

# Early Childhood Education: Formative Processes, Practices and the Configuration of Teaching in the Municipal Schools of Early Childhood and Elementary Education of Guarapari/ES

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we bring forward part of a research named, *A place called EMEIEF (MSECEE — Municipal Schools of Early Childhood and Elementary Education)*: features, dialogues and practices of early childhood education, in which we focus on the set-up of the MSECEE for the purpose of featuring them, especially considering the set-up of teaching in Early Childhood Education (ECE). We contrast how to actualize the formative processes in the institution, the practices of the teachers with the children and set-up of teaching in ECE. We base our analysis in a qualitative approach which had the following production data through participant observation and interviews. In the context of the practices of children and teachers in the MSECEE, we point out that there is a subordination of early childhood education to elementary education, both the pedagogical work as in the forms of appropriation and usages of collective spaces of the institution. We verified also the incipience of specific training for teachers of ECE, being held only training for permanent public servers throughout the school year. The formation of teaching on ECE, in the context of MSECEE, approaches increasingly a set-up of the elementary education, based on a traditional model of education.

**Key words:** training of educators, early childhood education, teacher's practices, formative processes, MSECEE

## 1. Introduction

We approached in this text some initial considerations of the ongoing research “A place called MSECEE: features, dialogues and practices in Early Childhood Education”, in which we focus on the set-up of the Municipal Schools of Early Childhood and Elementary Education (MSECEE). We think these institutions as spaces populated by individuals who trace their lines ceaselessly in this place (Certeau, 2008). Lines that intersect, intertwine, interweave senses and meanings that through these individuals and their interactions with the context (Bakhtin, 2003; 2010b), *trace the natural image* of a MSECEE, or in other words, its set-up. This theme is articulated with the statement of Early Childhood Education (ECE) on the social scenario, culminating with their

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inclusion in the education systems as the first stage of basic education (Brazil, 1996). In this context, studies and production of official references have been marking their specificity (Rocha, 1999; Brazil, 2010b). A specificity which is stated in policy settings (Brazil, 2006b; 2009b), in the proposition of infrastructure (Brazil, 2006a), in the indication of evaluative processes (Brazil, 2009a; 2009b) and in the discussion of curriculum guidelines (2009c; 2010b). Overall, we observed that this specificity is associated especially to the statement that the child from 0 to 6 years, “demands a type of care that does not fit the school model” (Campos, 2008), echoing on a critique of the homogenizing logic conception of students in the educational work (Nascimento, 2007). Thus, starting, we mark that ECE has been setting its own field in the joints with school systems (Côco, 2010). A field that offers the integration of care and educational activities, indicating new requirements for professional practice with young children.

This scenario has involved setting up distinctive institutions for ECE and the other stages of education. Usually, ECE nominates its Centers/Municipal Units of Early Childhood Education institutions and Elementary Education nominates their Municipal/State institutions. If on one hand this distinction has been characterizing the specificity of ECE, on the other, there is a “fracture” in the educational work (Campos, 2011) and hence the need to promote its articulations (Machado, 2007). Therefore, we consider a scenario of tension in the joints of the ECE with the other stages of education. In this context, we note the existence of institutions that escape this logic by gathering ECE and Elementary Education (EED) in the same building.

The theme is also part of a context of expanding the service to this type of education on the social scenario. Research and statistical follow-ups for a variety of institutions indicate that the increase in demand for ECE, both in Brazil and in the world, is a reality. This demand follows the needs of the contemporary society, linked to the increasing urbanization of cities, to the considerable increase in female participation in the labor market and to the ways of reorganization of the families. We combine to this demand the understanding of society to how important are the lived experiences of young children in ECE institutions.

In a recent study, Moss (2001) highlights the article 28 of the Convention about the Rights of the Child of the United Nations (UN), which recognizes the right to education from the earliest years of life, giving you the interpretation that this law begins with the birth, intimately linked to the right of small children to the maximum development. Linked to the recognition, educational care with quality stands as a challenge to the government, mainly in the effective expansion of services to young children of ECE, enrolled in the various legal frameworks that regulate it. In this perspective, we explore some of these legal frameworks in the Brazilian scenario, in order to situate our research problematic, which focuses on the set-up of the institutions known as MSECEE.

