

The afternoon class was composed of 59 teachers and managers with the following education profile: 55 had a bachelor in Pedagogy, 2 in Languages, and 2 did not inform, 17 of them had a specialization course, 47 attended college on-site and 12 in distance learning modality. Regarding the roles performed by them: 1 Pedagogical Support, 1 Technical Advisor, 1 Early Childhood Education Municipal



Coordinator, 1 Shift Coordinator, 1 Pedagogical Coordinator, 1 School Inspector, 13 did not inform, 16 hired teachers and 24 teachers who are public servants<sup>2</sup>.

In the social research scenario created by the Extension Course, the expressions and reports of the group of teachers were considered as a representative compilation of this social group.

The research was carried out during a period of 13 months, between May 2020 and June 2021. In 2021, the instruments used were the conversational dynamics and focal groups, which allowed us to focus on the interpretative construction of one of the research participants: a 42-year-old ECE teacher, with a bachelor in pedagogy, here referred to as Maria. During the pandemic, she worked with groups of young children, aged between 4 and 5 years.

Thus, Maria's participation in different moments of the training, such as the extension course, the focal group meetings, debates, and message exchanges through WhatsApp, made it possible to single out, in a qualitative and integrative analysis, dimensions of the pedagogical practice that were expressed as challenges of Early Childhood Education with regards to both the implementation of the BNCCEI and the challenges pertaining to the pandemic.

### CONSTRUCTIVE-INTERPRETATIVE CONSTRUCTION: CONSIDERATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Considering the methodological tools and the relationships established with the collaborators, the theoretical-empirical trajectories will be presented, highlighting that:

The work of information construction is guided by the researcher's reflection, who is considered active throughout the entire research process as he is permanently engaged with all the information that appears throughout the development of the empirical work. His role is not restricted to assembling information, but rather, involves producing meanings that enable theoretical interpretations and generate new sense zones to be deepened. (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 103).

To better organize and express the development of the path undertaken - aligned with the proposed methodology, objectives and questions - we present the dimensions of the group of teacher's social subjectivity and of Maria's individual subjectivity. Both are articulated with the experiences of these teachers but are presented here separately.

#### A- Impacts and challenges: the social subjectivity of ECE teachers

The survey sent to the education professionals introduced the theme of teacher training. Question number 12, which was open-ended, asked the teachers to report their opinion on the training processes they had already attended – the challenges, potential, impacts, if their needs were met, etc. A group of teachers responded with qualifying expressions such as "important for qualification/practice"; "Good"; "very fruitful"; "it met my professional needs"; "of great value to the teacher's daily life"; but they did not delve into the why or the element that led them to characterize them as such. Another group developed more with regards to format and content than with regards to their own process.



Seven teachers mentioned the "dichotomy between theory and practice" with statements such as: "The greatest challenge is to apply theory to practice"; "All very theoretical"; "Lots of theory and little practice"; "In my opinion, pedagogy is too much theory, it doesn't provide much basis for us to face challenges in the classroom." "We actually learn by doing, with struggles and dedication."

The dichotomy between theory and practice, as a result of the body-mind duality present in traditional science, constitutes the villain of educational problems in analysis based only on common sense, in which frequently theory is assumed as opposed to the practice. (MADEIRA-COELHO, 2016).

The following reports emerged from about three more elaborate answers that expressed the opinion and meaning derived by teachers from continuing education: "Each year that passes and that we teach different classes, we observe that we are faced with different needs. Courses are always good and important to update the teacher, we always learn and apply the content in our daily lives" (excerpt from one of the collaborator's response). Another participant characterized continuing education as follows, "continuing education is a process that aims to improve the teacher's performance to better aid the students in their development."

When asking precisely what the collaborators thought regarding continuing education, most of the responses indicated that it is very necessary and of great importance. A group of around 10 responses listed continuing education as essential for pedagogical practice, as a means of enriching/improving it, helping the educator in the classroom and in everyday school life, and also updating teachers in accordance with the various changes that occurred in society and with what those changes require. Another group of around 10 answers, highlighted continued formation as a means of expanding knowledge, involving expressions such as: improvement, updating, learning.

In the conversational dynamics on teacher training, two teachers reported that they are interested in participating in continuing education. One tells us that she always likes to participate in training and that most of her colleagues do too, although some are resistant, and that when the new DCGO (2019) curriculum, focused on BNCCEI (2017) emerged, she and her professional colleagues requested a course on the BNCCEI. Another teacher emphasizes the importance of conducting training, for with the emergence of the new BNCCEI comes the need to know and study it.

