

## Knowledge, practices and challenges of teaching babies in child education

*Saberes e fazeres de uma professora de bebês na educação infantil*

*Saberes, haceres y desafíos de la docencia con bebés en la educación infantil*

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**Abstract:** Considering that there are still few studies on the specificities of work with Early Childhood in schools of early childhood education, this research, carried out in a municipal public education institution, aimed to describe and discuss the knowledge and practice of a teacher of babies. In this regard, a qualitative research approach was favored, through field observations in nursery II group and interviews with the participating teacher. The data revealed the complexity of the teaching knowledge, which is constituted as plural knowledge, constructed and constantly reconstructed through experiences, formation and daily practices. Topics as the relation between care and education, planning and teamwork, were verified to be quite relevant in the work of the professional who works with this age group. The data indicated the importance of a reflection on the training and practices of teachers of children from 0 to 3 years of age, in the intent to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice.

**Keywords:** Teacher Education. Early Childhood Education. Teaching practice with babies. Teacher knowledge.

**Resumo:** Considerando que ainda são poucos os estudos sobre as especificidades do trabalho com a Primeiríssima Infância na educação infantil, esta pesquisa, realizada em uma instituição de educação infantil pública, pretendeu descrever e discutir os saberes e fazeres de uma professora de bebês. Para tal, privilegiou-se abordagem qualitativa, por meio de observações de campo no agrupamento de berçário II e entrevistas com a professora participante. Os dados obtidos revelaram a complexidade dos saberes docentes, que se constituem como saber plural, construídos e constantemente reconstruídos por meio das experiências, formação e práticas diárias. Temáticas como relação entre cuidado e educação, planejamento e trabalho em equipe, mostraram-se de absoluta relevância no trabalho da profissional que atua com essa faixa etária. Os dados apontaram a importância da reflexão sobre a formação e as práticas dos professores das crianças de 0 a 3 anos, buscando superar a dicotomia entre a teoria e a prática.

**Palavras-chave:** Professores-Formação. Educação Infantil. Prática docente com bebês. Saberes docentes.

**Resumen:** Considerando que todavía son pocos los estudios que tratan sobre las especificidades del trabajo con la Primera Infancia en las escuelas de educación infantil, esta investigación, realizada en una institución pública de educación infantil municipal, pretendió describir y discutir los saberes y conductas de una profesora de bebés. Para ello, se privilegió el abordaje cualitativo de investigación, por medio de observaciones de campo en el agrupamiento de guardería II y entrevistas con la maestra participante. Los datos obtenidos revelaron la complejidad de los saberes docentes, que se constituyen como saber plural, construidos y constantemente reconstruidos por medio de las experiencias, formación y conductas diarias. Las temáticas como la relación entre cuidado y educación, planificación y trabajo en equipo, se mostraron de absoluta relevancia en el trabajo de la profesional que actúa con esa franja etaria. Los datos apuntaron la importancia de una reflexión sobre la formación y las conductas de los maestros de los niños desde 0 a 3 años, con la intención de superar la dicotomía entre la teoría y la práctica.

**Palabras clave:** Formación de Profesores. Educación Infantil. Práctica docente con bebés. Saberes docentes.

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## Introduction

Child education is historically marked in Brazil by struggles of social movements that sought to guarantee the rights of children from 0 to 6 years of age to education and quality care. Since the 1970s, urbanization and greater participation of women in the labor market have resulted in “pressure of demand” and “urgency of care”. This, in addition to the “omission of current educational legislation”, made attendance occur within the “ideology of education as compensation for needs”, which led to early childhood education to expand outside of education systems (BRASIL, 2005, p. 8).

However, with the re-democratization of the country, “the struggle for public, democratic and popular pre-school was confused with the struggle for broader political and social transformation” (KUHLMANN JR., 2000, p. 11). Thus, with the intense increase of middle-class women in the working class, this sector of society began to look for suitable institutions for their young children; with this, “the educational attendance of children in day-care centers from their birth will gain a social legitimacy beyond their exclusive destination to the children of the poor” (KUHLMANN JR., 2000, p. 11).

