



# Early Childhood Education in Portugal: Discourses, Projects and Practices (1834-1974)\*

Educación de la primera infancia en Portugal: discursos, proyectos y prácticas (1834-1974)

Educação de infância em Portugal: discursos, projetos e práticas (1834-1974)

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## Abstract

This paper is a summary of the paths in early childhood education in Portugal, during 1834 and the end of the Estado Novo, in April of 1974, proposing a comprehensive reading of the evolution of thinking and action on the care and education of children in early childhood. This text also focuses on the analysis of official discourse, thought and pedagogical debate, as well as its realization. The documentary *corpus* used in this article, consists of the legislative production and a collection of texts on early childhood education, compiled in the education and teaching press. Those sources allow us to analyze ideas, proposals, projects and initiatives that, either through the State or embodied by civil society, were marking the long period of construction of modernity in Portugal. The documentary body was subjected to the critical method and content analysis, that showed that the diffusion of ideas and the implementation of educational policies and institutions was slow and accompanied by difficulties. Slow process that was rooted in the material and symbolic conditions of portuguese society. To a large extent, an expression of the national *locus*, translated an appropriation of international theories and practices.

## Keywords

child; childhood; early childhood education; nursery school; educational policy

## Palabras clave

niño; infancia; educación de la primera infancia; escuela de párvulos; política de la educación

## Resumen

Este documento es un resumen de los caminos de la educación de la primera infancia en Portugal, durante 150 años, entre 1834 y el final del Estado Novo, en abril de 1974. Su objetivo es producir una lectura de la evolución del pensamiento y la acción sobre el cuidado y la educación de los niños. Se centra en el análisis del discurso oficial, el pensamiento y el debate pedagógico, así como su realización. El *corpus* documental consiste en la producción legislativa y una colección de textos sobre educación de la primera infancia, compilados en la prensa pedagógica. Estas fuentes ofrecen una aproximación a las ideas, propuestas, proyectos e iniciativas que, ya sea a través del estado o encarnadas por la sociedad civil, se han esbozado, estirado o materializado en el largo período de construcción de la modernidad en Portugal. Al someterlas al método crítico y al análisis de contenido, su escrutinio nos permitió observar que la difusión de ideas y la implementación de políticas e instituciones educativas para este grupo de edad, profundamente marcada por las condiciones materiales y simbólicas de la formación social portuguesa, fue lenta y marcada por dificultades. En gran medida, la expresión del *locus* nacional trajo una apropiación de teorías y prácticas internacionales.

## Resumo

O presente trabalho constitui um bosquejo dos caminhos da educação de infância em Portugal, ao longo de 150 anos, entre 1834 e o fim do Estado Novo, em abril de 1974. Visa produzir uma leitura compreensiva da evolução do pensamento e ação sobre o cuidar e educar das crianças na primeira infância. Centra-se na análise do discurso oficial, no pensamento e debate pedagógico, bem como na sua concretização. O *corpus* documental é constituído pela produção legislativa e por uma coletânea de textos sobre a educação infantil, compilados na imprensa de educação e ensino. Estas fontes oferecem uma aproximação às ideias, propostas, projetos e iniciativas que, seja por via do Estado ou corporizadas pela sociedade civil, se foram esboçando, estilando ou concretizando no longo período de construção da modernidade em Portugal. Ao Sujeitas ao método crítico e à análise de conteúdo, o seu escrutínio permitiu observar que a difusão das ideias e a concretização de políticas e instituições educativas destinadas a esta faixa etária, profundamente marcadas pelas condições materiais e simbólicas da formação social portuguesa, foi morosa e eivada de dificuldades. Em larga medida, expressão do *locus* nacional, traduziu uma apropriação de teorias e práticas internacionais.

## Palavras-chave

criança; infância; educação de infância; jardim de infância; política educativa

## Introduction

When discussing the rearing and education of children in their early years in Portugal, we need to keep in mind that this discussion is consistent with what occurred in European countries, following the same patterns and transnational ideas. Accordingly, any approach to the topic must take into consideration a broader perspective, even when the core concern is the national reality (Ferreira, Mota e Vilhena , 2019).

The discussion about childcare and attitudes towards childhood is linked to historical development. Therefore, attention should be paid to the material and cultural conditions of each period and each social context. This is the only way to carry out a critical analysis without falling into the “sin” of anachronism, the reasonableness and coherence—or the lack thereof—of certain practices that today could raise some eyebrows and be rejected (Ferreira et al., 2019).