## **2. The Early Childhood Education in Brazil and Its Legal Frameworks**

The current demands of families regarding the ECE led and still lead the civil society to make an effort that the government legally sustains this type of education, since, historically, the social achievements were not accomplished without effective mobilization of society. In legal texts, that protection occurs in the Federal Constitution (CF — Constituição Federal) of 1988, in its Article 208, paragraph IV, stating the obligation of the State to offer ECE as a form of education and child's right to such care. Two years later, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA — Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente) also points out to the child's right to this care, at the same time that mechanisms of social control and participation in the development and implementation of policies for children were established. On the other hand, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education

(LDB — Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional) considers ECE as the first stage of basic education, expressed in its title V, chapter II, section II, article 29, for purposes of the development of children up to six years old. It assigns responsibility to the municipalities regarding the offer of this type of education, explaining in its Title IV, art. 11, that:

The Municipalities shall be entrusted to: (...) offer early childhood education in kindergartens and pre-schools, and, with priority, elementary education, permitted its operations in other levels of education when they have fully met the needs of their area of expertise and resources above the minimum percentages bound by the Constitution to the maintenance and development of education.

In the wake of the constitutional responsibility of municipalities towards ECE, the increase of enrollment of children aged 0 to 6 years in public schools occurred according to two competing movements: one is from society which demands more enrollment vacancies for ECE; another are the municipal administrators which arise before the legal obligation to ensure greater and better offer for Early Childhood Education.

At the beginning of 2006, the approval of the Law No. 11274/2006 extends the elementary education from eight to nine years duration, with the enrollment of children that are 6 years old in the first year, previously named first grade. Little time has passed after the implementation of this measure and the Constitutional Amendment (EC — Emenda Constitucional) number 59/2009, which amended the definition of mandatory education, is sanctioned without any further discussion about it in society, in specialized circles nor in the National Congress itself. Added to the adoption of Elementary Education in 9 years, it appears as a real stream of changes that weighed on the municipal management of education in this first decade of the century (Campos, 2011). The new National Educational Plan (PNE — Plano Nacional de Educação) for the decade 2011-2020, in the National Congress, has as primary goal to universalize until 2016 the educational attainment of the population aged 4 and 5 years, and expand by the year 2020 the offer of early childhood education, in order to meet 50% of the population under 3 years old. By placing the nursery as an optional stage, it draws attention to the pre-school, now mandatory, and the previous segment loses pressure, in all aspects. As the daycare expands, if the educational processes do not ensure a harmonious sequence between the stages of ECE, it can be repeated, in its passage to pre-school, the phenomenon of the existing rupture between pre-school and elementary school in many educational systems (Brazil, 2010a).

This rupture, either within Early Childhood Education itself or in the passage of the children from ECE to the EED, stands as tension between the legal guarantee of the right of children to a universalized and qualified education and to what has been observed within the local systems of education. In the entanglement of legal texts that underlie the ECE as a right of the child and family and duty of the state and the contemporary social reality, the demand for early childhood education institutions is justified and consolidated as a priority to be served by municipalities, according to the existing constitutional and legal definitions.

### **3. The School Environments of the Public School System of Guarapari/ES**

At the end of 2012, the municipal school system of Guarapari consisted of 57 schools, distributed as follows: 6 “Unidocente” Elementary Schools (EMUEF — a school that has one teacher to teach different grades, in the same classroom), 10 “Pluridocente” Elementary Schools (EMPEF — a school that has more than one teacher to teach different grades, all in the same classroom), 11 Centers for Early Childhood Education (CEMEI), 3 Early Childhood Education schools (EMEI), 14 Elementary Schools (EMEF) and 13 schools of Early Childhood and

Elementary Education (EMEIEF). Each group has its specificities of this set made according to the purposes they are intended and the levels and types of education that span, aiming to meet the demands of the communities to which they belong.

We emphasize, in our study schools that congregate the ECE and Elementary Education (MSECEE), serving children aged 4 and 5 years in ECE, and children in the early years of the Elementary Education, part-time. Thus, our study focuses on this encounter of the ECE and the Elementary Education, but we need to consider that this is a meeting of part of the ECE with also a part of the Elementary Education. Nevertheless, it is a date which eludes most current institutional models, exactly to separate these integrating parts of the basic school. Still, we assume that these two parts can be significant for its specificity, so much that they mark the way to name the institutions, once the ECE and Elementary Education are in the name. However, this name starts with school. One observes the strength of the school model in this context.

In the context of this encounter, we focus everyday dialogues among individuals with an inspiration in Bakhtin's view that dialogue is constituted as a special type of interaction, understood in a much broader sense than just a debate, or the representation of a conversation between two individuals transcribed to paper. We assume that the dialogue takes on a character of non-closure, provisional completion. Even if a dialogue is interrupted, it does not end, because it is always possible to say something more from it. Thus, we believe that MSECEE claim themselves in the field of ECE in a constant movement of enunciations, mobilizing different intentions among individuals.

