



Early childhood education in focus: what official curriculum documents say about reading and writing experiences¹

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Abstract

This article presents part of the results of a post-doctoral theoretical research that aimed to analyze the presence of reading and writing experiences in the main curricular documents guiding Early Childhood Education in Brazil: the National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 2010a), and the National Common Curricular Base (Brazil, 2018). The guiding question of the research focused on the following issue: “How are reading and writing experiences conceived by the official curricular documents guiding Early Childhood Education, and to what extent do they value the specificities of childhood in situations where written culture is present?”. Regarding methodological procedures, the study was qualitative and characterized as documentary research. The aforementioned curricular documents were analyzed to identify the presence/absence of the terms literacy and reading comprehension in the texts of the proposals, as well as words/expressions related to written culture. The results indicated that, despite advances in recognizing Early Childhood Education as a space for educating and caring, there is still a lack of understanding about the identity of this school phase and how to reconcile pedagogical practice within the context of written culture with the specific needs of children.

Keywords: Early childhood education; curriculum; reading; writing.

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Educação infantil em foco: o que dizem os documentos curriculares oficiais sobre as experiências de leitura e escrita

Resumo

O presente artigo apresenta parte dos resultados de uma pesquisa teórica de pós-doutoramento que objetivou analisar a presença das experiências de leitura e escrita nos principais documentos curriculares orientadores da Educação Infantil: os Referenciais Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil (Brasil, 1998), as Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil (Brasil, 2010a) e a Base Nacional Comum Curricular (Brasil, 2018). A problematização norteadora da pesquisa centrou-se no seguinte questionamento: “Como as experiências de leitura e escrita são concebidas pelos documentos curriculares oficiais norteadores da Educação Infantil e em que medida valorizam as especificidades infantis nas situações em que a cultura escrita se faz presente?”. Quanto aos procedimentos metodológicos, o estudo é de natureza qualitativa e caracteriza-se como pesquisa documental. Foram analisados os documentos curriculares citados para identificar a presença/ausência dos termos “alfabetização” e “letramento” nos textos das propostas, assim como palavras/expressões correlatas à cultura escrita. Os resultados apontaram que, apesar dos avanços no reconhecimento da Educação Infantil como espaço de educar e cuidar, ainda persiste a falta de compreensão sobre a identidade dessa fase escolar e como conciliar a prática pedagógica no âmbito da cultura escrita com as especificidades das crianças.

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil; currículo; leitura; escrita.



La educación infantil en el punto de mira: qué dicen los documentos curriculares oficiales sobre las experiencias de lectura y escritura

Resumen

Este artículo presenta parte de los resultados de una investigación teórica postdoctoral que tuvo como objetivo analizar la presencia de experiencias de lectura y escritura en los principales documentos curriculares que orientan la Educación Infantil: las Referencias Curriculares Nacionales para la Educación Infantil (Brasil, 1998), las Directrices Curriculares Nacionales para la Educación Infantil (Brasil, 2010a) y la Base Curricular Común Nacional (Brasil, 2018). La pregunta orientadora es: ¿Cómo son concebidas las experiencias de lectura y escritura por los documentos curriculares oficiales que orientan la Educación Infantil, y en qué medida valoran las especificidades de la infancia en situaciones donde está presente la cultura escrita? En cuanto a los procedimientos metodológicos, el estudio es cualitativo y se caracteriza como investigación documental. Los documentos curriculares fueron analizados para identificar la presencia/ausencia de los términos alfabetización y comprensión lectora, así como palabras/expresiones relacionadas con la cultura escrita. Los resultados indicaron que, a pesar de los avances en el reconocimiento de la Educación Infantil como un espacio de educación y cuidado, aún hay falta de comprensión sobre la identidad de esta etapa escolar y cómo conciliar la práctica pedagógica en el contexto de la cultura escrita con las necesidades específicas de los niños.

Palabras clave: Educación infantil; plan de estudios; lectura; escritura.



Introduction

In the landscape of Brazilian education, a long history of struggles and achievements is observed in constructing the identity of Early Childhood Education as a formal space for learning that requires qualified professionals to develop a practice endowed with pedagogical intentionality and truly committed to childhood and its specificities.

Throughout this trajectory, the effort to construct a curriculum for Early Childhood Education has also been the subject of numerous studies and discussions, as well as part of the initiative of different government levels to subsidize projects aimed at this purpose, seeking to guarantee the consolidation of theoretical and practical assumptions to ground and guide the pedagogical work developed with children at this stage.

Among the main problems identified during basic schooling, difficulties related to children's literacy have been a recurring theme, being the focus of several studies and reports broadcast in the media.

Indeed, considering the complexity of the teaching and learning process of reading and writing within the Brazilian context, it would not be possible to identify a single reason or a specific school stage in which such impasses and difficulties reside most evidently. In fact, it is necessary to understand that the schooling process throughout Basic Education, formally initiated in Early Childhood Education, represents a trajectory that needs to be conceived in a continuous and progressive manner, considering the specificities of each stage.