From this viewpoint, it is noteworthy that the economic, social and political transformations have had a more or less effective impact on the cultural and educational fields. The changes that have occurred, particularly the gradual growth of trade, alongside an increasingly complex bureaucratic system, have put on the agenda new skills for those who are involved in the management of bureaucratic-administrative affairs. The European schooling system began with the expansion of the training of the bourgeoisie and the wider recognition of the value of education. Hinged on humanism and on religious reforms—initially in protestant States, but also in Catholic Europe—, several ideas on children’s education (Ferreira, 1988; Ferreira e Pereira, 1987) and educational or pedagogical programmes spread throughout Europe, bringing a renewed focus on childhood into light (Ferreira et al., 2019).

The 18th and 19th centuries saw the spread of the idea that child rearing and education should be rational, in other words, that it should not be the work of pure chance, an idea that has lasted and developed to this day. In the 18th century, this idea was accompanied by the finding that a pre-school child was an intelligent being whose education should not be neglected. Doctors and educators, as well as psychology experts since the end of the 19th century, contributed to this finding by drawing attention to the educational needs in primary school (Beatty et al., 2006; Brehony, 2009; Ferreira, 2000; Ferreira & Gondra, 2006; Luc, 1997).

This new focus on the early years of life was mirrored in discourses and political action concerning childhood. At a time when, due to the growing education of populations, a new image of childhood was being constructed—that of *child/student* (Hendrick, 1997; Hofstetter, 2012)—, the concern for security and the future needs of the State contributed to the development of the idea of *child of the nation*, associated with the awareness

of childhood as a period specifically suitable for shaping students, in which the future of individuals and, consequently, of nations was being constructed (Cunningham, 1995; Hendrick, 1997). As this period was particularly prone to educational action, and given the social importance of education in the eyes of political and intellectual elites, child rearing and education became a matter of public interest, no longer being regarded as a private matter and the exclusive responsibility of families (Brehony, 2009; White, 2002). The first early childhood education institutions were created against this backdrop. Their main goals were to provide the care needed for survival and the maintenance of health and, at the same time, to ensure the moral and intellectual education of children (e.g. Beatty, 1995; Luc, 1997; Wollons, 2000).

Although it can be said that childhood protection and education initiatives existed before the 19th century—the best known being the *école des plus jeunes* established in 1769 by Protestant Pastor Jean Oberlin—, the 19th century effectively saw the creation of educational establishments for pre-school children. Some examples include the English *infant schools*, the French *salles d’asile*, transformed in the late 19th century into *écoles maternelles*, or Froebel’s *kindergarten*, in Germany, in addition to the *Casa dei Bambini*, created by Maria Montessori, to name but a few of the best known whose influence not only expanded to other regions worldwide, but also lasted to this day (e.g. Dombkowski, 2001; Luc, 1997; Read, 2013; Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008).

It must be pointed out, however, that this process was slow and uneven due to stark regional (and local) contrasts, sharp socio-economic asymmetries, and diverse social and cultural contexts. As a consequence, the ideas about the education of children and different positions on childhood were appropriated differently (Ferreira et al., 2019).

This work aims to present an overview of the paths of early childhood education in Portugal, focusing on three aspects: the official discourse, the pedagogical debate, and the practices. To do so, we have analysed the legislation and other official documents issued by the education authority, other publications on the subject, e.g. textbooks, and, in particular, a collection of texts published in the education and teaching press, e.g. *Froebel* (1882-1885), *Alma Feminina* (1914-1946), *Educação Social* (1924-1927), *A Saúde* (1931-1943), *Os Nossos Filhos* (1942-1964), *A Criança Portuguesa* (1942-1963), one of the (privileged) media for disseminating the prevailing ideas on early childhood education (Boto, 2001; Nery, 2006), which, at the same time, gave us an account of the concrete experiences carried out in the period under analysis.

It follows that the economic, social, political and cultural conditions indelibly shape the development of children’s education and the embodiment of childhood in Portugal, framing our analysis: official discourse, pedagogical

debate, and practices, their visibility and degree of involvement. This paper covers two major periods: liberal Portugal and the Estado Novo period. As we draw near the liberal period, it subdivides into two subperiods, the first of which focuses on the period between the first initiatives and the beginning of the integration into the educational system, which corresponds, in a broader sense, to the constitutional monarchy, and the second period, which corresponds to the Republican regime, characterized by the rhetorical construction of early childhood education. The Estado Novo period, that spanned over almost fifty years, is divided into two separate stages: first, when early childhood education policies were shaped by the ideology of motherhood, contaminating, as will be seen, the analytical dimensions; then, from the 1950s/1960s, largely due to the invisible changes (Rosas, 1994) in Portuguese society, when early childhood education and the perception of childhood were dominated by concerns over the training of human resources with a view to economic development, the expansion of schooling, and educational planning (Ferreira et al., 2019).