#### **4. The Configuration of Teaching in EI, within the Spaces of the MSECEE**

In the motion of immersion of our research at this place called MSECEE, we loan the meaning of space in Certeau (2008), which claims to be the area practiced a place where the daily movements are operated by individuals who inhabit this place. Practitioner individuals who (re) signify their doings in interactions with the place and its inhabitants. In this way, we have presented the idea that the practices of teachers of children in ECE, in the MSECEE, have a peculiar way in the uses of the spaces, a "do it together" (Certeau, 2008) of teachers and children of the ECE, with who necessarily share the same spaces. This game involves sayings and doings of each participant themselves. In the words of Certeau:

A thousand ways to play/undo the game of the other, in other words, the space instituted by others, characterize the activity, subtle, tenacious, tough, groups that, by not having its own, must untangle a network of forces and representations established. Have to "do it together" (Certeau, 2009, p. 79).

ECE too. I think everyone starts in the ECE also, you know, the cradle (SSEC, interview, 31/10/12).

"Do it together" brings the sense that, when we do something, we are not moving in an isolated act. We're doing something with someone, with a different one from us, with their own ideas and ways of doing so. In this game, each "me" pursuits to demarcate positions and somehow, openly or covertly, consciously or not, impose their ways of doing things. As Certeau says, there are relations of forces present in this movement that bring out the "strong" and "weak", which create a polemic to this shared practice. This is about, according to him, "[...] fighting or games between the strong and the weak, and the 'actions' that the weak can undertake." (Certeau, 2008, p. 97). It is in the practice of this game that individuals appropriate the place they inhabit, in these movements there are practitioners of a place, reinventing ways to make their daily practices. We emphasize these pedagogical practices of teachers to reaffirm the idea that school spaces are constituted as spaces for training and that this

training movement does not occur in isolation, but closely linked to dialogical interactions between individuals and, of these, with the spaces in which they inhabit.

## **5. Interactions of research in the MSECEE**

This way, we link our immersion/stay in the specific field of research to view an interactive dialogue with the individuals with whom we proposed to research, articulated to the methodological choice of an exploratory qualitative research approach, with ethnographic inspiration, allowing us to describe with more density the entire potency of our encounter with the individuals and the field in which we immersed. In our trajectories of/in the research we analyzed documents, observed and were observed, listened carefully to the wordings of these individuals and visualized their doings. We participated in the daily routine of the MSECEE, always seeking not to lose sight of the implied ethical conduct in the research field of work, in recognition of the legitimacy of the other and the place he inhabits. Therefore, seeking to describe the places and contexts of MSECEE, we elected as a school field for the research a public institution of Guarapari-ES, as well as made some incursions in the Municipal Secretary of Education (SEMED — Secretaria Municipal de Educação) of this city, in order to proceed to an analysis of official documents.

In the spaces of the MSECEE, we could observe how each individual appropriates of them. The school staff moves continuously in their everyday routine, in their practices, in their coexistence with others, in the individual and collective pathways, in different times and directions, intersecting with others. In the majority of the staff, we observed that each individual occupies a unique and unrepeatable place (Bakhtin, 1993b, p. 58), respected in their uniqueness and particularities. There, we focused especially on the uses (Certeau, 2009) that the children and teachers of the ECE and 1st grade of the EED make of the classroom space, in the daily movements in the ECE. In our observations, we consider the contexts of use (Certeau, 2009, p. 90) of these rooms by children and teachers, overlapped with the tactics operated by the former against the planned strategies in these spaces by the latter.

Through observations made we perceived that the rooms used by the ECE and the 1st year of the EED have a good physical structure, good natural lighting and ventilation because of the size of its windows and an inner area that allows several possibilities of organizing furniture and shifting of children. However, as we link our observations to the specificity of the educational work with the ECE and the construction of physical spaces that meet such specificity, we point out that the structure of these rooms, as well as their equipment and physical infrastructure of the MSECEE, as a whole does not recognize the child as an individual of the educational process and neither as a practitioner individual of this place. Our concept is that the physical structure of the MSECEE, was planned and built to serve primarily the EED and the service to the specificity of the ECE is only remembered in the furnishing of the rooms, which leads us to conclude that there is a subordination of the ECE to the EED, in the uses of the spaces.