The appreciation of day-care centers and the overcoming of the social stigma associated with this type of care - hitherto seen as a “lesser evil” for families and mothers considered uneducated to educate their young children - will occur under the influence of the feminist movement, in the context of the urban social movements that emerged in the late 1970s. At the outset, day-care was advocated as a right of working women; soon afterward, the social organizations constituted with the return of democracy begin to worry about the quality of services, bringing the child to the foreground (CAMPOS, 2013, p. 30).

It is from the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988) that child education becomes the right of the child, and since then, this school has been seeking to build itself in a different way, moving away from the idea of assistance to young children, as Barbosa (2010, p. 1) points out:

In 1988, the Federal Constitution, meeting the expectations of society, especially the women's movement: feminists, trade unionists or residents of neighborhoods, defined that the Brazilian State should guarantee the provision of free, quality public education for children of 0 to 6 years through the educational system. This legal proposal triggered, in the following decades, a wide expansion of the establishments of infantile education.

In 1990, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (BRASIL, 1990) reaffirmed this right. As early as 1996, the Law on Guidelines and Bases of National Education, LDB 9.394/96 (BRASIL, 1996), determines early childhood education as the first stage of Basic Education. The National Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework - RCNEI (BRASIL, 1998) and the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, through the mandatory CNE/CEB Resolution 1/1999, revoked by Resolution CNE/CEB No. 5/2009 (BRASIL, 2009), deepened the discussions on the specificity of this segment. More recently, other documents have been published addressing children's education in various aspects. In 2015, it started to be drawn up the National Common Base Curriculum,

established by Resolution CNE/CP No. 2/2017, which contemplates this stage of basic education (BRASIL, 2017a).

This process shows the growing concern with the knowledge and practices adopted by professionals in the nursery schools, enabling the construction and reconstruction of teaching knowledge and adequate pedagogical practices, in order to guarantee the educational rights of children from 0 to 3 years of age. Hence, it is necessary that the education of children be based on different concepts from other levels of education.

The experiences of the first years of life constitute essential for the human formation and development of children. Therefore, to conceive a specific education and care for infants and toddlers is an enormous challenge. That is why professionals working with this age group still suffer daily from the devaluation and precariousness of their work (KRAMER; NUNES, 2007).

The education of the First Childhood<sup>i</sup> has been gaining ground in the context of national research and education, but it suffers due to its welfarism and to the low social and professional value given. Although there is an apparent consensus on the importance of education and care of children up to 3 years of age - and consequently - of the studies and research that focus on them, it is still a challenge to be faced.

## Knowledge and teaching

Despite the intensification of discussions on early childhood education, the Pedagogy of the First Childhood is still behind true effectiveness in the different contexts of children's institutions in Brazil. It is then necessary to

[...] ensure the quality of education of young children in partnership with their families, in a perspective that gradually breaks with welfarism, the nonrecognition of the child as a subject of rights and the nonprofessionalism of their educators (OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 84).

Teachers of the babies<sup>ii</sup>, then, play a fundamental role in the formation, learning and development of them, while acting as professionals responsible for their care and education, complementing in a different way the action of families. That is why studies on the formation and identity of these professionals and on the knowledge necessary for their educational practice become of extreme relevance.

Tardif (2002) points out that it is only possible to understand and discuss the knowledge of teachers if it is done in an intrinsic way to a wider context, to the craft, to the school. That is, it is necessary to relate the knowledge of teachers to the aspects of their social reality and work context as well as to their experiences, personality and identity.