## The emergence of early childhood education (1834–1910)

The first initiatives regarding child rearing and education in Portugal began with the “Misericórdias” created by Queen D. Leonor in 1485, which addressed social concerns and focused on underprivileged children and those without a family. At the same time, a first set of laws (*Ordenações*) was published charging the public authorities with the protection of orphans and abandoned children (*Ordenações Afonsinas*, 2009). Moreover, it is undeniable and significant that by the end of the 19th century the abandonment of newborns or young children was a widespread and accepted praxis, leading to the emergence of “Casas da Roda” (foundling wheels) or orphanages, acting as welfare facilities, and later the “Asilos de Infância” (children’s homes), in line with customary practices in Europe (Ferreira et al., 2019).

In 1834, children’s homes were set up at the initiative of the *Sociedade das Casas de Asilo da Infância Desvalida* (Society of Underprivileged Children’s Homes) and under the patronage of King D. Pedro IV. These homes took in and educated children between the ages of 2 and 7 while their mothers worked, and were intended for children from poor families. Although they were primarily welfare facilities, they also provided education to these children, in particular related to the development of their abilities (Vasconcelos, 1853).

Besides being an innovation in terms of welfare assistance, as they were meant for poor children with families, and not for orphans or the unprotected, like the institutions that had existed until then (Lopes, 1993),

these specific homes took in younger children, contrary to primary schools, anticipating the pedagogical movement that would lead to the establishment of primary and kindergartens (Ferreira & Gondra, 2006).

Being restricted to Lisbon at first, other *Casas de Asylo* were established in other towns across the country (e.g. Funchal, Porto, Coimbra, Viana do Castelo), demonstrating, on the one hand, great concern to find a solution to a specific problem, that of the fate of younger children whose mothers had to work, and on the other, in line with Christian philanthropy, a concern with their care, moralization and education.

The educational dimension apparently fell under the charge of the State, first with the reform carried out by António da Costa Sousa Macedo in 1870 (whereby children from the age of 5 could attend school), and, eight years later, with the law published by António Rodrigues Sampaio on the establishment of educational homes for children between the ages of 3 and 6, managed by the District General Councils and the City Councils, representing the “starting” schools.

Even though the production of laws was accompanied by the prioritization of the institutions’ educational role, the results were marginal. The name “educational home” continued to prevail over “kindergarten” until 1880, when the State made provision for its creation following the Froebelian model to match the Children’s Homes to kindergartens (Vasconcelos, 2004). Pedagogues and politicians were concerned that early childhood education still met with the State’s inability to implement a significant project in the educational system, an idea that was successively postponed.

The 1880s would prove decisive for the creation of the first kindergarten in Portugal, with the political discourse, in official documentation and legislative output, aligned with political will. The government was willing to allocate a subsidy from the general State budget to open kindergartens for children ages 3 through 6, following Froebel’s method, and with the power of initiative, seen in the critical contribution of Teófilo Ferreira (1840-1893), director of the Normal School and in charge of the Education Department in the Lisbon City Council since January 1882. In the centenary year of the birth of Friedrich Froebel, the first public kindergarten was inaugurated in Jardim da Estrela, influenced by the Froebelian method, intended for the training of future kindergarten teachers (Ferreira, 1882).

In the following decade, the 1894 law provided for the establishment of kindergartens in Lisbon, Porto, and other important towns. Two years later, the Primary School Regulation (1896), wherein early childhood education is integrated in the educational system, established the following: (i) the predominance of education over welfare; (ii) its design as the gateway to primary school; (iii) the definition of its own methods, different than those

used for other children, suited to the characteristics and specific needs of this age group; and (iv) the definition of the early childhood educator as an exclusively feminine profession.

The concern focused on the educational function, which borrowed from the Froebelian method, did not succeed in changing the social practices. What did prevail was the social function anchored in a narrative that sought to offset inequalities in the family sociocultural milieu. The specificity of the kindergarten was far from unanimous, and the educational function was often highlighted. The 1894 law used the expression “infant school” rather than “kindergarten”, and in its various pieces of legislation refers to “early childhood education” (Vilarinho, 2000). Moreover, scholastic slant increased in the laws produced at the beginning of the century, as, although it stipulated that early childhood education is not a level of education, its contribution to children’s education is valued, by highlighting its role in the intellectual development of children and in preparing them for primary school, while safeguarding children’s characteristics and abilities, as well as the concept of childhood as a maturing process (Cardona, 1997).