In the course of our research, we observed the everyday routine of children and teachers. Arriving at the MSECEE, all children were headed to the inner courtyard where they were grouped with their classes to join the line. Facing the ramp that has access to the rooms, the classes were formed from 1st to 5th grade and to the side of the ramp to the EED children, always with repeated requests by the coordinator to be quiet in order to pray and go up to the rooms. Now and then some errands were given and shortly after everyone went up the ramp.

Already in their classrooms, the teachers of the ECE organized the children's tables, not allowing the chattier to all sit in the same group of tables. In the class of 4–5 years (PRE I — preschool grade 1), always the teacher

asked the children that they put their backpacks and handbags in the back, as to if they were next to tables there was a risk of a child stumbling and falling on them. In the class of 5–6 years (PRE II — preschool grade 2) the children had autonomy to decide where they wanted to keep their backpacks, which were usually close to them at the tables.

After that the so-called routine activities differed slightly, both between the rooms as in each one of them. Pre I children, usually, would count how many classmates were present in total, how many boys and how many girls. The children were also asked about the weather, and what day of the week and the month they were in. In the Pre II<sup>o</sup> room, the children sang a welcoming song and greeted each other. They also updated the calendar, which was registered on the blackboard.

In this context, we observed that there was not a wide diversity of activities to work with the children of ECE. The most common activities were the game with building blocks, with toys that were stored in a box, freehand drawing and painting. During the days of observation/interaction with the Pre I and II classes, we noticed that only few activities involved music, arts and corporeality, turning away from the pedagogical practices of teachers working in the specificity of ECE (Brazil, 2009c).

Another important issue in the classrooms of ECE was the observation that children were not having activities with cutouts because the teachers of the ECE “were worried that they could get hurt while playing with scissors” (DC 18/10 and 10/25/12). Sometimes some expository classes were held in the ECE, always related to some commemorative date: father’s day, the city’s birthday, national tree day ... What caused us surprise was the fact that there is a photocopied workbook in use by children in Pre II, material containing several pages with activities related to promptness for literacy, as well as activities for the teaching of letters and numbers. Whereas the specificity of the pedagogical work in ECE, we point out the interwoven preparatory bias in everyday teaching practices with children in the room expressed in the use of this collection of activities that, for your use, require the students to practice the traditional posture of EED: students sitting, silently, developing an exclusively individualistic and mechanical work, which excludes interactive and knowledge production possibilities.

In the context of the practices of children and teachers in the MSECEE we point out that there is a certain subordination of the ECE to the EED, both in the educational work and the forms of appropriation and uses of collective spaces of the institution, even if such subordination is subtle and unintentional. In any case, the children of the ECE are in the spaces of daily MSECEE seeking to reinvent their actions, in the dialogues established with the EED, in this place. A dialogue permeated with tensions (Bakhtin, 2003) that increase the possibilities that the MSECEE is a place of teaching encounter. We bet on the power of these reinventions (Certeau, 2008), these meetings, in which the practices of early childhood education and elementary can integrate and complement each other.

Regarding the set-up of teaching and the formative processes, we assert that exploring them in the MSECEE became a challenge to this research, given the peculiarities of the school where we have researched. In order to discuss about them, we interacted with teachers, school staff and SEMED (Secretaria Municipal de Educação — Municipal Secretary of Education) linked to the idea that these individuals say who they are based on their everyday actions, on their practices, in their coexistence with others, in the individual and collective trajectories, during varied time and directions, crossing with each other. Thus, while exploring the educational formation and teacher activities through individual interviews, considering the particularities of each of the professionals, we emphasize that all these have worked in the ECE. We mention 3 of these trajectories:

When I started, I remember as if it was today, I started in a room of I started with ECE, I always worked with students from 4 to 5 years of age, and I also worked in a daycare as a teacher of ECE [...] (PPI, interview, 03/12/12).

I already worked in the ECE from 1994 until 1996, then in 2010 until mid 2012, when I was invited to run the school [EMEIEF research field] (GE, interview, 12/19/12).

Regarding the union of professionals at municipal schools, we specifically highlight the bonding of the teachers at ECE and 1st year (grade) of EED. Out of 4 teachers, there are two statutory teachers of the school and two that are under temporary designation (TD). This latter form of provision creates a personal feeling of instability in the teachers and, to some extent, of not belonging to the staff of the municipal teaching, since many of the rights that the statutory teachers have are not recognized for the temporary workers, such as the right to participate in continued education courses offered by the SEMED.

