

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR LATIN AMERICA UNDER THE
PERSPECTIVE OF "DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD" OF THE WORLD
BANK**

***EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL PARA A AMÉRICA LATINA SOB A ÓTICA DO
"DESENVOLVER A PRIMEIRA INFÂNCIA" DO BANCO MUNDIAL***

***EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL PARA AMÉRICA LATINA BAJO LA PERSPECTIVA DE
"DESARROLLO DE LA INFANCIA TEMPRANA" DEL BANCO MUNDIAL***



Camilla Maria BORTOT¹
e-mail: camilabortot@gmail.com



Elisângela Alves da Silva SCAFF²
e-mail: elisscaff@gmail.com



Kellcia Rezende SOUZA³
e-mail: kellcia@hotmail.com

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¹ State University of Maringá (UEM). Maringá – PR – Brazil. Professor in the Department of Foundations of Education at the State University of Maringá. Post-doctoral student in Education at the Federal University of Paraná.

² Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), Curitiba – PR – Brazil. Associate Professor at the Department of School Planning and Administration at the Federal University of Paraná (DEPLAE/UFPR).

³ Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD), Dourados – MS – Brazil. Adjunct Professor at the Faculty of Education Post-Doctorate in Education at UFPR.

ABSTRACT: This study aims to critically analyze Early Childhood Education in Latin America from the perspective of the World Bank's "Developing the First Years" (DFY) initiative. It employs a qualitative approach, and bibliographic and documentary research was conducted, primarily based on data from World Bank documents – and its experts – in recent years. The study reveals how the Bank prioritizes the DFY agenda through social and educational programs for economic development and the (re)production of future human capital, strengthened by the neuroscience discourse. To achieve this, the documents articulate how to develop these legitimized programs as best practices in education, nutrition, and health, decentralized and at multiple levels, i.e., through intersectoral practices with alliances with the private sector. In conclusion, contrary to the Bank's perspective, it is argued that it is essential to Develop Early Childhood based on a critical, emancipatory, and decolonial perspective.

KEYWORDS: Educational Social Policy. World Bank. Developing Early Childhood. Latin America.

RESUMO: Este estudo busca analisar de forma crítica a Educação Infantil na América Latina sob a ótica do "Desenvolver A Primeira Infância" (DPI) do Banco Mundial. Mediante uma abordagem qualitativa, realizou-se uma pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, com base prioritária de dados dos documentos do Banco Mundial – e de seus experts – nos últimos anos. O estudo revela de que maneira o Banco tem como agenda o DPI a partir de programas sociais e educacionais para o desenvolvimento econômico e a (re)produção de capital humano futuro, fortalecida pelo discurso da neurociência. Para isso, os documentos manifestam o como desenvolver esses programas legitimados de boas práticas de educação, nutrição e saúde, descentralizadas e em multinível, ou seja, em práticas intersectoriais com alianças com o setor privado. Por fim, ao contrário da perspectiva do Banco, defende-se que é fundamental Desenvolver a Primeira Infância pautada em uma perspectiva crítica, emancipatória e decolonial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas Educacionais. Banco Mundial. DPI. Educação Infantil. América Latina.

RESUMEN: Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar de manera crítica la Educación Infantil en América Latina desde la perspectiva de "Desarrollar la Primera Infancia" (DPI) del Banco Mundial. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, se llevó a cabo una investigación bibliográfica y documental, con base prioritaria en datos de los documentos del Banco Mundial, así como en la información proporcionada por sus expertos en los últimos años. El estudio revela de qué manera el Banco establece la agenda del DPI a través de programas sociales y educativos para el desarrollo económico y la (re)producción del capital humano futuro, fortalecido por el discurso de la neurociencia. Para lograr esto, los documentos expresan cómo desarrollar estos programas, legitimados como buenas prácticas en educación, nutrición y salud, descentralizados y en niveles múltiples, es decir, a través de prácticas intersectoriales con alianzas con el sector privado. Finalmente, en contraposición a la perspectiva del Banco, se defiende que es fundamental Desarrollar la Primera Infancia desde una perspectiva crítica, emancipadora y decolonial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Política Social Educativa. Banco Mundial. Desarrollo de la Primera Infancia. América Latina.