In the essay-letters on expectations for starting the extension course, 25 of the written documents contained aspects that valued the acquisition of new knowledge, even though some of the letters included only words like "knowledge" or "learning", associated to words like "motivation", "inspiration", "innovation", "news." Some emphasized the aspect of exchanging experiences and/or ideas, with words such as "sharing", "interacting with colleagues", "getting to know new realities". Others permeated the field of affectivity, with words such as "gratitude", "positivity", "creativity", "overcoming".

Among this set of written documents, another 11 essays highlighted the field of new knowledge, but relating it to new practices, with expressions such as "experience exchanges to enrich my routine"; "to take advantage of all knowledge, all experience that enable the improvement of my work 'with the little ones"; "enriching pedagogical practice with a focus on learning"; "adds to our knowledge



and makes our days and experiences in the classroom more pleasurable and creative", and also "is related to the success of the school staff, by making teachers 'better for the children'".

Regarding the BNCCEI, which was one of the main motivating factors for offering the extension course to teachers, only 11 wrote expressly about that, namely: how to "learn ways to better work with the BNCCEI [...] if possible, new games to use in the classroom", "understand/ get to know the BNCCEI" or "understand the BNCCEI and curriculum" indicating the articulation between the training process with the possibility of innovating pedagogical practices and acquiring knowledge. In another document, a member of the coordination staff expresses the BNCCEI as challenging, reporting that it will be a challenge to "learn what the BNCCEI consists of, to put it into practice and help the school group within this new modality.". In other words, beyond just expanding knowledge related to BNCCEI, the possibility of articulating it with the work conducted with the children, or with the teachers in coordination, also encompassing the experience of learning more games, songs and about Early Childhood Education in itself.

The BNCCEI also appears in relation to teaching processes through reflections or expressions that express concerns and the BNCCEI as a challenge. They reflect guidelines that argue, simplistically, that adapting to the BNCCEI is merely to reduce the use of "paper and pencil". A teacher faces the BNCCEI as a challenge, expressing that "The new educational context that the BNNCEI brings is to put aside paper and pencil, which for many years were indispensable in a classroom". Others show great concern with "demands from parents who are unaware of the BNCCEI and who demand printed tasks and even violent".

It is understood that the meaning attributed to the use of paper and pencil and printed tasks is linked to the notion that this is the only manner through which formal learning happens, which is often associated with content aimed at incorporating the Alphabetical Writing System, whereas in fact ECE:

has the role of giving children the opportunity to understand the different uses and functions that writing has in society [...]. It should also be noted that written language must be given the same importance as other forms of language—visual, bodily, graphic, musical, audio-visual, etc. — and developed in real and meaningful contexts. (DCGO, 2019, p. 132).

Literacy stricto sensu - conceived as a process of appropriation, understanding and effective use of the Alphabetical Writing System through pedagogical practice - 'requires the teacher to search for different ways to 'develop each student's knowledge/learning', making clear "the need for schools to rely on different spaces for the proper development of activities" (text excerpt 38). The modification of pedagogical practice and the need for new spaces and resources for development is indicated by other teachers in their reports, in which they mention the need for the inter-complementary and diversified character of pedagogical actions, which arises from the concept of fields of experience, which should be worked on every day of the year, relating said fields and working with them in an integral way, and not in an isolated manner, with a time or day set aside for each field.

The set of impressions shared by the teachers with regards to their teacher training processes and their expectations in terms of participation in the course proposed at that time are closely related to the academic production of authors who address the association between teacher training and the improvement



educational practices (PERES et al, 2016; GALINDO; INFOSATO, 2016; GUEDES, 2018; MAGALHÃES; AZEVEDO, 2015).

The different expressions express beliefs shared by the group regarding the value attributed by the group to the articulation between teacher education and professional development, in which the training moment is an opportunity to expand knowledge, acquire new techniques, methods or practices that have the potential to make work more efficient.

On the one hand, they express the belief in the value of teacher education, in its various contexts, as a viable alternative for changing pedagogical practices. On the other hand, the dichotomy between theory and practice remains present, expressed as the main problem of many training programs or through their preferences for "practical" content.