A first guiding thread is that the knowledge of teachers must be understood in close relation to their work in school and in the classroom. In other words, although teachers use different acquisitions, this use is due to their work and situations, conditions and resources related to this profession. In short, knowledge is in the service of work. This means that the relationships of teachers with knowledge are

never strictly cognitive: they are work-mediated relationships that provide them with principles for coping with and solving everyday situations (TARDIF, 2002, p. 16).

According to the author, teachers have a complex relationship with this knowledge, which is not limited to its transmission. The knowledge of teachers is characterized as a plural knowledge, which is constituted by professional training, discipline, curriculum, and also experiential knowledge (TARDIF, 2002). It is important to note the breadth of this concept, which is beyond the notion of knowledge since it “encompasses knowledge, skills, abilities (or aptitudes) and attitudes of teachers, that is, what has often been called by knowledge, know-how, and know-be” (TARDIF, 2002, p. 60).

Teaching practices are related to actions, decisions, activities, planning, evaluation, which are specific to the work of the teacher. These are shown as a diversity of moments, actions and languages that are carried out daily by the teachers with the children. When one thinks of working with infants and toddlers, these tasks are presented in a very particular way, different from the other educational levels.

The intentionality required for teaching has its own traits when it comes to the education of young children and requires a redefinition of what is teaching because it does not allow the adaptation of the model of elementary school teaching; it is a teaching of another order. The strategies of organization of the pedagogical work are commonsense one has to plan, observe, register and evaluate (COUTINHO, 2013, p. 10).

So what is it to be a teacher in the nursery school<sup>iii</sup>? What practices characterize the routine of this professional? What knowledge is needed?

Is part of the knowledge and practices of professionals working in nurseries activities permeated by concepts of care, education, hygiene, food, safety, hospitality, affection, playfulness. Thus, the teacher of babies needs to master these activities, as well as to value them as an essential part of her teaching. Characteristics such as sensitivity, perception, affectivity, beyond the consistent theoretical knowledge that support the practice seem to be decisive for this work. According to Tristão (2004, p. 4), “the teaching practice with infants is characterized by the subtlety of daily actions, which are often not perceived within the daily routine but are determinant in the characterization of this humanizing profession”.

In addition to the inseparability between caring and educating, it must be understood the multiplicity and the particularity of the different knowledge and practices present in teaching with this age group. That is to assume that they permeate and sustain relationships and interactions in the context of early childhood education and that it is only by means of research and discussion about them that improvements in the care of children can be attained, while the teachers are aware of how significant their interventions are.

It is imperative to clarify the inseparability between knowledge and teachers practices since the former is the foundation and guide the professional practices and, in the same way, the practices are shown as the source of the knowledge of teachers. This intrinsic relationship makes these concepts complex and deeply integrated.

## Methodological paths

The research was based on the qualitative approach so that it was possible to capture the main aspects of the reality that it was proposed to investigate. The approximation with the studied reality allowed to collect data (speech, gestures, looks, dialogues, interactions), establishing relationships between them, reflecting on the knowledge and actions of a baby teacher.

For that, it became necessary to know and be part of the daily reality of the subjects, gaining their trust, paying attention to the details (BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994). The data collected through qualitative research are predominantly descriptive and full of situations, speech, interactions, looks, dialogues (LÜDKE; ANDRÉ, 2003). Thus, there is an intense interest in capturing all present aspects and understanding the “perspective of the participants”, understanding the “dynamism” present in the interactions (LÜDKE; ANDRÉ, 2003, p. 1).

Data collection was done through interviews with the participating teacher and field observations in nursery II group. The collection was carried out at a municipal public education institution in a city of the state of São Paulo. The school field of research is located in the periphery of the city, surrounded by irregular neighborhoods and predominantly low-income population, serving about 190 children annually, full time.

## Choice for teaching with babies

I think that is what I was born to do (Interview on July 29, 2017).

Responsible for a grouping of 20 children between 1 and 2 years old, the teacher subject of the research, at the time of data collection, was 25 years old, graduated in Pedagogy at a private institution of Higher Education in 2011, contemplated with a full scholarship by the Program University for All (Prouni) from the Federal Government. She also held two postgraduate courses in private teaching institutions between the years of 2012 and 2013.