In this period, these norms coexisted with a growing consensus among pedagogists on Friedrich Froebel’s proposals, albeit without much public expression. The first article on the German pedagogue published in Portugal, entitled “Frederico Froebel – Jardins-de-infância” [Friedrich Froebel – Kindergartens], authored by Luís Filipe Leite, dates back to mid-19th century. However, it is only about two decades later that we again find Froebel’s ideology, when Francisco Adolfo Coelho used Froebel’s materials and exercises in children’s education in Porto (Fernandes, 2004). The following decades saw the dissemination of the work and methods of the German pedagogue in the press (e.g. Froebel e os jardins de infância, 1885; Eunes, 1904; Menezes, 1882;), highlighting that he had created a method and a number of teaching materials suitable for the education of young children (Raposo, 1882). In Porto, the Sociedade de Instrução do Porto (1880), composed of a group of people interested in the education “issue”, acquired a set of Froebel-based teaching materials, promoted conferences and exhibitions, and suggested the sending of scholarship students abroad to train, which met with much favour.

In addition to the work carried out by Carolina Michäellis, Joaquim António de Vasconcelos, Adolfo Coelho and Bernardino Machado. We also emphasize the activity pursued by the pedagogue José Augusto Coelho (1850-1925), a primary school teacher and author of teaching and methodology textbooks, influenced by Spencer’s evolutionism, and representative of pedagogists Pestalozzi and Froebel, who drew up a programme for a kindergarten intended for children four through eight years old. Based on scientific knowledge, he compounded the definition of ages (educational stages) with a set of knowledge, psychologists and pedagogues, advocating

a kindergarten divided into four periods, systematizing a set of practical proposals, and using the intuitive method and lessons on “issues” (Ferreira et al., 2019).

These activities were part of a set of innovative philosophical, social and historical ideas that permeated Europe and combined the notion of cultural renewal with that of pedagogical reform. Portuguese educators are known to have circulated in European educational institutions, resulting in their involvement in the Portuguese school system (Ferreira et al., 2019).

In the 20th century, the Associação de Escolas Móveis pelo Método de João de Deus [Association of Mobile Schools according to the João de Deus Method], which was also established in the early 1880s, changed its articles of incorporation and was renamed Associação de Escolas Móveis pelo Método João de Deus, Bibliotecas Ambulantes e Jardins-Escolas [Association of Mobile Schools according to the João de Deus Method, Mobile Libraries and Kindergartens] (1907), aiming to implement kindergartens inspired by the work of João de Deus for children between the ages of three and seven. This initiative in the field of childhood education cannot be overestimated, as it spans the entire 20th century, and even today constitutes a differentiated offer for children of that age group in the Portuguese education system.

## Purposes of the theoretical construction of childhood education

The evident concern with childhood education, well expressed in discourses and in the various social and legislative initiatives (e.g. Hintze Ribeiro, 1901), that would lead in the first years of the Republican regime to the establishment of the official childhood education and to the training of teachers specializing in the education of children ages 4 through 7, was but a negligible manifestation of intentions.

The belief in education as a motive for regenerating the country and as a support for the construction of a new man, free from the dogmas of the past through the moral and intellectual development of citizens, as active agents in social transformation (Candeias, 2006; Ferreira, 2014), placed education, in general, and childhood education, in particular, high on the political agenda. It should be remembered that, at the time, it was important to keep children away from harmful environments, e.g. the street, as a place of contagion and of all addictions, as well as from the hands of the (“ignorant” and “unfit”) mothers who knew nothing about the scientific principles of raising and educating children and, therefore, were unable to give their children a rational and positive education (Serpa, 1913).



It therefore comes as no surprise that in 1910 the provisional government determined that the fence adjacent to the Palácio das Necessidades and its rural premises should be renamed *Jardim Infantil* [kindergarten], for which the Lisbon's School Inspection Department would have to submit a reorganization plan. A committee formed, among others, by João de Barros and João de Deus Ramos was set up in that same year to draft the reform of the educational system to organize the primary education system into tree levels, covering childhood education —pre-school, wholly part of the educational system—, for children from three to seven years of age, and supporting the “nationalization” of childhood education through the universalization of the João de Deus method.