This selection criterion for participation in training creates tensions in the educational institutions, because often the permanent teachers fill all the vacancies of the courses without giving an opportunity for temporary teachers to participate. And, often, in the course of educational formation, some participants drop out, leaving unfilled vacancies which could be filled by a TD. This situation suggests that permanent teachers feel, somehow, obligated to participate in the courses offered by the SEMED, either by direct indication of the school management, or as a means of progression in the plans of teaching jobs, or because part of these training courses give the senses that it is a privilege granted to permanent teachers. We tie this opportunity to the sayings of Nóvoa (2011, p. 23) when he states that [...] learning throughout life is justified as a human right and as a need of the profession, but not as an obligation or constraint. In this context, we wonder what are the repercussions that take place in the training of teachers who work in the MSECEE, when they participate in training processes that carry a much more summoning character than voluntary, in which the enrollment occurs in the middle of a game of tensions that may affect the interactions among individuals, in this place.

We also verified, through interviews in the SEMED, that there is no specific training for the teachers of the ECE, being held only trainings for ECE public servers over the year of 2012 (cooks, nursery workers, multidisciplinary teachers). In a way, the absence of such specific training leads to a discredit, to a distinction and a devaluation of teachers who work in the ECE, and particularly those working in the MSECEE, considering that the teachers who work in the EED of these institutions have the opportunity to participate in continued education offered by the SEMED, to the detriment of who work in the ECE.

We associate our analysis to the research by Côco (2009), which explores the development of the process of inclusion of the ECE to the educational systems in Espírito Santo. Analyzing the provided positions for teachers, it states that the distinctions between categories, whichever they may be, do not strengthen the ECE as a work environment that values professional teachers. Therefore, we sustain the challenge facing the SEMED team, to overcome the distinction between teachers of the ECE and EED regarding opportunities to participate in the continued education programs offered. The expansion of this offer enables the teachers' qualifications in the ECE integrating care and education, favoring the development of a conception of ECE as a place of learning and expansion of educational experiences for all individuals. The strengthening of the ECE is articulated to the investment in teachers, during their initial training and in-service, in order to improve their professional practice.

In the daily routine of educational institution, considering the current model of a traditional school in the local setting, we expose the idea that the ECE is overshadowed, to the extent that the EED overlaps it in some ways, whether by the strength of the name school in the nomenclature of the institution, or by the uses of

collective spaces and the quantity of classes and in the adoption, by the ECE, of some own tasks of the current school model in the EED. Consequently, the establishment of teaching in the ECE, in the circumstances of the MSECEE, is approaching more and more a setting for teaching similar to the EED, based on a traditional model of teaching. The peculiarity of the ECE work demands new requirements for the setting of teaching this type of education, linked to the expansion of the offer of continuing training for professionals working in the ECE, in the municipality of Guarapari/ES.

## **6. Inconclusive Considerations**

According to Bakhtin's thought that the last word has not yet been said (and never will), we seek in this paper to point out some of our research findings, with the intention of characterizing the designated institutions MSECEE s, the formative processes in the institution — and beyond — the practices of the teachers with the children and the setting of the teaching profession in Early Childhood Education (ECE). We emphasize that the Brazilian educational scenario is a field marked by challenges, struggles and tensions, the search of the right to education for all and with quality and, in this context, we can see the ECE and its insertion in the education system marked by a specificity which states attendance policies, in the pedagogical and infrastructure challenges, securing the rights and training professionals, as well as the increase of demand for this stage of basic education.

In our immersion in the field, we point out that providing education to children in the MSECEE, beckons powerful interactive possibilities between ECE and EED initial series, on the proposition that the transition of children from one stage to another occurs in a more favorable and smooth context, linked to the recognition of the individuality of each of them. Also, we bet on the possibility that the MSECEE, will characterize itself as a place of teaching encounter (Moss, 2011), where the practices of early childhood education and elementary integrate and complement one another, from purposeful actions of the school staff in order to organize forums for discussion and collective planning of their teaching practices, with the intention of overcoming subordination from the ECE to the EED observed in the course of our research.

Based on the premise that the setting of the MSECEE reverberates in the constitution of teaching in the ECE and in the pedagogical practices of teachers working in it, and that the EED is overshadowed to the extent that the EED overlaps it in some aspects, pointed out that the settings of teaching in the ECE, in the MSECEE, resembles to the EED, based on a traditional model of teaching (Machado, 2007; Fields, 2011; Moss, 2011). The peculiarity of the ECE work demands new requirements for the setup of teaching this type of education. It assumes an educational work that points out the child as the protagonist in the educational process, producing culture, that recognizes the interaction and games as foundational work with children, to consider the inseparability of caring for and educating in their teaching practices, just to mention a few.

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