Throughout the interviews, encouraged to discuss the shortcomings of her initial training course, she considers that many contents are not applicable in practice, at least not in practice with infants, besides not being adequate to the reality of schools, which made her feel unprepared for teaching:

There was a lot of things that I don't think we use in practice. I attended Mathematics, Portuguese classes. And that, for me, here... Maybe in secondary school, I would use it, but not here. The ludic games, I thought they were too unworkable, they were made for adults, not for children. [...] I had a lot of training, but I don't think they show the reality, I think the courses are lacking this sense of reality, at the least the one I did. Because you get in a class for the first time and you're still unprepared, at least in mine I didn't have this preparation for reality. (Interview of July 29, 2017).

Asked about the gaps she perceives in her initial education and that make her work as a child education teacher difficult, she defends the need - inherent in the profession - for constant improvement and study, so that it is possible to overcome the obstacles of daily practice:

For me, I think we notice the more we work, the less we know... I speak from the experience that I had here in school. We get here and realize we don't know anything, you have to start from scratch. For example, I studied a lot of constructivism, but I never have put it in practice, and when you have to do it...that's it. It seems that I can't develop, so far it seems that I'm still... You research and research, you talk, but when you have to put it in practice, you realize... at least in the reality I live, that you can't (Interview of July 29, 2017).

The data reveal that the teacher chose to teach with this age group, however, in the interviews, she reveals that she has had difficulties in adapting to the new reality of work when she took up her position in the field research school since the Municipal Secretary of Education adopts a different conception of her previous experiences for working with infants. This is because, according to her, in her previous experiences, work in the nursery was for “caring, only” (Interview of June 12, 2017), and this made her feel lost in her role as a teacher of babies, but also served as an incentive to continue studying and modifying her practices.

The researched teacher says she understands that the contents and theories covered in her Pedagogy course had little relation with the school reality. The problem in the initial training of teachers regarding the visibility of infants and toddlers results in theoretical knowledge separated from the teaching practice,

Thus, we can affirm that the training for teachers of Early Childhood Education remains secondary, considering that the priority is in the training for teachers of the initial grades of Elementary School. This secondary placement represents, in a general way and within the academic universe, the understanding and the place of importance conceived for the formation of teachers who will perform in the education of young children (GENTIL; MICHELS, 2011, p. 164).

The initial training that is not very consistent and far from the reality of daycare centers is a major obstacle in the formation of teachers, which leaves important gaps weighing on the quality of the teaching work. Babies and toddlers remain practically forgotten in the training of teachers, which incurs in not building consistent theoretical bases for their work, often falling into practices consolidated by common sense:

Another factor when one thinks of the necessity of having another way of working with children is the absence of a specific training policy for the professionals of the Early Childhood Education in the courses of Pedagogy, with a clear explanation of their attributions towards the children, particularly in relation to those aged between 0 and 3 years (OLIVEIRA, 2010, p. 14).

Such gaps can only be surpassed by reformulating the initial training courses, bringing infants and very young children to the prominence of the discussions and reflections, enabling the construction of a specific pedagogy for the education of children (ROCHA, 2001; KISHIMOTO, 2005; AMORIM; DIAS, 2013; DRUMOND, 2018). Continuous quality

training is also a valuable tool, as it allows moments of reflection on daily practices and difficulties through discussions, planning and evaluation.

## To be a teacher of babies

Unappreciated, but not unmotivated, because I know the importance of my work (Interview of June 12, 2017).