When it comes to children's literacy, one perceives the emphasis placed on the first years of elementary education (1st to 5th grade), to the detriment of intentional reading and writing experiences developed in Early Childhood Education (Albuquerque; Ferreira, 2020, Amorim, et al., 2019, Morais; Silva; Nascimento, 2020; Neves; Castanheira; Gouvêa, 2015; Nunes; Corsino, 2019). It is emphasized, however, the need to deepen discussions regarding reading and writing experiences within the context of Early Childhood Education,



strengthening the recognition of this school stage as a potentially relevant space for development and learning during the childhood period.

With the purpose of contributing to this aim, the present investigation presents an excerpt of the results of a theoretical research of a bibliographic and documentary nature from a post-doctorate, whose main objective was to analyze the legal and scientific path of the consolidation process of Early Childhood Education as part of Basic Education in the last decade (2010-2020), as well as the construction of its identity as a space for learning and care, directed toward human formation and child development, with an emphasis on practices of Literacy (*Letramento*), Alphabetization (*Alfabetização*), and Playfulness (*Ludicidade*).

Within the scope of the documentary research, the main official curricular documents that guided, and still guide, the educational work in Early Childhood Education school institutions were analyzed: the National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a), and the National Common Curricular Base (Brasil, 2018). The aforementioned research sought to identify the presence/absence of the terms “alphabetization” (*alfabetização*) and “literacy” (*letramento*) in the texts of the proposals, as well as other words/expressions related to the process of appropriation of reading and writing.

The analysis of the terms and words in question was conducted with the purpose of understanding how such guiding curricular documents conceive the presence of reading and writing in Early Childhood Education and what developments these conceptions hold to ground and qualify pedagogical work in the field of written culture at this school stage.

Methodology

The approach of the present research was characterized as qualitative and exploratory (Minayo, 2002). Regarding the research design, considering the technical procedures of data collection and analysis, the study was developed



in two main phases: the first being of a documentary nature, and the second, bibliographic. In the text in question, the data from the documentary research will be presented (Gil, 2002).

Official documents were considered sources for data collection within the scope of the documentary research, specifically the national curricular proposals for Early Childhood Education since the 1990s: the National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a), and the National Common Curricular Base (Brasil, 2018).

Bearing in mind the purpose of analyzing how reading and writing experiences are addressed in the aforementioned documents, the documentary research developed sought to identify the presence of the terms “alphabetization” (*alfabetização*) and “literacy” (*letramento*) in the texts of the proposals, as well as other words/expressions related to the process of appropriation of reading and writing.

For data analysis, a progressive study was carried out through successive readings, considering that

[...] the task of analysis implies, at first, the organization of all material, dividing it into parts, relating these parts, and seeking to identify relevant trends and patterns within it. In a second moment, these trends and patterns are reassessed, seeking relationships and interferences at a higher level of abstraction (Lüdke; André 1986, p. 45).

Following the analysis of the text of the documents and the identification of the referred words, expressions, and conceptions, the objective was to understand both the advancements and the gaps in the curricular proposals regarding reading and writing experiences in Early Childhood Education.

For starters...

Early Childhood Education is currently recognized in the Brazilian scenario as the first stage of Basic Education and represents an important phase for human formation and child development. However, this school stage



did not receive proper attention from public authorities for a long time, being characterized by a welfare-oriented profile, without the presence of qualified professionals to act in educational work with infants and young children.

Along this path, the main curricular documents guiding the educational work in Early Childhood Education schools, through their conceptions and characteristics, contributed, each in its own way, to the consolidation of the identity of this school stage as a space dedicated to the care and integral formation of the child. Among these documents, the following stand out: the National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2010a), and the National Common Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2018). Each proposal, considering the historical and temporal context in which they were published, aimed to guide and subsidize, through different theoretical and practical perspectives, the learning experiences directed toward formal education during the childhood period.

Among the experiences lived in Early Childhood Education, the approach to written culture represents a point of prominence, since, often, the first meaningful and formal contacts with reading and writing occur when children enter school.

However, when dealing with reading and writing experiences in the school space during the childhood period, we find distinct positions, especially regarding the methodologies and theoretical/practical perspectives that sustain the pedagogical work in this period. While some perspectives defend the use of more directive pedagogical interventions in the learning process of reading and writing, others position themselves in the sense of valuing children's spontaneous actions.

In this scenario, the conceptions of alphabetization and literacy come into play, which, depending on the way they are conceived and incorporated into curricular proposals and the educational work of schools, denote different



stances regarding the directions of initial experiences with reading and writing in Early Childhood Education.

Bearing in mind the purpose of understanding the perspectives that guide reading and writing experiences, considering the conceptions of alphabetization and literacy present in the curricular proposals mentioned at the beginning of this topic, a documentary research was developed to identify the presence of the terms “alphabetization” (*alfabetização*) and “literacy” (*letramento*) in the texts of the proposals, as well as other words/expressions related to the process of appropriation of reading and writing.