The committee's proposals were reconsidered by the political powers before being incorporated into a regulation. The Republican Education Act provided for a free and voluntary early childhood education with the aim of promoting the educational and integral development of children from 4 to 7 years of age, defining the curriculum, e.g. introduction to reading and writing, notions of descriptive geography, subtraction and multiplication, with specific features appropriate to this age group in terms of method and materials (Ministério da Instrução, 1911b), reflecting a certain focus on the role of early childhood education in the search for a balance between schooling and development. According to the regulation, the mission of the “early childhood school programme” was to make the transition from family to primary school, promoting the integral development of the child while stressing the importance of early childhood education for future school life, taking precautions with regard to the length of lessons, which were to focus on the child's interests and use exclusively intuitive teaching methods (Ministério da Instrução, 1911a). According to school inspector Heitor Passos (1921), pre-schools, organized and guided by the principles of pedagogy and psychology, fulfilled this aim.

With regard to teacher training, the legislator established a training course for primary school teachers to be taken at the normal primary schools, and the attendance of a two-year specific course for pre-school teaching. In the absence of qualified teachers—to use a current expression—, the law provided for the hiring of primary school teachers with a good school track record (Ministério da Instrução, 1911b). The incisiveness of a child's education based on scientific knowledge that had underpinned the child's development contributed to the focus given to the training of primary school teachers, pointing out the need and importance of future “gardeners” [from the word *kindergarten*] to know the principles of Pestalozzi and Froebel, as well as the laws that presided over the psychological and physiological development of the child (Cardoso Jr., 1922). Moreover, the programs of normal primary school reflected this concern, paying particular attention to the teaching of specific methodologies together with scientific

advances appropriate for the child's knowledge, an essential aspect for adapting education to their level of development (e.g. Pedology) (Ministério da Instrução, 1924).

Legislative work was intense during the 16 years of the First Republic. After the First World War, Leonardo Coimbra promoted a reform that integrated early childhood education into primary education (Ministério da Instrução, 1919), which then became organized into three levels: early childhood, general primary, and higher primary education. In 1922, two diplomas that regulated school schedules and calendars (Ministério da Instrução, 1922b; Ministério da Instrução, 1922a) not only took into account the age of children, but also placed pre-school at the level of the others. Besides organizational aspects, the legislator also discussed the curriculum and promoted citizenship values and an integral and lay education, thus reflecting the influence of the New Education "movement".

The fact is that, despite the legal-regulatory rhetoric, public childhood education remained almost non-existent, and the decade initiated by the military dictatorship on May 28th, 1926, did not change the substance or the form of the *statu quo*. During the course of the First Republic, twelve kindergartens were opened, including the Israeli school and the João de Deus kindergartens, plus one or two associations/institutions that may have had such establishments too. In 1927, the statistical yearbook mentions the existence of 55 "schools and pre-schools", the latter created by Leonardo Jardim (1919) for children between the ages of 6 and 7. In the decade beginning in 1926-1927, there was no significant change in the number of schools or pre-schools, of educators, children, or in their geographical distribution (Ferreira et al., 2019).

The profusion of legislation and the disappointing ability to implement it is no discredit to the rulers of the First Republic, and their recognition of the role of early childhood education and its integration in the educational system (Vilarinho, 2000). This inability is subject to various interpretations, such as the lack of a strategy on the part of the Republican political elite in the face of an (almost) chaotic situation: 75 % of illiterate people, 17.5 % of parishes without a primary school, in addition to the serious political instability—46 governments in 16 years—and the weak economic situation. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and debates on education, in general, and early childhood education in particular, stimulated pedagogical reflections and private initiatives, one example being the João de Deus Association.

With the increasing dissemination of pedagogical and didactic knowledge, based on science, scientific pedagogy gradually took hold and other authors began to contest hegemony against Froebel's thinking—e.g., in 1916 the Lisbon City Council sent a group of primary school teachers to

attend the International Maria Montessori Pedagogy Course in Barcelona. António Sérgio (1883-1969) gave prominence to Montessori's influence, which he believed was an essential contribution to education. Sérgio also focused on early childhood education and its characterization, arguing that education should be based on the child's interests in articulation with the sociocultural characteristics of the community, proposing a cooperative education that would enable the development of autonomy and critical thinking. In terms of how it should be organized, he advocated the creation of educational communities with their own social life, offering a learning method through the practice of democracy.