Introduction

The World Bank (WB) has operated, since its creation in 1944, in granting loans to member countries and developing a set of studies and consultations for governments on topics such as poverty, agriculture, industry, and environmental issues, among other contents aimed at public policies. In education, his intellectual production aims to diagnose educational problems and propose solutions that often include economic and social reforms for various sectors of society. With this, it produces guidelines and arguments aimed at education, with the aim of debating international issues, especially the formation of human capital and the alleviation/management of poverty.

In this sense, the WB promotes a global reference agenda that encompasses a wide range of documents that permanently feed 'interested parties', such as signatory countries, with 'guidelines' on political priorities; specialized support through consultancy and technical assistance to countries interested in the design and implementation of policies; the dissemination of recommendations on teaching policies through the participation of consultants in events and congresses, publication of books and other productions; partnerships with private sector institutions; holding meetings, gatherings, and seminars, bringing together heads of state and ministers to hear consultants' interpretations of the imperatives of achieving educational goals and expanding dialogue on strategy guidelines, seeking to advance in the convergence of agendas and actions (BRITO NETO; SHIROMA, 2015).

Among the argumentative and guiding priorities of the Bank's documents for education is early childhood education with the central axis of early childhood development (ECD). Since 1970, there have been recommendations for Early Childhood Education in Education Sector Documents (WORLD BANK, 1974) which, since the beginning of the 21st century, have been constituted, via their network of experts, in the dissemination of arguments to a decisive *audience*. In the design, implementation, and evaluation process (DENBOBA *et al.*, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; EVANS; Kosec, 2011; GAAG; TAN, 1998; MYERS, 1992; NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011; SAYE; WODON, 2014; VEGAS; SANTIBANEZ, 2010; YOUNG, 1996).

Concerning the above, this article presents some of the results of research in discussions about the influences of Multilateral Organisms in the hybridization of educational policies for children in Latin America. In the meantime, the objective is to critically analyze Early Childhood Education in Latin America from the perspective of the "Developing Early Childhood" (DPI) of the World Bank. Methodologically, the research that underlies this text

has a qualitative approach, constituting itself as a bibliographical and documental one insofar as it seeks to understand the production of scientific knowledge about certain aspects of the investigated reality. It should be noted that documents are human activities that reveal their ideas, opinions, ways of acting, and world perception based on written, numerical, statistical, and visual documents, among others (BRAVO, 1991). Although the documental research allows a multiplicity of contributions, in the present investigation, the written documents stand out predominantly from the World Bank and its consultants, whose analysis will be carried out from the literature related to the theme and the socio-historical context.

The empirical work was structured in two moments: first, we demonstrate what the World Bank calls IPD and its intentions, and then we carry out a descriptive examination of how to develop early childhood in arguments of the World Bank and its consultants in recent years. Years for Early Childhood Education in Latin America.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the expression 'expert' will be used throughout this exposition according to the technical-political meaning attributed to it by Shiroma (2014). According to the author, the activity of *experts* goes beyond the technical mastery of a given field of knowledge or area of professional intervention, also relating to ensuring the sustainability of educational reform plans. To this end, these plans intervene as conflict mediators, promote the adaptation of transnational agendas to the local scope, disseminate ideas and proposals, provide scientific advice in decision-making, and create and reformulate engaged knowledge for policy.

Developing Early Childhood: What Does This Slogan Reveal?

The term 'Early Childhood Development' (ECD) is a recurring concept, which we characterize as a *slogan*, when it comes to Early Childhood Education in documents produced by the World Bank and/or published by its consultants, who are mostly economists. Since 1970, there has been an approximation with the ECD, which is articulated with poverty, in order to align the education of parents with the nutrition of pregnant women and their children (WORLD BANK, 1974). In 1980, in the document entitled *Education: sector policy paper*, as strategic entry points for ECD, programs involving nutrition, health, and social development were highlighted, with an emphasis on the role of the preschool in parent education programs about health, nutrition, and family life (WORLD BANK, 1980).

In the 1990s, the publication of the document *Priorities and Strategies for education: sectorial studio del Banco Mundial* (WORLD BANK, 1995) marked the beginning of lending for the development of children in early childhood, directly in the document as a strategic line to be followed and as a financing strategy by the Bank. By the way, one of the guidelines in the document concerns the role of education and the importance of generating synergies with other sectors, such as nutrition and health, in the formation of human capital.