Regarding the concepts of alphabetization and literacy, it is worth emphasizing the polysemy of the terms, depending on the theoretical framework adopted. In the study in question, such conceptions had as reference the studies of Magda Soares, who understands alphabetization as

[...] the learning of a representation system, in which signs (graphemes) represent, rather than encode, the sounds of speech (phonemes). Learning the alphabetical system is not learning a code, memorizing relations between letters and sounds, but understanding what writing represents and the notation with which, arbitrarily and conventionally, the sounds of speech, the phonemes, are represented (Soares, 2021, p. 10, author’s emphasis).

The concept of literacy is “understood as the explicit and systematic development of reading and writing skills and strategies” (Soares, 2021, p. 12), that is, it represents the state or condition that both a social group and an individual acquire by virtue of having appropriated reading and writing (Soares, 2003).

Next, the results of the analyses in each document will be presented.

Results and discussion

The National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 1998) were published in three volumes (1- Introduction, 2- Personal and Social Formation, and 3- Knowledge of the World), with the third volume, entitled “Knowledge of the World,” presenting among its objects of knowledge a



topic named “Oral and written language.” As stated in the introduction of the mentioned item:

[...] the learning of oral and written language is one of the important elements for children to expand their possibilities of insertion and participation in diverse social practices. Working with language constitutes one of the basic axes in early childhood education, given its importance for the formation of the subject, for interaction with other people, in guiding children’s actions, in constructing many knowledges, and in developing thought (Brasil, 1998, p. 117).

In this manner, the RCNEIs² guide that Early Childhood Education must constitute itself as a space that promotes meaningful experiences in work related to language learning, allowing for the expansion of communication and expression capacities, as well as children’s access to the literate world, through the “gradual development of capacities associated with the four basic linguistic competencies: speaking, listening, reading, and writing” (Brasil, 1998, p. 117).

The RCNEIs present, in the third volume in question, a chapter indicating the peculiarities of working with oral and written language within the context of Early Childhood Education, addressing the following themes: “Presence of Oral and Written Language in Early Childhood Education: current ideas and practices”; “The child and language” (Containing the items: Development of oral language and Development of written language); “Objectives” (organized by age group – children from zero to three years old and children from three to six years old); “Contents” (organized by age group – children from zero to three years old and children from three to six years old); “Didactic Guidelines” (organized by age group – children from zero to three years old and children from three to six years old, presenting guidelines for Speaking and listening; Reading Practices, and Writing practices); “General Guidelines for the teacher” (Literacy environment, Organization of time; Didactic resources and their utilization) and, finally, the item “Assessment, Recording, and Formative Assessment.”

Regarding the initial experiences with written culture portrayed in the theoretical and practical assumptions of the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998), one verifies the



tendency not to conceive this learning process as something “mechanical,” with some criticisms being presented toward teaching methods focused on copying and emphasizing the development of activities that explore motor coordination through the training of sensory-motor, perception, and memorization skills (Radino, 2001). Such aspects approach the idea of alphabetization defended by Magda Soares, which relates to the understanding of an alphabetical writing representation system within a given culture, and implies specific teaching procedures directed toward consolidating this learning (Soares, 2021).

According to Radino (2001), in addition to recognizing the child as an active subject in the process of constructing their knowledge, the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) highlight that the learning of reading and writing represents a long path of development composed of social practices related to these skills (reading and writing); thus, “alphabetization represents the construction of a knowledge of a conceptual nature. The child needs to recognize not only what writing represents, but the way in which it represents language” (Radino, 2001, p. 75). This means that

alphabetization is not the development of capacities related to perception, memorization, and the training of a set of sensory-motor skills. It is, rather, a process in which children need to solve problems of a logical nature until they come to understand how alphabetical writing in Portuguese represents language, and thus can write and read by themselves (Brasil, 1998, p. 122).

Based on the reading of the document in question, when dealing with oral language, it is stressed that this construction by the child “is not linear and occurs in a process of successive approximations with the speech of the other, whether it be from the father, mother, teacher, friends, or those heard on television, radio, etc.” (Brasil, 1998, p. 126). In this way:

[...] the expansion of their oral communication capacities occurs gradually, through a process of comings and goings that involves both the participation of children in daily conversations, in situations of listening to and singing songs, in play, etc., and participation in more



formal situations of language use, such as those involving the reading of diverse texts (Brasil, 1998, p. 127).

Considering the need to contemplate children's experiences (or the lack thereof) related to reading and writing practices lived in childhood, the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) prescribe the importance of promoting a literacy environment (*ambiente alfabetizador*), in the sense of valuing the diverse situations in which reading and writing are utilized in daily life. The relevance of this literacy environment is emphasized, principally, for children who do not possess, within their family environment, daily experiences related to reading and writing, and in these cases, the teacher will constitute an important reference (Brasil, 1998).