The contributions of Adelaide Cabete (1867-1935), Irene Lisboa (1892-1958), and Ilda Moreira (1849-1980), cited by Vasconcelos, 2004 were also significant. Urged by infant mortality, Adelaide Cabete published "O ensino da puericultura na escola infantil" [The teaching of childcare in kindergartens] (1928) during the military dictatorship, viewing education according to its social prevention component. Irene Lisboa, on the other hand, presented a proposal for the "Basis of a kindergarten programme" (1933), which she called "A Escola Atraente" [The attractive school], introducing ideas and practices of the New Education movement, clarifying the specific features of early childhood education, toning down its growing role as preparation for primary school, and prioritizing the expansion of children's interests. Finally, the contribution of Ilda Moreira, who created the official kindergarten in Tapada da Ajuda, testing new forms of early childhood education, marked by the ideas of Maria Montessori and Ovide Decroly (Vasconcelos, 2004). In the same line of action, the Associação João de Deus saw its educational method fail to be adopted as the national educational model, and continued to pursue one of the goals set out in the 1908 articles of incorporation: establish kindergartens. When the Estado Novo regime came into power, the Association already had five kindergartens in operation.

## The ideology of motherhood and the welfare and private nature of childhood education

The time for affirming the educational function of early childhood education and its integration in the official educational system had come to an end as the new Constitution (1933) embodied another philosophy. The ideology of the Estado Novo materialized in an (almost) hegemonic manner in education with the taking up of office of Minister Carneiro Pacheco (1887-1957) between 1936 and 1940, substantially marked by the change of name from Ministry of Instruction to Ministry of National Education (1936).

By adopting the perspective of family as the core of social organization, the new policy assigned women to the private domestic sphere and the responsibility for children's education to the family. This very traditional idealization of motherhood contained in the policy gave this responsibility to women, considered as the mainstay of the family and of social order (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1936).

In pursuit of this goal, the women's state organization *Obra das Mães para a Educação Nacional* (OMEN) [Association of Mothers for National Education] was established as an institution, aiming at the integral education of women, empowering mothers to take charge of family education, in particular to educate their children. OMEN sought to encourage the educational role of the family, and promote and ensure pre-school education as a complement to the family action (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1936).

The concern over the preparation of mothers for this task denotes the preponderance of the *scientific motherhood* ideology, highlighting the belief that maternal behaviour should be based on scientific knowledge. The discourse about the need to protect poor children, whether through attending kindergartens or through educating working class mothers, are underpinned by a health concern to combat child mortality and morbidity, advocating scientific childcare (Sousa, 1939). Early childhood education institutions were thus viewed as part of a broader system of maternity and childcare that encompassed a diverse number of institutions, such as childcare dispensaries, milk banks or nurseries, the purpose of which was not only to ensure *healthy bodies*, but also *healthy minds* (Souto, 1933). Most of the institutions of this period—e.g. *Lar do Pequenos*, in Montemor-o-Novo (Noticiário: 'Lar dos Pequenos', 1941), Centro Maternal e Infantil (Fundação Júlia Moreira) or the *Creche de Pedro Folque* (*Os amigos das crianças*, 1945)—are part of this welfare logic of maternity and childhood protection.

In 1937, the official early childhood education was definitely abolished on the pretext that it could not be guaranteed to all the children in the country (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1937), with the State being responsible for promoting the educational role of the family, assisting private institutions that promoted pre-school education, and exercising the role of regulator or supervisor. As a guide, and at the expense of the educational function, the welfare and assistance to sociofamily issues affecting children's lives prevailed, taking on the role of monitoring the popular classes. As a sign of this sense of direction, early childhood education was transferred from the Ministry of National Education to the Under Secretariat for Welfare, under the tutelage of the Ministry of the Interior, later Ministry of Welfare.

The model covered the training of educators and assistant educators, and was considered within the framework of private education and welfare assistance. The Normal Social School, created in the second half of the 1930s, was a private teaching school that offered training of social workers and whose curriculum was oriented towards mother and child care services. The School created a specialized course in children's nursing care, with competences in kindergarten teaching (Ferreira & Mota, 2018).

The tendency to centralize and privatize welfare services (Cardona, 1997) increased, visible in its regulatory principles (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1944). A number of institutes were set up in 1945, aimed at the support and education of young people, and the Instituto de Assistência à Família [Institute of Family Welfare], responsible for creating children's schools and welfare services (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1945). The idea was abandoned, not least because the State failed to provide financial support thereto. In 1949, and in the framework of the Ministry of National Education, in defining the Statute of Private Education (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1949) early childhood education is construed as for children not of school age, criteria were defined for the opening of school establishments and for the requirements of moral and civil suitability, as well as for the specialized training of its human resources.

Some childhood education initiatives survived, especially in the field of welfare assistance, notably the work carried out by Bissaya Barreto, with the *Obra de Proteção à Grávida e Defesa da Criança* (OPGDC) [Institution for the Protection of Pregnant Women and the Defence of Children] which, seeking to find answers to the social needs of families created the *Casas da Criança* [Children's Homes], following Maria de Montessori's pedagogical model. Her influence is reflected in the name of these Children's Homes, offering nursery school and kindergarten components. Between 1936 and 1970, 25 *Casas da Criança* were set up in the central region of Portugal (Ferreira e Mota, 2018).