In the documents above, economic analyses direct Early Childhood Education to ECD actions, in which *investing* in childhood (children and their families), which is outside the living conditions considered productive by the State, is a social risk that demands monitoring (PENN, 2002). Thus, the alliance between economics and Early Childhood Education as an investment strategy in the human capital of poor children is fundamental for poverty alleviation (CARVALHO, 2016). Therefore, ECD involves educational actions and those related to health, family support, employment, and social integration.

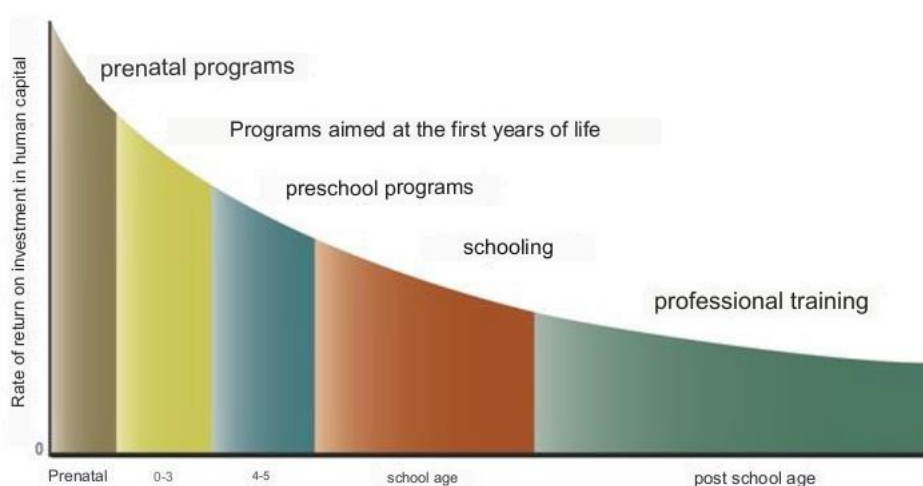
In turn, these propositions focus on the development of skills that aim at forming a productive individual and entrepreneur of himself – the citizen of the future – and are structured under the equity-cost-effectiveness integration, that is, at the same time that promotes the maintenance of poverty, whose educational assistance involves the expansion of commercial and philanthropic partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean (BORTOT, 2022; BORTOT; LARA, 2019). These announcements materialize the financial agenda outlined in the 1990s and early 2000s by the World Bank: a good investment in a productive and instrumental notion of early childhood that emerges from the theory of human capital, strengthened by the discourse of neuroscience (MARQUEZ, 2016).

Pereira (2010, p. 457, our translation) points out that, throughout history, the OM acquired broad, disseminated and solid legitimacy as a “source of data, guarantor of ideas, trainer of policy-makers, producer of comparative analyzes and guide in matters of development policies”, in order to disseminate, legitimize and produce studies on the impacts of successful programs for the DPI, focused on the triad of human, social and economic development.

In this triad, economists carried out research showing the importance of investing in Early Childhood Education, considering that it is the most profitable social investment for society (HECKMAN, 2000; HECKMAN; PINTO; SAVEKYEV, 2013). Investment in ECD programs thus has a high rate of return for society as a whole. Some estimates made by the American economist, James Heckman, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2000,

indicate that for every US\$ 1 invested in early childhood policies, there is a return to society of up to US\$ 17 (UNICEF, 2019). For this, nutritional conditions, family environment, mother's education level, and quality of interventions received at the daycare center, among other aspects, are included in calculating costs and returns. This calculation makes it possible to prescribe appropriate conduct and guide measures aimed at minimizing the risks that poor children do not develop satisfactorily.

Figure 1 – Strategic inversion: childhood programs and their rates of return on human capital by Heckman.



Source: Heckman *et al.* (2008)

For Heckman *et al.* (2008), investments in human capital, in addition to reducing inequalities, reduce – and even eliminate – the efficiency *versus* equity trade-off, since, in general, these investments are more equitable due to the similarity of children in their early years. Years of life, regardless of their cultural context of origin. In this economic view, the primary goal of child development is to produce a fruitful adult population by fostering stronger and more economically prosperous communities.