Thus, according to the guidelines exposed in the document in question, it is up to the teacher to utilize real situations for the use of reading and writing in which children participate actively and, gradually, can identify the social functions involved in these actions (reading and writing), such as: preparing an invitation for a party, writing a note for the parents' meeting, reading a poster placed in the courtyard, among others. These moments of learning that involve social uses expressed through reading and writing are considered by the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) as "literacy events" (*eventos de letramento*), and such events do, in fact, configure a literacy environment.

Therefore, one notes the presence of the term "literacy" (*letramento*) in the text of the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) and, in the manner it was presented, it approaches the perspective advocated by Magda Soares (2016, 2021), in which the referred concept refers to the social practices of reading and writing present in everyday life. As Soares (2021) argues, for the initial learning of reading and writing, it is essential that experiences exploring the alphabetical writing system are developed within a context of literacy.

Regarding the act of storytelling, Radino (2001) emphasizes that the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) value this moment, especially linked to reading the book; however:



[...] the reading of a story by the teacher is presented more as an activity that can favor alphabetization than as a moment of pleasure. Priority is given to the knowledge that can be obtained from these stories and not the emotion or pleasure they can arouse. The emotion that appears is that of the other and not that of the child (Radino, 2001, p. 76).

Radino (2001) further points out that the words “fantasy” and “creativity” do not appear in this chapter of the reference document, and the use of stories told by the teacher is indicated more as an important element to favor children’s cognition and alphabetization than as a moment that can stimulate emotions, imagination, and creativity. With this, although the referred document criticizes reading as a mechanical process, at the same time, it emphasizes the importance of the teacher performing a linear reading, in the manner it presents itself in the text, aiming for its assimilation by the child (Radino, 2001).

Even though the RCNEIs (Brasil, 1998) presented a certain weakness in recognizing the child as a historical subject and producer of culture—since it is centered on learning contents and on the systematization of experiences with reading and writing (approaching the structure and organization of Elementary Education)—it is worth considering the relevance of a document, published in the 1990s, that expresses the need to conceive grounded objectives, themes, and experiences for the organization of pedagogical work in an intentional manner within the context of Early Childhood Education. Such an idea favors the deconstruction of the welfare-oriented character that is still rooted in the way the first stage of Basic Education is conceived, and emphasizes the need to consider this space as responsible for the human and integral formation of the child through care and intentional pedagogical practices.

The National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education - DCNEIs³ - (Brasil, 2010a), established by Resolution No. 5 of December 17, 2009, integrate a document that defines the General National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education in Brazil (Brasil, 2010b), approved in 2010 by the National Council of Education (CNE).



[...] The National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education articulate with the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education and gather principles, fundamentals, and procedures defined by the Chamber of Basic Education of the National Council of Education to guide public policies in the area and the elaboration, planning, execution, and assessment of pedagogical and curricular proposals (Brasil, 2010a, p. 11).

Therefore, the analyses of the conceptions in focus (alphabetization and literacy) will be presented having the general document (Brasil, 2010b) as a reference, articulating the discussions with the text that addresses the stage of Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a), understanding that the General National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2010b), instituted by Resolution No. 4 of July 13, 2010, represent a set of fundamentals and principles that permeates all phases of this schooling period.

Throughout the process of drafting the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2010b), some changes occurred, the main one being

[...] the alteration of Elementary Education to nine years, which principally meant an expansion of the period destined for the alphabetization process, already in an attempt to reverse the situation of Brazilian illiteracy. To alphabetization, or as many began to refer to it: the 'alphabetization block', it was determined its focus specifically on the initial three years of Elementary Education, gradually expanding and intensifying the educational process with social quality initiated in Early Childhood Education (Santos; Ribeiro, 2021, p. 53).

Therefore, for this analysis, the text establishing the National Curricular Guidelines for Nine-Year Elementary Education (Brasil, 2010c), instituted by Resolution No. 7 of December 14, 2010, will also be used. Considering the expansion of Elementary Education (in accordance with Law No. 11.274 of February 6, 2006), the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2010b) propose framing alphabetization especially in the first three years of Elementary Education (a proposal already modified due to the publication of the National Common Curricular Base in the year 2017).



When dealing with Elementary Education, it is verified in the text of the General National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2010b), in its Article 24, that the mastery of reading and writing is included in the objectives of children's basic training, and it needs to occur, preferentially, in the first three years of this stage.

Art. 24. The objectives of children's basic training, defined for Early Childhood Education, extend through the initial years of Elementary Education, especially the first, and are completed in the final years, gradually expanding and intensifying the educational process by means of:

I - development of the capacity to learn, having full mastery of reading, writing, and calculation as basic means;

II - a central focus on alphabetization throughout the first 3 (three) years;

III - understanding of the natural and social environment, the political system, the economy, technology, the arts, culture, and the values upon which society is founded;

IV - the development of the capacity to learn, with a view to acquiring knowledge and skills and forming attitudes and values;

V - strengthening family bonds, ties of human solidarity, and mutual respect upon which social life rests (Brasil, 2010b).

However, the text of the National Curricular Guidelines for Nine-Year Elementary Education (Brasil, 2010c) clarifies that this delimitation for the consolidation of alphabetization in these first three years does not mean that during the remaining school periods such skills (reading and writing) will not be explored.