Note also the continued activity of the private educational *Associação de Escolas Móveis e Jardins-Escolas João de Deus*, which promoted a general "Portuguese model of kindergarten", based on the Maternal Guidebook. In 1946, it took the name of *Associação de Jardins-Escolas João de Deus*. As defined in its articles of incorporation, these kindergartens held a two-year course (later turned into three years) on pre-school didactics as preparation for primary school teaching. In April 1974, there were 23 *Jardins-Escola João de Deus* and within about thirty years the Association had trained 1,118 teachers (Gomes, 1977).

In short, early childhood education was of a welfare essence, was marked by privatization, and seemed to develop along two socially different axes: private institutions for children from privileged backgrounds,

dominated by educational concerns; and, on the other hand, welfare institutions (albeit with some exceptions), for the children of working mothers and attended by children from less privileged backgrounds (Santos, 1953).

## Childhood education at the turning points

The 1950s and 1960s brought about changes in the Portuguese society that strongly influenced pre-school education. Despite the Estado Novo Regime still being in power, the Portuguese society experienced, in the decades following 1945, a time of “invisible changes” (Rosas, 1994), with a structural transformation between 1950 and 1974, that became even more visible in the 1960s, namely the changes in the economic structure, resulting from industrial progress, the intensification of tertiarization, the colonial war and emigration, leading to an increase in the female labour force. As more mothers entered the job market, social demand for childcare increased. As in other countries of European Union, the growth of the female labour force also explains the expansion of nurseries and kindergartens in Portugal (Vilarinho, 2000).

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, childhood education changed gradually, with an increase in the number of early childhood education establishments, children attending them, and normal early childhood education institutions. The latter increased from 94, in 1950-1951, to 177, in 1959-1960, and to 209 in 1962-1963, that is, an increase of thirty-two institutions, representing a growth of about 18 %. In the same period, the number of children attending these establishments rose from 1,954 children to six thousand in 1959-1960, and more than eight thousand in 1962-1963.

Similarly, the offer of normal early childhood education institutions expanded. Two private schools for kindergarten teachers were created in 1954, the Instituto de Educação Infantil [Early Childhood Education Institute], set up by the “Associação de Educação Infantil” [Early Childhood Education Association], and the “Associação de Pedagogia Infantil” [Childhood Pedagogy Association] created the Escola de Educadoras de Infância [School of Kindergarten teachers]. Adopting the spirit of apostolate and mission and Catholic morality (Vilarinho, 2000) as structural elements for the training of teachers, their concept of education was centered around the child, based on the precepts of childhood sciences, especially those derived from child psychology. In 1963, two schools were established that depended on the General Inspectorate for Private Education: one in Coimbra, the Escola de Educadoras de Infância de Nossa Senhora da Anunciação [School of Kindergarten Teachers of Our Lady of Annunciation], set up by the Servas do Apostolado [Servants of the Apostolate] Institute

(open between 1955 and 1974); and one other, in Porto, on the initiative of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, the Paula Franssinetti Teaching School. Four years later, two schools for kindergarten assistant teachers were established in Porto and Lisbon, under the supervision of the Directorate General for Welfare. In 1968, the Directorate-General for Welfare, the Sisters of Saint Dorothy Institute and the Patronage of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy agreed on the opening of the Paulo VI School, aiming at training teachers and assistant teachers of welfare care institutions for minors (Ferreira et al., 2019).

The 1960s were a turning point for formal early childhood education. Some factors contributed to taking a fresh look at early childhood education, but also to the construction, albeit in a very incipient form, of the public pre-school network (Nóvoa, 2005), which was almost a necessity due to the growing demand of this educational level, which between 1960 and 1965 almost tripled (Sampaio, 1968). For example, the changes in the Portuguese educational policy as the result of a growing concern over the training of human resources with a view to economic development (Teodoro, 2001), the growth of the female employment rate and the consequent increase in the social demand for childcare facilities (Vilarinho, 2000), and the dissemination of studies that highlight the compensatory function of childhood education, that is, its role in the fight against school failure, especially among children from the less privileged classes.

The role assigned to normal early childhood education in promoting mental health, in compensating for the shortcomings in family education—whether due to the inability of parents or to the growing number of working mothers—, and the “easier adaptation of children who attended early childhood education to primary school” (Sampaio, 1968, p. 86) were the grounds for the need to expand early childhood education.