The impact of education on child development has been widely discussed in the economic literature (ARAÚJO, 2011; VIANA, 2012). Therefore, developing early childhood, from the perspective of the World Bank, involves education policies and the importance of synergy with other sectors, such as nutrition and health, in the formation of human capital, given the economic efficiency of Early Childhood Education and its magnitude as a solution to the various economic, political and social problems that affect developing countries.

To this end, to develop early childhood, integrate education and health into intersectoral programs planned as strategic investment points, based on home programs educating fathers

and mothers about health, nutrition, and hygiene in the first years of life. Life allows articulating, as a way of providing, public-private partnerships of formal and informal health, nutrition, and stimulation programs integrated into home daycare centers or with support in non-institutionalized Early Childhood Education centers (WORLD BANK, 1995; 2000).

These questions of *how* to develop early childhood have developed throughout the 21st century. To this end, an *expertise* and *advocacy* network was established for Early Childhood Education based on intersectorality, in order to meet the World Bank's education and health agenda. In this sense, the following section demonstrates, from the Bank's perspective, *how* to develop early childhood, with the aim of constituting a globally structured agenda for Early Childhood Education in Latin America.

How to Develop Early Childhood: the arguments of the World Bank

Fundamentally, developing early childhood is a strategic way of linking economic development to poverty management in the Latin American region (BORTOT, 2022). Recent studies published by the World Bank and its *experts* demonstrate *what to do* and *how* to achieve an investment in early childhood aiming at great returns, in order to meet the agenda of uniting social development with economic development through education. That is, in addition to characterizing the importance of developing early childhood from an economic perspective, they develop what they call *good practices in decentralized and multilevel education and health*.

In the document *Education sector strategy update: achieving education for all, broadening our perspective, maximizing our effectiveness* (WORLD BANK, 2006), education is linked to the economic development agenda, with the proposal to help integrate education into national economic strategies. For Early Childhood Development, integrated interventions in education, health, nutrition, and promotion of social and cognitive development of children from 0 to 6 years of age are proposed again.

In 2007, the institution published an important study entitled *Early Child Development From Measurement To Action International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, specific to early childhood (WORLD BANK, 2007). The item 'Early Child Development: Raising Awareness and Investments' highlighted that growth and development programs for young children (ages 0-6 years) are the "best investment to develop the human capital needed for economic growth" (BANK MUNDIAL, 2007, p. 70, our translation), given that the

programs for the stage, summarizing the Bank's study, are the basis for the formation of human capital; have the highest rate of return on economic development; express the most cost-effective way to reduce poverty and promote economic growth.

To this end, the document emphasizes the types of support and alternative options for ECD programs, with a multilevel cooperation network:

Support for ECD programs is needed by parents, communities, clinics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other local and regional institutions, social institutions and larger government departments. Alternative ECD options: A full range of options should be available to children, parents and communities. Having cost-effective alternatives and complementary options will reduce the overall cost of ECD programs and increase access to these ECD programs by the poor and/or rural children and families (WORLD BANK, 2007, p. 213, our translation).

In addition, it emphasizes the role of civil society in "creative" *cooperative forms* of financing in some countries in Asia and the Pacific, Central Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa

Indonesia is exploring public funding of community-driven ECD programs. Brazil is partnering with foundations and private banks to build capacity in ECD caregivers.

The Open Society Institute continues to provide catalytic funding and assistance in 30 countries.

Jamaica is initiating legislation and policies to encourage funding for early childhood development.

The Dominican Republic established a Competitive Fund for educational innovations (WORLD BANK, 2007, p. 258, our translation).

In the 2007 document, the World Bank highlights the work with childhood education in Brazil, in its publication, as an example to be followed based on successful practices based on evidence. The program in focus was the "Brazil 's Millennium Fund for Early Childhood" (WORLD BANK, 2007, p. 215), developed by the Bank in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO, to the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina⁴. The aim was that a fund could galvanize private sector participation and increase the level of effort and investment in early childhood development, most notably "providing small grants to communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to establish and maintain high-quality ECD services. quality for young children" (WORLD BANK, 2007, p. 216, our translation) in community, philanthropic or public institutions.