The phrase above expresses the teacher's feeling about her acting with infants and very small children. Marked by its history of low social and professional value, teaching the First Childhood can often increase the devaluation and precariousness of the teaching profession. Asked about what it is to be a teacher of babies, she points out personal characteristics that she considers relevant to this work:

It is to be a person with a lot of patience, a person that enjoys it too much... What is it? It is to be a teacher like any other. The difference is that with us is not educating the whole time, I can't pedagogical the whole time, because for that I need a team that helps and is not always that I have one. But I think that's it, that's what I am... a teacher (Interview of June 12, 2017).

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Thereby, she assumes the teaching function when she repeats to herself the word "teacher" and all the elements that this term brings with it. For her, what sets her apart from other teachers is the fact that she does not "being pedagogical" the whole time since, for this, a greater number of room assistants would be necessary.

The teacher understands the pedagogical activities as those in which the focus is the teacher as, for example, reading circles, storytelling, music circles, activities with names and photo cards, among others. Would also be included in this classification more elaborate activities such as exploration of textures, drawings, and paintings.

On the one hand, it is understood the importance of offering the most varied range of experiences and activities that enable the learning and development of babies and, in this sense, the relevance of these activities is assured. On the other hand, it is assumed the need to value the "little" everyday practices that make the nursery an environment different from any other, assuming the importance of practices, gestures, looks and interactions that happening constantly and that require from the professional a series of specific knowledge.

Regarding the concepts of care and education in nursing this age group, the teacher states:

To care, that is happening all the time, we are there caring. Is not everyone that can stand to be there and offer care for the children. In educating, we do the best we can, between the gaps, in socialization... We end up caring more. The time of teaching is when we can (Interview of June 13, 2017).

At various times, it was possible to identify contradictions in the speech of the teacher regarding the concepts of caring and educating in the nursery. In some lines, she seems to believe in the inseparability between them, but in others, these two concepts split. However, the practice based on the relation between these concepts is observed, in the sense that the

teacher values the activities of care and hygiene, she presents a concern regarding the well-being and comfort of the children, and she is observant of their needs. In the table below is possible to identify some of these aspects:

**Table 1.** Systematization of knowledge and practices regarding concepts of care and education

	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Practices</b>
<b>Relationship between caring and educating</b>	There are pedagogical and non-pedagogical activities The concepts of care and education do not take place all the time or in all activities The concepts of care and education work together with babies and toddlers Caring happens all the time at work with babies and toddlers Education is introduced in between the gaps, through interventions, socialization, and games The pedagogical activities are those in which the focus is on the teacher All activities fall into care and education	To develop activities in which the focus is on the teacher (talk, music and reading circles, storytelling etc) Seeks to perform care activities when the two helpers are in the room with the group of children Cannot develop many activities that involve the care and hygiene due to the organization of professionals in the room Practices focused on the inseparability of the concepts of care and education

Source: Oliveira (2018).

When it comes to child education, especially in relation to the care of the First Childhood, it is essential to clarify the inseparability between care and education activities. Craidy and Kaercher (2001, p. 16, emphasis in original) point out that

The education of the young child involves simultaneously two complementary and inseparable processes: *educating* and *caring*. Children of this age group, as we know, have needs for attention, care, security, without which they could hardly survive. At the same time, at this stage, children get in touch with the world around them, through direct experiences with people and things in the world and with the forms of expression that take place in them. This insertion of the children in the world would not be possible without activities aimed at *caring* and *educating* simultaneously.

Thus, the need for teaching practices that are deeply marked by the inseparability of the concepts of care and education is reaffirmed and directed towards ensuring the greatest wealth of learning, interaction and development possibilities, valuing the way of being and acting of the babies, as well as their characteristics, their desires and their rights as learners. The data show that it is necessary to broaden the discussions about these concepts with the teachers of infants and toddlers, valuing the “simple” everyday actions, but which exert an absolute influence on the human, affective and identity formation of the children.

At the time of collection, the teacher had the support of an intern from the Pedagogy course and a nursery assistant (medium level position and hired by a third-party company). The very municipal administration dissociates completely the concepts of care and education,

leaving the former in charge of people without specific training, which goes against the prevailing legislation for early childhood education and is characterized as a huge setback and obstacle for the teachers and for the public schools.