One contributing factor to this was Portugal’s participation in the Mediterranean Project coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which gave new meaning to economic and social policies that were now linked to the development of the education sector, and which will effectively promote the quantitative and qualitative expansion thereof, in particular in the 1960s and 1970s. This project resulted in the production of two reports (Instituto de Alta Cultura, 1963, 1964). The first one presents the situation of early childhood education at the time, defining it as dependent on private institutions, of an exclusive urban nature, and entailing high monthly costs per child for the families. The second report presents a forecast for 24 thousand children enrolled in early childhood education between 1974 and 1975, pointing out, however, the difficulties in forecasting due to the irregular growth of early childhood education in Portugal, as well as the high children/teacher ratio.

The concerns regarding the compensatory and prevention role of early childhood education and the training of teachers regained some visibility in a report (1964) drafted by Émile Planchard, which purpose was to organize a new National Education Charter, calling for the need to prepare an official network of kindergartens and the establishment of public teacher training schools (Cardona, 1997). Moreover, an opinion issued by the Corporate Chamber for Education and Research, during the discussion of the 1965-1967 Interim Development Plan, which addressed early childhood education in Portugal, the limitations of families in its implementation, and its importance in the development of children, recommended the official establishment of early childhood education (Gomes, 1977).

With regard to official discourses, until 1973 the guidelines for pre-school education followed the aforementioned principles. In that same year, before the reform of the education system, the Department of Pre-School Education was set up within the Ministry of National Education, and in July the reform conducted by Veiga Simão gave a new boost to this process by reintegrating early childhood education in the educational system, for the purpose of the overall and balanced development of children, while taking into account the concern for moral and religious principles (Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1973).

The concern for the implementation of the law is expressed with the setting up of two primary teaching schools (Ministerial Order of 20 June), even before Law 5/73 was promulgated, one in Coimbra and the other in Viana do Castelo, which were opened in November and December 1973, respectively. Several kindergartens were also created, dependent on the Ministry of National Education (Gomes, 1977). However, as Salgado Sampaio argued, their experimental nature and limited scope did not allow for the creation of concrete and objective conditions for the expansion and democratization of pre-school education.

## Conclusion

The development of early childhood education in Europe was a slow and uneven process due to regional contrasts, sharp socioeconomic asymmetries, and diverse social and cultural contexts. These circumstances led to different appropriations of the ideas about the education of children, and different positions on childhood, and shaped the material and symbolic conditions of the development of children's education and of childhood in Portugal.

Although the production of laws from 1834 to 1910 focused on the educational role of institutions, the results were insignificant. Despite the concern showed by pedagogues and politicians, early childhood education



faced the State's inability to implement a relevant project within the educational system, and was successively postponed. It was only in the centenary year of Friedrich Froebel's birth that the first public kindergarten was opened in the Jardim da Estrela, in Lisbon, influenced by the Froebelian method.

The belief in education as a motive for regenerating the country and as a support for the construction of a new individual, free from the dogmas of the past through the moral and intellectual development of citizens, placed education, in general, and childhood education, in particular, high on the political agenda during the First Republic.

The fact is that, despite the legal-regulatory rhetoric, public childhood education remained almost non-existent, and the decade initiated by the military dictatorship in May 28th, 1926, did not change the substance or the form of the *statu quo*.

It should also be noted that the First Republic was a time for affirming the educational function of early childhood education and its integration in the official educational system.

The Estado Novo political legitimacy was materialized in a hegemonic manner in education, with the taking up of office of Minister Carneiro Pacheco (1887-1957) between 1936 and 1940, substantially marked by the change of name to Ministry of National Education (1936).

With the perspective of family as the core of social organization, the Estado Novo assigned women to the private domestic sphere and the responsibility for the education of children to the family. Within the family, in a traditional idealization of motherhood, this task fell on women.

In short, marked by privatization and a welfare essence, early childhood education developed along two socially different axes: private institutions for children from privileged backgrounds, dominated by educational concerns; and, on the other hand, welfare institutions for the children of working mothers and attended by children from less privileged backgrounds.

During the turning years of the 1960s and in the first five years of the 1970s, early childhood education hardly existed despite the political intentions. Pre-school education in that same period was limited mostly to urban centres, with a high population density indicative of the consequent development of the commercial and industrial sectors. It can also be inferred that in cities where the population is predominantly rural, the demand for kindergartens is associated with an increase in female labour.

The welfare and moralizing vision that marked the Estado Novo policy until 1970 opened the way for two avenues for the development of child-care support services: one social and solidary in nature, and the other predominantly educational (from 1973 onwards), under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education and following from the reform of the educational system.

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