[...] it is necessary to ensure that the transition from Preschool to Elementary Education does not lead to ignoring the knowledge that the child has already acquired. Likewise, the process of alphabetization and literacy, with which they become more systematically involved, cannot suffer interruption at the end of the first year of this new stage of schooling (Brasil, 2010c).

The focus directed toward the alphabetization process in the first three years of Elementary Education is based, in consonance with the National Curricular Guidelines for Nine-Year Teaching (Brasil, 2010c), on the idea of



favoring this learning (reading and writing) with an attentive and special gaze to try to reverse the scenario of school failure that still affects many children who finish the first stage of Elementary Education (initial years) without mastering reading and writing with autonomy.

Regarding the learning time for the appropriation of reading and writing, the document that indicated a review of the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2013) emphasizes the need for a continuous and articulated alphabetization process; after all,

[...] just as there are children who are alphabetized after a few months, others require two to three years to consolidate their basic learning, which is very frequently related to their living in environments where the social uses of reading and writing are intense or scarce, as well as to the child's own involvement with these social uses within the family and in other places outside the school. However, even among children from middle-class families, in which the utilization of reading and writing is more current, a large variation in the learning time of these skills by students is also verified (Brasil, 2013, p. 121).

Therefore, the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education in both of its versions (Brasil, 2010b, 2013) emphasize the relevance of the alphabetization and literacy processes in the formation of individuals through an articulated path among the stages of Basic Education, with reading and writing representing essential learning to be developed, especially, in the first three years of Elementary Education.

In this manner, it is identified, through the cited documents, the defense of a shared work that favors the construction of a continuous learning trajectory, especially in the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary Education. Reading and writing are conceived as instruments for understanding reality, and the contact that the child has with these skills in their family environment can favor learning.

Aiming at understanding the general assumptions that ground the National Guidelines for Basic Education (Brasil, 2010b), especially regarding the conceptions of alphabetization and literacy, the analysis proceeds by



emphasizing the text that addresses the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a) to understand the child's initial experiences with reading and writing at school.

In conceiving the idea of a curriculum for Early Childhood Education, the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) define it as

[...] a set of practices that seek to articulate the experiences and knowledges of children with the knowledges that are part of the cultural, artistic, scientific, and technological heritage. Such practices are implemented through social relations that children, from a very young age, establish with teachers and other children, and affect the construction of their identities [...] (Brasil, 2010a, p. 12).

In this sense, the child, the center of curricular planning, is conceived as a historical subject and a subject of rights who develops through the interactions, relations, and daily practices that are offered to them and established with the people with whom they live—that is, adults and children of different ages in the diverse cultural groups and contexts of which they are part (Brasil, 2010a). Thus, as emphasized by the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a), through distinct situations in which they experiment and experience the world around them, as well as their identity on a personal and collective level, the child produces culture.

Regarding the pedagogical proposal of Early Childhood Education institutions, the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) prescribe that the main objective consists of promoting the integral development of children from zero to five years of age, with the purpose of guaranteeing that they have access to “processes of knowledge construction and the learning of different languages, as well as the right to protection, health, freedom, respect, dignity, play, coexistence, and interaction with other children” (Brasil, 2010a, p. 18).

It is observed that the referred Guidelines (Brasil, 2010a) emphasize the need for the process of constructing infant experiences, at this phase, to be permeated by familiarity with different languages. This element is highlighted in several excerpts of the document in question, and when dealing with the organization of learning experiences in the curricular proposal, familiarity



with different languages is resumed as part of a set of learnings explored with children, pointing out that teachers who act at this school stage need to promote conditions for organizing times, spaces, materials, and interactions during activities, enabling the child to express themselves in different ways, including orality and/or sign language and in their first attempts at writing (Brasil, 2010a).

Thus, it is verified that the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) explicit the presence of reading and writing experiences during the learning process in an articulated manner with the different languages and modes of expression inherent to the child's universe. These experiences, promoters of learning, aim to favor communication based on different forms of expression—that is, through “images, songs and music, theater, dance, and movement, as well as written and spoken language, without forgetting sign language, which can be learned by all children and not only by deaf children” (Brasil, 2013, p. 94).

Verbal language, composed of oral and written language, is advocated by the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) as a cultural asset to which the child has a right, since it represents an essential instrument for expressing feelings, ideas, etc. Regarding the process of oral language acquisition, the orientation of the document in question is that it be developed in a planned and intentional manner, since it depends on the possibilities offered to children to observe and participate, daily, in diverse communicative situations.

Along this path, written language is also present and constitutes an object of interest for the child; after all, we live in a graphocentric society, meaning that written language is increasingly present. In such a way, children have often already familiarized themselves with writing before entering school (Brasil, 2010a).