It is possible to observe the frustration of the teacher with her practice since she often demonstrates “giving up” or giving in her initial planning due to the difficulties of organizing and carrying out certain activities. The unrest and number of the children, the lack of interest, and the often-restricted support of the auxiliaries proved to be major obstacles in this context.

The intern and the nursery assistant are bathing the children, the teacher is alone in the class with the group and they are playing with little bikes. She turns to the researcher and says “I spend too much time alone, I will not propose an activity, something different alone. To make it work, you have to plan, you have to schedule and even then sometimes it doesn’t work! You give a drawing, but they shouldn’t put in their mouths and there’s no one to help. Today, there are 13, the intern helped me with the circle and it worked, they participated, but if I’m alone...” (Field diary, May 5, 2017).

The anguish of the teacher in relation to her professional reality expresses the difficulties arising from the precariousness of the profession and work in early childhood education. However, a movement toward acceptance/adjustment in relation to unplanned situations in the routine with infants would allow greater participation and flexibility, while it

introduces the unexpected and the unplanned, it is necessary for the adult to be able to interpret and reorganize the conditions of the moment without, however, forgetting the proposed objectives. In this perspective, the adult can also be considered an apprentice insofar as, in observing, he knows the child and responds (or at least tries) to the needs and the unexpected (BUFALO, 2016, p. 121).

There seems to be some difficulty in promoting changes in the structure of routine and developing a more aligned and feasible planning, with the support of the helpers and seeking to promote the development and learning of children in nursery II. Reflections on actions, practices and everyday situations allow us to broaden the ways of building a curriculum for babies and toddlers.

## **Knowledge and practices of teaching with babies and sources of acquisition of teaching knowledge**

Different themes emerged throughout the collection, being relevant to the constitution of knowledge and teaching practices, among them: pedagogical planning and routine, evaluation, relationship and work with the intern and assistant of the nursery school.

**Table 2.** Systematization of knowledge and practices

	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Practices</b>
<b>Pedagogical planning and routine</b>	Flexibility, diversification and adaptation of activities Prior planning of activities Meeting the demands and interests of children Planning time and space Permanent activities as a guide Planning activities according to the time, routine and interests of children Based on the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education	Adaptable activities Different toys and materials Conduct weekly planning and follow school management guidelines Sensitivity towards the demands of children Activities of care and hygiene and with the focus on the teacher Moments of interaction and free play Weekly reflective recording of activities
<b>Evaluation</b>	Permanent evaluation Record and observations as tools of the evaluation process It is necessary to know children individually and collectively, as well as to understand children's development	Observing Value the progress of the children Take a careful and sensitive look Scold unwanted attitudes Judgments (agitated, aggressive children) Carry out a written evaluation Register through photos and videos
<b>Relationship and work with trainee and assistant</b>	Teamwork is determinant in the quality of child care The posture of the assistants influences the teaching practice All responsibility lies with the teacher Unfair division of tasks and responsibilities It is possible to learn from the experiences of these professionals	Involve the assistants in activities developed with the children The need for their help to carry out the activities Demand the accomplishment of the routine of diaper change and baths Guiding Show difficulty in aligning collective work Evaluate the posture and actions of the assistants Seek harmonious relationship

Source: Oliveira (2018).

Finally, are discussed the sources of acquisition of the knowledge of teaching, reiterating the complexity and diversity of its constitution. The data revealed knowledge from the initial formation, the continued education, the curricular knowledge and those coming from the professional experiences of the teacher, in line with the writings of Tardif (2002).

It is observed that, for the researched teacher, there is precedence of practice in relation to educational theories, that is, experiential knowledge is more relevant than the knowledge of professional formation, with little relation between the initial formation and the reality of work performance. Unfortunately, the knowledge valued by the teacher has little or nothing to do with her academic training, so the basilar knowledge for her practice “does not

correspond, or at least very little, to the theoretical knowledge obtained in the university and produced by the university. research in the area of Education” (TARDIF, 2002, p. 61).