⁴Cachoeira do Sul, Canela, Guaíba, Montenegro, Sapucaia do Sul, Charqueadas and Porto Alegre (RS); Chapecó, Itajaí, Joinville and Lages (SC).

What to do and who will carry out the ECD programs are explicit: the participation of civil society organizations that integrate international, regional, and national social networks has notably increased, and the dispute for hegemony to carry out the ECD programs in partnership with the local level since early childhood education is usually crowded at the municipal/provincial level. The legitimacy of governance networks is not given; it needs to be conquered and negotiated within the scope of the *stricto sensu* State and civil society (SHIROMA, 2020) – and, in the case of the guidelines and studies produced by the World Bank, the recipe is ready in the search to advance in the convergence of multilateral agendas and actions.

From this perspective, the document *The Promise of Early Childhood Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*, published in 2010 by Emiliana Vegas and Lucrecia Santibáñez⁵, sponsored by the World Bank, member of the *Latin American Development Forum Series*⁶ and sponsored by Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the World Bank.

After carrying out a general analysis of early childhood development in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on the precariousness of female participation in the workforce, poverty, infant mortality, nutrition, health and the family socioeconomic context, signaled that coverage of ECD services in Latin America remains low: existing programs reach only a small fraction of potential beneficiaries, especially among younger children.

Targeted ECD programs include programs that educate parents on how to best care for their children (parenting practices), programs to ensure that 0-2 year olds have childcare from multiple care arrangements such as community-based 0-2 to 3 years and preschool education programs for children aged 3 to 6 years. Such programs should “mainly benefit children from poorer backgrounds” (VEGAS; SANTIBÁÑEZ, 2010, p. 29).

Incidentally, most of these programs pursue common goals, such as: improving a developing child's quality of life early in life, including their cognitive and socio-emotional development, physical growth and well-being; improving maternal antenatal care with services and information to enhance the likelihood of delivering a healthy baby; and educating parents and/or caregivers in better parenting, health and hygiene practices, providing them with the

⁵Economist consultants in the Education sector of the World Bank's Human Development Department.

⁶This series was created in 2003 to promote debate, disseminate information and analysis, and convey the enthusiasm and complexity of most current issues of economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean on fiscal policy, climate change, immigration, labor, corporate governance, globalization and IPR.

opportunity to participate in the workforce in the future. It is still emphasized that ECD programs in Latin America are important because they affect the community in general that assist children from birth to 6 years old, such as mothers, caregivers, daycare centers, preschools, and health centers (VEGAS; SANTIBÁÑEZ, 2010).

These statements, according to the authors, are based on one of the many benefits of ECD interventions in developed and developing countries – and which, by the way, must be offered in an intersectoral and multisectoral way:

Ideally, such policies create links between different policy areas that affect young children, including services such as health, nutrition, education, water, hygiene, sanitation and legal protection. In other words, national policies are multidisciplinary and multisectoral, providing a framework that can coordinate the work of the various sectors of government needed to deliver integrated ECD services (VEGAS; SANTIBÁÑEZ, 2010, p. 29, our translation).

Before indicating *what* and *how* to do these programs, Vegas and Santibañez (2010) seek to legitimize their considerations in evidence on early childhood development interventions worldwide with an intersectoral approach, such as the so-called *Small programs*, namely: *The Perry Preschool Program*, in the city Ypsilanti, Michigan (USA); *The Carolina Abecedarian Program*, in North Carolina (USA); *Chicago Child Parent Program* (USA); Other so-called *Large-scale programs*, such as: *The Head Start Program*, in the US; *Community Mothers Program* (CMP) in Ireland; *preschool Education Project* (EPPE), in the United Kingdom; *Nutrition and Early Child Development Program* in Uganda; and *The Turkish Early Enrichment Project*, in Turkey.

In summary, the BM consultants point out that these programs *offset* consequences associated with inequality via educational work. Thus, they mark the intersectoral coordination of programs and projects (and not policies) for poor children and families. At the end of the document, they indicate *how to* increase the coverage of ECD programs, “based on existing successful programs to solve country-specific challenges” (VEGAS; SANTIBÁÑEZ, 2010, p. 127, our translation).