When dealing with the specificities of the appropriation of verbal language (oral and written), the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a, p. 25) value experiences that

II - favor the immersion of children in different languages and their progressive mastery of various genres and forms of expression:



gestural, verbal, plastic, dramatic, and musical; III - enable children to have experiences with narratives, appreciation of and interaction with oral and written language, and coexistence with different oral and written textual supports and genres; [...] IX - promote children's relationship and interaction with diversified manifestations of music, plastic and graphic arts, cinema, photography, dance, theater, poetry, and literature.

The three items indicated above refer to the idea of promoting the child's immersion, through the manifestation of different languages, into a broad atmosphere of relations with distinct possibilities of expression and communication in contextualized and meaningful situations. By considering the need for "coexistence with different oral and written textual supports and genres" (Brasil, 2010a, p. 25), such an aspect favors the approximation of children's learning with the social functions of reading and writing, contributing to the attribution of meanings to the actions of reading and writing in a given society.

These considerations allow us to infer that the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a) point out new perspectives for conceiving experiences with reading and writing, regarding, principally, the intentionality of teaching action in this process. Furthermore, the document in question considers the need to explore different languages, valuing the human formation of the child as a historical subject and a subject of rights, in an articulated perspective that considers their different forms of expression.

In the same way, regarding the advancements that can be identified in relation to the RCNEI (Brasil, 1998), the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) expand the understanding of the child as a historical subject and a subject of rights, a producer of culture, recognizing the need to conceive infant specificities, such as interaction and play, for instance, as the main axes of all pedagogical action carried out with children in the school context.



Moreover, it is possible to observe through the analyses of the practices required for the development of oral and written language the need to promote such experiences intentionally, in a context that values and explores the social functions of reading and writing. However, in the text of the National Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a), the terms “alphabetization” (*alfabetização*) and “literacy” (*letramento*) are not mentioned at any moment.

The absence of such terms suggests some reflections and can be justified by diverse reasons; however, bearing in mind the document’s defense (Brasil, 2010a) of conceiving infant specificities as the center of pedagogical actions, it is believed that such suppression is due to the need not to characterize Early Childhood Education as a space in which alphabetization and literacy are conceived in the way they are treated in Elementary Education—that is, with systematized actions characterized as “teaching.”

In this sense, it is believed that the lack of explicit identification of the terms in question allows for the understanding that experiences with reading and writing in Early Childhood Education should not be characterized in a rigid and systematized manner. This suppression may also be related to the current idea that “one should not alphabetize in Early Childhood Education,” because, depending on how this conception is sustained, the existing risk is to empty the essence of childhood from pedagogical practices aimed at infants and young children.

It is worth highlighting that the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) remain in force and act in a complementary manner to the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC – (Brasil, 2018), the current normative curricular document that aims to guide the elaboration of curricular proposals for educational systems and networks within the context of Basic Education.

Without disregarding elements that are crucial in the critical analysis of the BNCC (Brasil, 2018), between divergences and convergences regarding its implementation within the scope of Brazilian education, what stands out is the anticipation of the “consolidation” of alphabetization to the end of the 2nd grade



of Elementary Education schooling. This positioning interferes with the way of conceiving the appropriation of reading and writing in the Basic Education scenario, exerting influences in the field of Early Childhood Education. Thus, with the intent of favoring the understanding of these relations within the scope of written culture, the precepts that guide pedagogical action in this matter in the first stage of Basic Education according to the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) will be presented.

For the Early Childhood Education stage, the organization of the document in question is based on “Learning and Development Rights,” which are distributed across “Fields of Experiences”; for each Field of Experience, learning and development objectives are presented, arranged into three groups (infants, very young children, and young children), delimited by age group.

Regarding the structure and organization of the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) within the scope of Early Childhood Education, it is verified that the referred document is based, principally, on the text of the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a). Concerning the legal validity of these materials, the BNCC is conceived in a complementary way to the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a), aiming to promote continuity in the process of drafting a curriculum for the first stage of Basic Education—an intention that was already included in the text of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education of 1996.

The principles contemplated in the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) that constitute the guiding axes of Early Childhood Education are interactions and play, just as in the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010c), denoting

“experiences in which children can construct and appropriate knowledge through their actions and interactions with their peers and with adults, which enables learning, development, and socialization” (Brasil, 2018, p. 37).

Considering these two main axes, six learning and development rights are presented to guide educational processes: coexisting, playing, participating, exploring, expressing oneself, and knowing oneself. Following the presentation of learning and development rights, one observes, in the text of the BNCC



(Brasil, 2018), an excerpt that seeks to emphasize the need for educational intentionality within the scope of Early Childhood Education, highlighting that

[...] the conception of the child as a being who observes, questions, raises hypotheses, concludes, makes judgments, and assimilates values, and who constructs knowledge and appropriates systematized knowledge through action and in interactions with the physical and social world, must not result in the confinement of these learnings to a natural or spontaneous development process. On the contrary, it imposes the need to imprint educational intentionality upon pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, both in daycare and in preschool (Brasil, 2018, p. 38).

In the presentation of the six learning rights, it is observed that some skills denoting proximity to the universe of reading and writing are mentioned, more specifically, in the fourth and fifth rights. The cited rights are presented below.