This dichotomous perspective is related to a simplistic analysis of both the common sense, "in practice, theory is different", and the organization of training curricula that separates situations "of consistent theoretical training" and "practical immersion". The relationship established, "either one or the other", makes it difficult to propose a "complex relation between different possibilities of human or social expression that are configured both in theoretical constructions and in the action of lived contexts." (MADEIRA-COELHO, 2016, p. 13).

In this way, we can affirm that the separation of these two elements, as well as sticking to this dichotomy, makes the construction of meaning difficult for teachers who are experiencing the totality of practices.

Addressing the BNCCEI with regards to its recent implementation raises the need for these educators to participate in teacher training, as a time and space to reflect on their practices, understand what is organized by the curricula and develop professionally, but not focusing solely on techniques, methods and knowledge.

We, therefore, advocate the value of professional training that goes beyond the institutionalization of a curriculum, final diploma or grades, in which the subjects, studies and actions in which they participate throughout the training are in synch, so that from what they experience new subjective senses may be configured, which favours the development of effective actions. (MADEIRA-COELHO, 2016).

#### B - The imposition of technology: teaching and the pandemic

Regarding emergency remote teaching in which children and teachers had to make use of activities mediated by Information and Communication Technologies – ICTs, one of the teacher's statements characterizes the bewilderment and commotion that pervaded the group when they realized that the COVID-19 pandemic presented them with "a new school, one that no one attends".

The municipality's communication portal points out that ever since the suspension of classes on March 17, children have been doing the tasks sent by schools through social media and the Google Classroom platform. Teachers' precourse essay reports show that, for many, the remote teaching modality imposes a great challenge, not only because planning and practices must be differentiated, but also due to the handling of technologies and general risk situation caused by the pandemic:



**Technologies in this time of pandemic** are engaging us and we need to seek to learn how to handle these tools and it is often a great challenge, as we were not prepared for this situation in which we need to record, edit, plan videos, worry about the environment we broadcast these classes from, lighting, preparing activities, handling the editing apps. The time spent is huge. (Text Excerpt 07).

I am part of the risk group due to age, being hypertensive and pre-diabetic according to my doctor. Media terrorism, some mismatched information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, all make me fearful and leave me shaken. In addition to all this context, **there are still concerns about the recordings of classes and online courses.** Because I don't master these new technologies well, I have difficulties. For all this situation I've been experienced I am very anxious and stressed. (Text Excerpt 29).

According to Prensky's (2001) contributions in regards to the definitions of natives and digital immigrants, we are able to identify that the difficulties presented by teachers, belong to those who are, in most cases, digital immigrants, part of a generation that needs to relearn how to live with the presence of technology and learn this new language, the "digital language" that the so-called digital natives have already learned and whose identity does not distinguish between digital and real space (ROSSATO, 2014). We interpret that one of the possibilities in understanding the difficulties faced by educators in using ICTs is the fact that they have not subjectively produced in order to develop their identities within this space.

The use of digital tools by children and their identity within them is something that we cannot think of in the same way, since despite being born in the generation listed as "digital natives", they do not possess precise knowledge regarding access and the relationship established with the ICTs, because, even though access to these tools is increasing in our country, it is still far from serving the majority of the population, "which generates yet another form of distinction and social exclusion: digital exclusion" (ROSSATO, 2014, p. 153). Lack of access generates social exclusion and enhances inequalities, while isolation and stress experienced during this period impact the physical and mental health of children (SILVA, NETO; SANTOS, 2020; MATA et al, 2021).

Digital exclusion of students is a latent concern for teachers and certainly a challenge for education, especially now that digital information and communication technologies are these children's learning environment. The educators are concerned about children, considered to be low-income, who do not have access to cell phones and computers, and whether those who do have access are finding support from their parents both to access the activities and to carry them out, since emergency remote teaching does not provide the same quality of teacher and aid mediation as there was in on-site school. These issues are addressed in the following reports:

In the midst of so many changes and with no set date to resume classroom activities, we teachers look from afar, because many children are being helped by their parents, so what they are in fact learning isn't clear. This distance imposed by social isolation is undisputable, but the difficulty in the learning process is inevitable. (Text Excerpt 16)

I care about the well-being of students, as well as issues such as connectivity so that no one is left behind during this suspension from [in person] classes. (Text Excerpt 24)



Emergency remote teaching highlights the need for teachers to think of new methodologies suitable for the use of ICTs and the mediation of parents, as one teacher explains "the classes are not only for students, but also for parents who are helping the students at home" (essay excerpt 05), as well as materials for students who do not have access to ICTs and are opting for printed materials. The use of technologies in remote learning is posed as inadequate by some teachers, given the children's passivity or restlessness in front of the screen, or the difficulty of establishing teacher-student and student-student interactivity throughout the fulfilled activities. Due to this, the need for parents to be present during children's learning process is even greater. So the access to technology was one issue, but the variability in parents' familiarity with the technologies was also something that teachers had to work through.