In addition to the intersectoral coordination for the service, they guide the ways of providing for the expansion in collaboration:

[...] international groups and operating foundations committed to funding long-term programs in low-income communities, such as the Christian Community Children’s Fund, Save the Children, Plan International, and World Vision, may occasionally provide intermediary funding for a national

program. International NGOs often rely on private donors and benefactors willing to provide long-term sustainable funding for children or communities as building blocks of such a policy, all of which should be considered early in the process. Also, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations States, and the Pan-American Health Organization. These large organizations provide financial support and technical advice (VEGAS; SANTIBÁÑEZ, 2010, p. 158, our translation).

The concerted agenda integrates the new configurations of the social contract to the multiple arrangements of agreements between the public and private sectors for the development of the IPD. Said financial support and technical advice are intended to insert and open to the mercantile logic, converging on the (re)definition, alignment and control of policies, by operationalizing more flexible, decentralized models, in order to overcome borders and dichotomies in the north of the reconfiguration of the role of the State, hidden by the promotion of civil order through communitarian ideals of collaborative social cohesion.

In 2011, the WB published the study 'How to Invest in Early Childhood: A Guide for Discussing Policies and Preparing Early Childhood Development Projects', by consultants Sophie Naudeau, Naoko Kataoka, Alexandria Valerio, Michelle J. Neuman and Leslie Kennedy Elder⁷. The document seeks *to dialogue politically* with the Ministers of Finance, Planning and Social Affairs of the countries, in addition to development partners and civil society itself (ATINC⁸, 2011), making it, as the title indicates, a guide on why to invest in ECD programs on their determinants: economic, survival, health,⁹ school readiness and success.

The first factor, the economic one, is the strongest and intertwines with the others, given that, according to Naudeau's arguments *et al.* (2011), interventions in the early years of life have the potential to offset these negative trends, providing younger children with more opportunities and good outcomes in terms of access to education, quality of learning, physical growth and health – and, eventually to productivity. Investing in ECD has a ripple effect on the lives of beneficiaries, making it the most cost-effective thing a country can do for human development and building the nation's human capital (NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011), since, based on evidence, underprivileged children who do not benefit from quality ECD programs are

⁷Sophie Naudeau (Human development specialist, Human Development Network, Children and Youth Unit (RDHCJ), World Bank; Naoko Kataoka (consultant); Alexandria Valerio (Senior Economist, RDHCJ); Michelle J. Neuman (ECD Specialist, Department of Education, Africa Region, World Bank); and Leslie Kennedy Elder (Senior Nutrition Specialist, World Bank Department of Health, Nutrition and Population).

⁸Story by Tamar Manuelyan Atinc, Vice President of the World Bank's Human Development Network, who authored the foreword.

⁹School readiness refers to how prepared a child is to learn and succeed in school (ACKERMAN; BARNETT, 2005).

usually not prepared to learn when they enter primary school, which leads to inefficiency in the public education system, with a high cost to families and society. Thus, there is the incentive that investing early not only has a high cost-benefit ratio, but also a higher rate of return than interventions aimed at older children and adults, characterizing it, therefore, as a “good financial investment”” (NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011, p. 40).

The other determinants – survival and health; readiness and school success – are interrelated in the development of ECD programs for Early Childhood and their families, since, as in the previous study, intersectoral and multisectoral coordination is required in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

Covering the areas of health, nutrition, education, and social protection, as well as the fact that government involvement is often limited in scope, building an integrated policy framework can increase a nation’s visibility of its vision and goals in relation to early childhood, clarifying the responsibilities of different actors and agencies, providing crucial guidance for public and private investments. A country’s institutional arrangements for ECD governance are closely linked to the development of these policies. However, no single approach encompasses all perspectives (NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011, p. 88, our translation).

The *how* to do involves, according to the authors, cost-effectiveness, and the results of these programs should have as target audience: parents, children, parents and children, from prenatal care to children’s 6 years; types of services offered: educational (preschool, parent education), family support associated with health and nutrition, relating to therapeutic, community work; program reach: national, state, city, single group; funding sources: public, private, public-private partnerships and international assistance. Service modes should be organized into:

Organizational structures – a description of the administrative and coordination structures that operate at all levels of government and in the private sector including the organizational structure and respective responsibilities.

