



Listen to your children Rocinha! And Jardim Catarina as well!



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Improving Early Childhood Education in Fragile Contexts
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In this third Project Bulletin we discuss the importance of early childhood education, the rights to early childhood education set out in Brazilian law and the major role creches and pre-schools play in children's lives.

This newsletter springs from the project named in the title and is conducted by research teams in Scotland, Brazil, Eswatini, Palestine and South Africaⁱ. Newsletter no. 1 and 2 and more details about the project can be found at www.ciespi.org.br.

Why early childhood education is so important

We all know that physical and emotional care are critical for young children. But the years from 0-5 are also critical for children's brain and skill development. When parents change their gaze, their voice, their movements to respond to what a child is doing, the child is learning. Such responses trigger new pathways in the brain thus enlarging the brain's capacities. So, talking to very young children, playing with them and holding them are crucial for their development.

Creches and preschools are also very important for a child's development. Children going to early childhood centers improve their cognitive psycho-social development. Learning to interact with other children and with teachers and staff gives the young children the skills to do better in elementary education. Early childhood centers can provide calm and protected spaces and children develop better without the stress that

comes from noise, overcrowding and violence. Such centers are more effective when they have a rich mixture of activities including play, reading, and music. The importance of these influences cannot be over-estimated. Children with these kinds of stimulation from parents and ECC develop much more fully than children without.ⁱⁱ

What are the rights to early childhood education set out in Brazilian law?

Brazil, compared to some other nations, has been slow to recognize the importance of early childhood education but young children's rights to education have been gradually recognized. While Article 6 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution as amended guarantees all children the right to education, Article 7 provides for free assistance for children up to the age of five in day care centers and pre-school facilities. The 1990 Statute of the Child and the Adolescent insisted that protections for young people applied without discrimination

based on birth, family situation, age, sex, race, ethnicity or color, religion or creed and any form of disability. It also insisted that young people had all the rights of any person.

In 1996, early childhood education was established as a right for all children in the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education. The same law provided the completion of primary education to be the standard for early childhood teachers and in 2006, federal law mandated primary education for children down to age 6.

In 2006, the starting age for primary education was lowered (Law 11.274) to 6 years old and subsequently, the age for early childhood education was changed (53rd Amendment of the Constitution) to include children 0-5 year-olds. Furthermore, in 2009, preschool (for 4- to 5-year-olds) became part of compulsory education. This change was a critical recognition of the importance of early childhood education.

In 2009, a resolution of the Chamber of Basic Education (Resolução CEB/CNE nº 5 de 17/12/2009) in Article 8 called for participation and dialog and daily listening to the families of young children with respect for their different forms of organization. This meant that teachers were supposed to reach out to parents and make sure they had a continuing conversation with them about their children's education.

In 2016, Brazil enacted its first law specifically for young children (Marco Legal da Primeira Infância) covering young children through the age of six. Among other things, the law mandated the individual states to establish "plans, programs and services for early childhood which guarantee a child's full development". The law also mandated states to reduce inequality among children, aim for full day schooling, promote health, nutrition, culture, play and leisure. The same statute emphasized valuing the diversity among young children in Brazil and the differences between children of different social and cultural contexts. Going beyond formal education, the Marco Legal also mandated prioritizing the health,

nutrition, culture, play and protection against all forms of violence for young children.

The growing importance of early childhood education is also reflected in changing rules about the qualifications necessary for being an early childhood teacher and the importance of teachers who understood child development and early childhood pedagogy.

The 1990 Statute on the Child and the Adolescent laid down qualifications for teachers of basic education which included the completion of high school or college. Those with just high school also had to take a teacher's training course. National figures for 2020 show that for all early childhood teachers, 58.6% had both a degree and a teacher training certificate while 17.9% had neither. But in the state of Rio de Janeiro, only 25.1% had both a degree and a teaching certificate while 42.9% had neither.ⁱⁱⁱ

The directors of early childhood centers we have spoken with in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, say it is very hard to employ qualified staff particularly to work in this community. Staff with the proper qualifications prefer working in middle income neighborhoods. Staffing educational centers with qualified people is important for promoting the full development of young children.

The gap we observe in law and in reality, is very large. That gap is also true for many of the rights and mandates we listed earlier. Educational qualifications are just one area where the promise massively exceeds the performance.

Why creches and preschools are so important

Our research so far has shown that the staff of early childhood centers are upset that parents sometimes seem not to take the educational role of the centers seriously, regarding them merely as

providers of child care while the parents' work. We are looking forward to talking with parents to see how they regard the centers.

Creche and preschools play a vital role in providing safe places for children during the day, feeding them and giving them care. But that is just one part of their role. As our introduction shows, early childhood centers are critical for encouraging the children's learning and development and the research shows that such an experience is especially important for young children from low-income families. Children from Communities that also suffer from violence and other physical

dangers are even more in need of what childcare centers can offer. Early childhood education gives children a step up for the rest of their lives. So, we encourage parents and center staff to enter into a dialogue to figure out how they can help each other to promote the children's learning. Both sides have precious little time for such conversations, but we think such encounters could be very useful.

We invite people interested in the inclusive and participatory education project to contact us by email at ciespi@ciespi.org.br or Whatsapp at +55 21 98266 7045.

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ⁱⁱ Among the references used here are those available at <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>
<https://bernardvanleer.org/ecm-article/2017/big-surprises-little-brains/>
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Ministério da Educação, Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2021, available at https://download.inep.gov.br/informacoes_estatisticas/indicadores_educacionais/2021/SEI_INEP_0644683_Nota_Tecnica.pdf. Accessed on October 2, 2021.



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