Faced with emergency remote teaching during the pandemic, many questions and concerns arise from the ECE teachers' experience in this new institutional context, such as: the many debates on the validity of education through ICTs and its appropriateness to ECE; the significant role of parents in their child's learning process; the quality of the relationship between teachers and students, between parents and teachers; the evidencing of social inequalities; and, prospectively, the organization of the educational process when isolation measures are relaxed and students return to school still under restraining measures.

#### C- The individual subjectivity dimension: a teacher's singularity

The constructive-interpretative process of information construction regarding elements of the Early Childhood Education educational system enabled the development of a comprehensive structure, according to the three axes that follow.

## Axis 1: The social dynamics of the school's and municipality's educational context during the pandemic

According to the School Census (BRASIL, 2020) the number of enrolments in the public network of the municipality in which this research was conducted, was of around 511 children in pre-schools and of 1,753 in kindergarten. In March 2020, according to the SME, the municipality had 141 early education teachers, of which 67 were permanent teachers and 74 were temporary. These teachers worked in 11 educational institutions located in urban and rural areas.

In March 2020, the municipal government issued a decree that established a state of emergency in public health taking into account the acknowledgement of the pandemic based on legal documents issued internationally and nationally, and suspended on-site classes, replacing them with classes through digital media for as long as the New Coronavirus pandemic lasts. Then, after the first 30 days of the pandemic, the temporary teachers, who were not effective public servants, were let go and it was up to each institution to distribute the classes that lost their teachers among the shift coordinators and the remaining public servant teachers.

After this internal reorganization, the educational institutions began to contact families to instruct them on how the monitoring of the children would be carried out. Initially, educational institutions, following the Municipal Secretary for Education's guidelines, used the Google Classroom platform. However, many



families did not access the platform, due to different reasons. In July, the network began to use Whatsapp groups to send activities and keep in touch with families.

It is worth highlighting that, initially, the educational institutions' management team got in touch with the children's guardians individually through telephone calls or home visits. Subsequently, the contact with these families was maintained through the WhatsApp app.

The teachers prepared activities in digital format that were sent via Whatsapp group along with links to internet videos or videos produced by them. The same activities sent digitally were printed at the educational institution and could be picked up by the families that were restricted to this option. According to the teachers, the activities proposed were based on the postulates of the Common National Curriculum Base for early childhood education, which values children's bodily expression and involves music and storytelling.

The teachers kept track of the activities carried out through photos, videos and audios sent and made by those responsible for the child. However, according to the testimony of most of the teachers, few families showed engagement in carrying out the activities and maintaining communication with the teachers.

As for the relationship between teachers and management, we identified little articulation, collective planning and dialogue in decision-making. The teachers reported that they were not consulted about the work carried out, nor were they aware of the proposed changes due to the various situations that arose with the pandemic. In addition, they stated that there was an excessive concern with filling out papers and bureaucratic work in order to serve as evidence that accounted for the hours worked.

According to Maria,

I was watching this totally senseless discussion, seriously. And the kids? How will we manage to communicate with them, with their families? There are so many difficult situations (Focal Group, April 20, 2021).

The pandemic is showing us a lot, we have to think about those families who don't have a job and are having difficulty even with food provision (Focal Group, April 6, 2021).

In this way, each teacher and school ended up carrying out diversified work and referrals that pertained to their realities and particular dynamics. We identified that teacher Maria stood out for the stance she took in school meetings and during the training course in which she participated. She questioned and proposed reflections on the children's situation and the concern with distancing the discussions and planning from the guiding pedagogical proposal in a unique way,

As for the social dynamics of the school's and municipality's educational context during the pandemic, we can initially conclude that: a) decisions about the pedagogical work were management's responsibility; b) the classroom teachers did not participate in discussions and collective actions coordinated with management; c) hierarchical relationships in the educational system constituted an obstacle to the development of collective work.