Investment plans – a description of how human, institutional, financial and material resources will be allocated and mobilized, including the balance between public and private resources.

Communication Strategies – a description of how communication will flow between administrative structures and other stakeholders, including policy advocacy communication.

Partnerships – in particular partnerships between funders/donors and implementers, including NGOs and community-based organizations, and responsibility for their coordination.

Monitoring and evaluation processes – a description of the accountability systems, which will measure, monitor and evaluate progress towards the

policy goals (NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011, p. 92, emphasis added, our translation).

Regarding the offer, they point out that its cost-effectiveness is materialized by the low cost of the multiple forms of assistance, including classrooms, community centers, religious institutions (for example, churches, mosques, etc.), family homes “or even under a tree” (NAUDEAU *et al.*, 2011, p. 102). These centers may be owned, funded or managed by a variety of entities, such as government, community, non-profit organizations, private companies and religious institutions, or through partnerships between these entities.

Both in the study by Vegas and Santibañez (2010) and in Naudeu *et al.* (2011) public-private partnerships, called *sharing funds*, are strongly oriented by allowing a decentralization of resources and management, in order to involve public, private, public and private resources for third sector organizations and international agencies and NGOs.

The last WB document selected is entitled *Scaling up Early Childhood Development: Investing in Early Childhood with Big Returns*, authored by consultants Amina D. Denboba, Rebecca K. Sayre, Quentin T. Wodon, Leslie K. Elder, Laura B. Rawlings, and Joan Lombardi, 2014. The paper also turns to policymakers on how to invest in early childhood. The study identifies 25 ECD interventions to be delivered intersectoral, covering the education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and social protection sectors.

The document demonstrates a recipe for *packages* organized into five axes: family support package; pregnancy package; birth package; child health and development package; and preschool package, in a multidimensional and sequential process (DENBOBA *et al.*, 2014a). The first package encourages parental support for families in vulnerable situations via maternal education and social assistance transfer programs, based on income support, which leverage investments in human capital; the second deals with specialized prenatal care and counseling for mothers, with a view to preventing infant mortality; the third postulates on the nutrition and immunization of children from birth to 5-6 years. The first three are the basis, according to Denboba *et al.* (2014a), for the preschool package, which covers the period from 3 to 6 years old, with ECD programs – preschool and early childhood education programs (non-school, so as to involve parental education) – that aims at preparing for primary education to improve academic performance and prevent repetition and dropouts.

For this to happen, it is necessary to develop “*Integrated services to achieve synergies and cost reduction*” (DENBOBA *et al.*, 2014a, p. 17), emphasizing the role of multiple public and private partners, from planning policies to coordinating interventions, with synergies

through the provision of integrated services. All these actions are very important in contexts where mothers and young children are difficult to reach.

Finally, the study sponsored by the IDB for the development of the Americas, entitled *The early years: child well-being and the role of policies*, edited by Samuel Berlinski and Norbert Schady, in 2016, also points to important elements on the agenda of DPI. It highlights investment in child development as “the most profitable alternative” (BERLINSKI; SCHADY, 2016, p. 153). In this regard, the authors state:

The application of resources in early childhood is one of the **best investments that a government can make**. For starters, the earlier a government invests in children, the longer the country has to reap the benefits. Also, the rate of return on certain investments may be lower when investing later in life (for example, after a certain age, it is harder to make gains in intelligence quotient, or IQ). Finally, **investments in early childhood development have a domino effect on subsequent investments; in other words, the return on investment in human capital is highest when it is made early in life. On the other hand, disparities in child development outcomes are already present before a child starts elementary school**. Public investment in early childhood can act as a powerful **equalizing force** (BERLINSKI; SCHADY, 2016, p. 153, emphasis added, our translation).

The concepts 'investment', 'human capital' and 'equity' are the triad of recommendations in the study by Berlinki and Schady, published by the IDB (2016). To legitimize the discourse of this triad, they carry out a comparative study of expenditures between Latin American and Caribbean public expenditure data referring to early childhood with the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Chile, Colombia and Guatemala, in order to to encourage the development of home visiting programs, full-time child care and part-time educational activities for preschool children that aim to enrich their development and prepare them for school. The model for these programs estimates the cost of three groups of inputs: human resources; infrastructure; and nutrition, equipment and supplies.