Exploring movements, gestures, sounds, shapes, textures, colors, words, emotions, transformations, relationships, stories, objects, elements of nature, inside and outside school, expanding their knowledge about culture, in its diverse modalities: the arts, writing, science, and technology.

Expressing, as a dialogic, creative, and sensitive subject, their needs, emotions, feelings, doubts, hypotheses, discoveries, opinions, questions, through different languages (Brasil, 2018, p. 38, author's emphasis).

In the rights listed above, it was verified in the first one, among the various elements cited, the mention of the term "words" as a component of this process of exploration by children, since in Early Childhood Education, the use of the word is under construction, both in oral and written modalities. In this same right, the word "writing" also appears as a possibility for incorporating cultural knowledge. In the second right, one finds the expression "different languages," and, just as stated in the DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a), the document reaffirms the need for the child's communication to be enabled in order to promote different forms of manifestation and interaction.

In the five Fields of Experiences cited in the document in question, the definition and denomination of each of them are also based "on what the



DCNEIs (Brasil, 2010a) establish regarding the fundamental knowledges and knowledges to be provided to children and associated with their experiences” (Brasil, 2018, p. 40). It is verified that such fields are established through the grouping of experiences that encompass a certain area of knowledge and “constitute a curricular arrangement that welcomes the concrete situations and experiences of children’s daily life and their knowledges, intertwining them with knowledges that are part of the cultural heritage” (Brasil, 2018, p. 40).

The present text will address the Field of Experience entitled “Listening, speaking, thought, and imagination,” since it contains explicit considerations for lived experiences with verbal language (oral and written language) and reading and writing experiences.

Considering the child’s development process since birth, the referred field highlights the need for the subject’s participation in communicative situations even as an infant, through the first forms of interaction they establish with the world around them, and progressively expanding and enriching the possibilities, appropriating the mother tongue.

Regarding written culture, the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) emphasizes that the child’s curiosity is manifested even before entering school, since, often, they are immersed in situations involving the use of reading and writing in their family environment and “gradually build their conception of written language, recognizing different social uses of writing, genres, supports, and carriers” (Brasil, 2018, p. 42). For immersion in written culture within the context of Early Childhood Education, the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) suggests that this work have as its starting point what children know, as well as the curiosities they manifest in daily activities.

The learning and development objectives proposed in the Field of Experience “Listening, speaking, thought, and imagination” are organized into three groups by age range (infants, very young children, and young children), encompassing a progressive trajectory of the presented learnings. Through the analysis of the referred objectives, it was verified that immersion in reading



and writing experiences is proposed starting from the age range of zero to six months old (infants), based on participation in distinct experiences that allow contact with situations in which such skills are utilized, as well as textual carriers.

The proposed situations are configured, for example, as listening to the reading of poems and songs, the possibility of hearing stories told by adults, observing the illustrations and the way the reader can make use of certain behaviors at these moments (Brasil, 2018). It is further verified the valuation of listening to texts that contemplate different textual genres, in addition to the knowledge and manipulation of printed and audiovisual materials in different carriers, such as books, magazines, comic books, etc.

Familiarity with reading and writing continues in the stage delimited for very young children (1 year and 7 months to 3 years and 11 months), through involvement in experiences that allow, for instance, identifying rhymes in poems and songs, differentiating writing from illustrations, becoming involved with the narrated story to understand it, among other objectives. The valuation of the use of different textual genres appears again, aiming to promote the identification of their social uses, seeking to expand the child's contact with the diversity of existing genres. In addition, it is proposed that this handling and contact with writing supports can guide the production of drawings and the tracing of letters and other graphic signs.

For the age range of young children (4 years to 5 years and 11 months), interaction with reading and writing practices continues by emphasizing contact with books, the creation of sung games, as well as the retelling of stories, both in oral and written modalities. At this phase, spontaneous writing is mentioned as a possibility for the child's expression, and in the production of the written retelling, the teacher can act as a scribe for the children.

It is interesting to observe that, after analyzing the text of the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) regarding the Early Childhood Education stage, as well as searching for the terms/conceptions of alphabetization and literacy present in it, it was verified that at no moment in the text did the words "alphabetization" and



“literacy” appear in this item. Experiences were mentioned in which children can live, since infancy, contact with situations involving the use of reading and writing, but without the support of a consistent theoretical and scientific foundation to sustain such approaches.

When dealing with the insertion of the child into contextualized situations that represent the social function of the actions of reading, writing, and communicating through orality, for example, one understands the proximity of this proposal indicated in the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) with the theoretical perspective of literacy defended by Magda Soares (2021, 2016), in which the learning process of reading and writing does not occur disconnected from its uses in a given culture. However, there is no mention of the term literacy, nor even the expansion of the possibilities of this perspective for the consolidation of children’s experiences with written culture through a theoretical and scientific contribution.