## Axis 2: The teacher's Pedagogical practice and social representations of the teaching and learning processes

Fear regarding an unknown virus and uncertainties related to social dynamics and the functioning of the educational institution imposed new ways of life. Since the beginning of the pandemic, different needs have emerged, both by teachers and by the children's families. In an attempt to strengthen the bonds and engage those responsible for the children in carrying out the activities she planned, Maria r thinks of ways to involve families in the school tasks.

there are families that up until today have still not given us any feedback, we don't know if things are ok or not... I'm thinking about what you are saying, and I think the best way is to try to change the strategy and really become closer. (Conversational Dynamics, August 25, 2020).

Gradually, during the pandemic, a stronger bond between the teacher and the families is identified due to a new way of interacting, closer and more personal. This can potentially establish a new social relationship that, procedurally, may constitute an essential path with great potential for favouring each child's learning and development processes.

We emphasize the importance of the child-teacher relationship, which promotes an encounter. An encounter in which the early childhood education teacher comes to know the children's learning needs, as this is a means for her to plan and develop experiences that collaborate with the teaching and learning process. In addition, this path can support the teacher's practice when the need to understand more about the specifics of the group and of each child arises. The child-teacher relationship is marked by pedagogical intentionality. Thus, the relationship that Maria tried to establish with the children could be the starting point for making advances in the planning of new learning experiences in face of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Regarding her pedagogical practice Maria comments: "I say it's not easy, I thought a lot throughout the course, I believe in a different kind of work that really puts the child at the center of the process. I've done so many elaborate things in my planning and now I think 'what for'? Just to teach the green colour?'. That's not it, I see that I'm thinking differently, but there is a lot of resistance and there is a tendency to do the activities the traditional way, on paper" (Conversational Dynamics, October 27, 2020).

One of the challenges of her practice as an early childhood education teacher is to change social representations of the role of early childhood education and learning. With regards to school education, we emphasize two important aspects: 1) to recognize that there is no way to separate learning for school from learning for life, as a dichotomy; 2) to consider that different kinds of learning are produced in school, school learning is not configured in a single, homogeneous and linear way.

About the teacher's pedagogical practice and her representations of the teaching and learning processes, we conclude that: a) although the teacher recognizes flaws in her practice - sometimes she isn't able to act the way she would like to. Her actions are not entirely congruent with her statements; b) the teacher's pedagogical practice isn't guided solely by her social representations of the



teaching and learning processes. There are other aspects that participate in her action.

#### Axis 3: Indicators of changes in the teacher with relation to teaching

During the course of this research and of the follow-up period with the teacher subsequent to the training experiences, we identified in Maria a special interest and distinctive participation in the discussions held. She remained active throughout the training course, posing questions about the challenges of her teaching practice. In one of the meetings, she spoke about her outrage with respect to the public library:

For me it's impressive, who here knows there's a city library? I'm sure almost no one does, the library is abandoned, full of books. During this pandemic period, they could have done something, distributed, donated, but they've shut the library down and left everything to rot... (Focal Group, April 27, 2021).

The teacher displayed a broad view of her work with children, articulating it with the municipality's public policies. During many moments, a critical political stance articulated with her view on educational matters was evident. Her statements in relation to her work with young children expressed the need for further studies and knowledge development.

After participating in training activities organized by the university team, Maria sought out one of the members of the research group, an early childhood education teacher, who had obtained her doctorate degree, in order to obtain information and support to begin a master's in education. Her interest made it possible for her to enrol in a class, as a guest student, in the graduate program shortly thereafter, at the beginning of the semester.

This action is in line with what was expressed at the beginning of the extension course, in which the teacher wrote about her initial expectations: "my expectation is that it will be an enriching and pleasurable training process that will contribute to my professional and personal development. Through this training, I hope to contribute to the success of my team and, in particular, to become a great and better teacher for my (our) children" (Written Text, 3 November 2020).

We identified Maria's personal involvement throughout the course, having engaged in its activities. For the teacher, teaching is shaped by what she has historically experienced in her profession and is updated by this training experience, and others, in a unique way. It is worth noting that the teacher's experiences and actions in school are permeated by social relationships and intentional activities. Her work is pedagogical in nature but is not restricted to the classroom. In sharing similar routines and contexts with her work colleagues, the teacher is an active participant in the educational system. Hence, this professional cannot be understood as separate from the experienced social dynamic, which in itself is unpredictable, dynamic and contradictory.