This aspect is problematic with regard to the gaps in the formation of teachers and how they act with children. While educational theories are neglected, the knowledge of teachers working with babies and toddlers is being constituted from common sense. Overcoming the rupture between theory and practice, seeking new ways to build a curriculum and a pedagogy suitable for the First Childhood becomes necessary according to the demands of Early Childhood Education.

## Considering the challenges

After reflections, it is necessary to push up the valorization of professionals working with this age group, in order to guarantee the educational rights of infants and very young children in kindergarten, understanding them as unique, active, creative beings with potential and voice.

For this, studies that give visibility to the work of professionals of this segment are still needed. Describing and discussing knowledge, practices and challenges present in the context of teaching with the First Childhood is presented as a way to approach these professionals, establishing clear relationships with their work, reflecting on daily actions and situations, thus making it possible to bring these aspects (knowledge and actions) in light of the advances and discussions proposed by the scientific studies on the subject.

More and more, the complex scenario of nursery groupings is assumed to be essential for human training since it serves children with a few months of life, being responsible for their care and education, in the most determinant and sensitive phase of human development.

With this research, gain prominence problems and obstacles encountered by the teacher for the accomplishment of her work, such as the social and professional depreciation of the teachers of children and toddlers, the difficulties of alignment and organization of the collective work with the room assistants, the high number of children per adult, the planning, and the routine.

The inclusion of lay people in the grouping of children from 0 to 3 years of age points to a still mistaken view of the care to this age group, while the municipal administration itself detach the concepts of care and education, delegating the activities of hygiene and care of the body to people with no specific training for this work.

These aspects go against the appreciation of the professionals of early childhood education who work with the First Childhood, making it difficult to build a school capable of meeting the needs and specificities of groupings of children.

If on the one hand the data revealed a diversity of problems, difficulties and obstacles to the construction of a specific Pedagogy for children from 0 to 3 years of age in pre-schools, on the other hand, there was evidence of commitment, dedication, joy, and anxieties

of a professional who, despite the adversities, chose to work with this age group and seeks to carry it out with quality.

The data indicate the need for discussion on the quality of the training of professionals working with the First Childhood, making it possible to consolidate practices guided by educational theories and allowing the approximation of theoretical knowledge produced on the education and care of children and toddlers with the practices adopted by their teachers in nursery schools.

The slow process of constructing a curriculum that meets the specificities of care and education of children and toddlers in preschools brings out the reality of teachers working in this segment. Considering that the observed reality may be similar to that of many other Brazilian schools, the relevance of these data and their use is assumed to discuss the topic from a broader perspective.

Although it is still on the margins of studies and public investments, it is necessary to focus on the education of children of 0 to 3 years of age, increasing their visibility in public policy and initial teacher training courses, working towards the guarantee of their social and educational rights, providing their full and integrated development. This process can only be successful if there is social and political involvement, mainly of professionals who work with child education.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Nomenclature adopted by the Maria Cecília Souto Vidigal Foundation (PELIZON, 2014), which comprises the First Childhood as the stage of birth at 3 years of age.

<sup>ii</sup> According to the 2016 School Census, in day-care centers (from 0 to 3 years old), male teachers accounted for 2.3% of the total number of teachers. In pre-school (4 and 5 years), they added 4.8% (BRASIL, 2017b). Therefore, the option to use the term teachers, in the feminine (in Portuguese, “professoras”, distinguishing from the masculine form “professores”), since they are majority.

<sup>iii</sup> Nursery School – Nomenclature adopted by the Municipal Plan of Education (SÃO JOSÉ DO RIO PRETO, 2015) of the city where the research was carried out, denominating Nursery II the group that comprises children of 1 and 2 years of age.