The term alphabetization, as mentioned, is also not found in any segment of this item of the document. Specifically included in the Field of Experiences “Listening, speaking, thought, and imagination” (and in the development and learning objectives listed under it) is the indication of proposals aimed at familiarizing children through situations in which reading, writing, and orality are utilized in daily life. Explicit theoretical and scientific principles relating to the initial process of appropriation of reading and writing are not presented to sustain the aspects portrayed in the document.

It is worth highlighting that the absence of such terms – alphabetization and literacy – in the text of the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) does not presuppose that such conceptions are not present there. These conceptions are, even if implicitly, dialoguing and guiding the pedagogical work with reading and writing experiences in Early Childhood Education. The emergence of the terms “alphabetization” and “literacy” (in the case of the BNCC text, the use of the term “literacies” is also observed) occurs when the item addressing the Elementary Education stage of the document in question begins.



The suppression of the terms alphabetization and literacy in the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) in the topic addressing Early Childhood Education suggests some analyses (and inconsistencies) regarding what is expected from the experiences lived by children in the first stage of Basic Education. Such a fact can be justified by the need to consider that Early Childhood Education represents a space endowed with specificities for childhood, without the due systematization of pedagogical work based on the appropriation of reading and writing. However, such a perspective does not exempt the need for indicating consistent theoretical and scientific fundamentals that subsidize the understanding of pedagogical work in childhood within the area under discussion.

Therefore, when dealing with the initial learning of reading and writing, several gaps are identified in the analyzed documents (RCNEI, DCNEI, and BNCC) in view of the inconsistencies observed regarding pedagogically oriented guidelines and the theoretical and scientific support that could favor a more adequate understanding of the child's specificities and how to potentialize their entry into the universe of written culture.

Even with the recognition of this relevance, it is perceived that there is still no consensus regarding the place that reading and writing can occupy in children's lives, both in the school context and outside of it. Furthermore, added to this discussion is the fact that within the scope of Early Childhood Education

[...] distinct forms of relationship with elementary education compete, ranging from the search for specific functions and practices to the subordination of contents and methodologies adopted in elementary education. In contemporary societies, reading and writing practices in early childhood education materialize a large part of these disputes, both due to the value placed on alphabetization, owing to the graphocentric bias in which they are organized, and by the idea of productivity, the shortening of free time, and the demand for products that prove the results of investments made (Nunes; Corsino, 2019, p. 104).

The mentioned aspects suggest the construction of a more attentive look at the reading and writing experiences developed within the school space and propagated by the official curricular documents presented here, bearing in mind



that several studies in the field have indicated that such experiences, besides being promising, are primordial within the scope of Early Childhood Education, as they foster, at an early stage, contact with meaningful lived experiences that will provide support for the appropriation of this knowledge throughout life (Albuquerque; Ferreira, 2020; Amorim et al., 2019; Morais; Silva; Nascimento, 2020; Neves; Castanheira; Gouvêa, 2015; Nunes; Corsino, 2019).

After all, what experiences can be developed in childhood to promote an approximation with written culture in a meaningful and pleasurable way? This question does not have a single answer and can be clarified through different focuses, considering the numerous approaches that aim to offer theoretical and scientific support to this purpose.

However, official curricular documents play an important role in this scenario, given the normative function that many of them exercise when it comes to the organization of pedagogical proposals in Brazilian schools. For this reason, it is relevant and necessary to develop critical readings and consistent analyses of these texts to enable the understanding of the conceptions employed and to make choices more attuned to childhood specificities and the reality of school institutions in different contexts.

Final considerations

Among the experiences lived in Early Childhood Education, the approximation with written culture represents a point of prominence, since, in many cases, the child's first meaningful and formal experiences with reading and writing occur upon entering school.

These experiences are the subject of discussion and debate among researchers dedicated to studying the initial path of alphabetization in childhood, revealing distinct positions regarding the approach to reading and writing pedagogical practices within the scope of Early Childhood Education.

Through documentary research, the most relevant official curricular documents aimed at guiding (and that still guide) the educational work in



the context of Early Childhood Education since the 1990s were analyzed: the National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 1998), the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010a), and the National Common Curricular Base (Brasil, 2018).

In the analysis in question, it was possible to identify weaknesses regarding the theoretical and scientific positioning of official documents on reading and writing experiences in childhood, demonstrating the discontinuity of Brazilian educational policies, especially those directed toward alphabetization within the context of Basic Education.

The three documents (RCNEI, DCNEI, BNCC) advocate, each in its own way, the valuation of the child's approximation with written culture; however, even though they prioritize childhood specificities, they present inconsistency and mismatch, as they do not support themselves on a clear and consistent theoretical and scientific positioning regarding the approach to reading and writing experiences in the first stage of Basic Education.

In a general way, this scenario reflects the challenges for constructing an identity for Early Childhood Education throughout the history of Brazilian Education as a space for learning that is, in fact, oriented toward the human and integral formation of the child, with the bias of caring and educating as inseparable from intentional pedagogical practice, through an educational work that values childhood and play as a central activity.

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Notes

- 1 Translation performed with the assistance of AI-GEMINI.
- 2 National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education (Referenciais Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil).
- 3 National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil).



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