In this way, the teacher and her training experiences are also constituents of the educational system's structure. This understanding is essential in order to produce a collective and democratic proposal for educational public policy.

In articulated with the axes discussed, with regards to the indicators of changes in the teacher in relation to teaching, we considered that: a) the social



dynamics of the school's and municipality's educational context during the pandemic participated in the teacher's teaching practice as a significative element of her work, as they made her feel uncomfortable and challenged to seek new forms of practice; b) the teacher displayed an active attitude towards the demands imposed to her pedagogical practice; c) the teacher was personally engaged with reflections throughout the training course, which favoured rethinking social representations regarding her work, early childhood education and the teaching and learning processes; d) the relationship between theory and practice is expressed in the teacher's training process as a guiding element of her reflections and subjective production.

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The educational system's structure consists of integrated multi-dimensions in which social and individual processes are integrated. Thus, in order to promote school education that breaks with systemic inequality, especially with regard to learning and development processes, it is essential to consider the interrelationship of the different constitutive dimensions of ECE in a municipality. This text focuses on the discussion of one of the aforementioned dimensions: teacher training.

This article analysed the process of teacher training as an element of a Brazilian educational system that favours more equitable teaching and learning processes in early childhood during the pandemic. Therefore, in the dialogic process that characterized the course, a space-time for the teacher's subjective production was created, which helped her face challenges, both historically constructed and current in relation to teaching and emergency remote teaching.

The guiding principles of the training program were organized into two inseparable levels: the social and individual. In this way, we were able to understand the subjective dimension of the social space of training constituted by the group of ECE teachers. To understand some of the group's beliefs, values, relationship dynamics and this collective's organization informed the development of a unique teacher training program proposal and course of research.

We consider that the material created for this course opened channels of communication with the course participants and connected the national policy guidelines to the pedagogical didactics specific to Early Childhood Education that, in addition to the bonds of trust and engagement developed with some of the teachers, substantiated the choice of methodological strategies utilized throughout the online training

With regards to the individual dimension — which is articulated to the dynamics of the social space of training - the article presented a case study that illustrated the changes occurred in a teacher throughout this process. We conclude that the training experiences constituted, for the teacher, a favourable context for learning about the role of school education in early childhood and in her teaching trajectory. In this way, it was possible to promote reflections, actions and professional practice guided by an education model that aims to break with banking (FREIRE, 2004) and homogenized education models.



# SUBJETIVIDADE E FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE NO CONTEXTO DA PANDEMIA EM UM SISTEMA MUNICIPAL DE EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

#### **RESUMO**

O isolamento social decorrente da pandemia de COVID-19 suspendeu as aulas desde março de 2020 na maior parte das cidades do país e passou a exigir dos educadores uma postura crítica e criativa, capaz de gerar alternativas diante do imprevisível que se presentificou em nossas vidas. Nesse contexto, o trabalho desse artigo, que se integra à pesquisa mais ampla, da formação docente como compreender processos multidimensionalidade do funcionamento de um sistema municipal de Educação Infantil, por meio da compreensão de como professoras subjetivam uma vivência formativa. Com base na Teoria da Subjetividade e na correspondente Epistemologia Qualitativa de González Rey, abordam-se sentidos subjetivos produzidos pelas professoras como grupo social e a forma como essa produção se configurou, nesse contexto de exceção, como resposta possível à formação profissional e à imposição da tecnologia em suas práticas cotidianas. Para além de aspectos que singularizam a experiência desse grupo social, a construçãointerpretativa traz, também, a produção particular da subjetividade individual de uma dessas docentes, considerando que a experiência formativa se constituiu para a professora como contexto favorecedor de aprendizagem sobre a função e os processos da educação escolar na primeira infância em relação à sua trajetória docente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Formação docente. Subjetividade. Educação Infantil. Pandemia.



#### **NOTES**

1 A preliminary version of this article was submitted for evaluation to the Annual Meeting - American Educational Research Association 2022.

2 In Brazil, in order to have a permanent contract as a public-school teacher, first one must pass the public servant exam. Other teachers hired without having become public servants, are on temporary contracts.

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Page | 74



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Page | 76



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