However, the authors elected, based on comparisons between programs, that home visitation is the least expensive option, as it does not “require expenses with infrastructure or nutrition. Among basic structural quality programs, daycare is less expensive than preschool” (BERLINSKI; SCHADY, 2016, p. 186, our translation). In addition, such programs can have public intervention without discounting the participation of the private sector directly, since there is wide flexibility in the transfer of resources in most countries in the region: “The government can provide direct subsidies to providers or, indirectly, for consumers, regardless

of the type of service provider – public or private” (BERLINSKI; SCHADY, 2016, p. 199, our translation).

The integration of governance and intersectionality between the various sectors and the institutions responsible for programs and policies are equivalent to the strategies pointed out by the World Bank consultants, both in horizontal coordination between sectors, such as health, nutrition, sanitation, education, work and social protection, and vertically between the national, subnational and local levels of government. Local governance actors are referred to as *external influencers from civil society*, grassroots organizations, academia, business sectors and international organizations, working in areas such as accountability – introducing intersectoral competition for funding, program redundancy and resource allocation. Suboptimal resources – monitoring and evaluation and/or development of standards and models already consolidated, as they measure low cost with good economic returns. The educational intentions, on the other hand, are focused on equitably focusing on vulnerable children and prioritizing actions to prepare them for later stages of education, supported by models that have already been solidified and that are evaluated with good results, with the objectives disseminated by the World Bank’s DPI.

The *how* is prioritized with multiple justifications from national best practices to international experience – from validating data and models – to prescribe a policy agenda of evidence-based models: non-formal intersectoral equitable ECD programs and services or mixed, because they have a lower investment cost, financial return, the flexibility of the professionals who work there and the spaces/management of their operationalization in the management of poverty and vulnerability. In all studies, the experts work with what is known based on evidence to support the adoption of certain policies over others, offering advantages over simply political or ideological forms of decision-making, above all by instrumentalizing the paths to fulfill the agenda of global DPI.

The World Bank's and its experts' arguments seek to legitimize good practices as possible ways to invest in early childhood to develop it as a viable return for poverty management. They, in turn, confirm the centrality of ECD in constructing intersectoral *service arrangements* as an investment alternative and philanthropy with social impact. Poverty in the early years of childhood is increasingly becoming a commodity, albeit under the pretext of a new form of philanthropy based on collaborative participation between the State and private civil society. The international-to-regional orientation of the agenda to Latin American

countries disseminates and harmonizes the construction of policy entrepreneurship with the delivery of development and aid policy (BALL, 2014).

Therefore, the Bank's arguments, highlighted throughout the study, instrumentalize the international agenda and develop evidence-based policy *advocacy* backed by political decisions in solid research that shows the type of policies that work. However, it is known that the evidence can be easily instrumentalized to support the adoption of certain policies instead of others; that is, the ECD becomes a merely economic instrument that does not seek to take children and their families out of a situation of vulnerability in they are, by providing quality education and social mobility.

The preparation of a wide range of documents that permanently feed interested parties and guidelines on political priorities subsidize the configuration of a regional network for consultation and dissemination of studies through consultancy and technical assistance to countries interested in the design and implementation of policies in search of advancing in the convergence of agendas and actions.

Furthermore, the importance of the *presumed worlds* of policymakers (MCPHERSON; RAAB, 1988) and their ability to do political work to carry out agendas, beyond the national context, and mediate new meanings, as they translate policies, evidence and knowledge between different locations (LENDVAI; STUBBS, 2007), legitimizing, through their *know-how*, which practices countries should follow and why. Experts seek, in their studies, to mobilize cultural capital and act *as* key actors in networks: they carry out governance work that mobilizes or articulates political blocs; build alliances, negotiate and reconcile interests; they put together projects that define the direction and purpose of governing (BOSWELL, 2009) and how to institutionalize certain policies to the detriment of others. Furthermore, it should be noted that they are "chosen" political actors, being mediators and translators of the World Organizations (OM), with considerable power to interpret the data and transform them into policy recommendations.

Conclusion

This article sought to present an analysis of the arguments of the World Bank – and its *experts* – for Early Childhood Development. This, in turn, is based on the defense of development that tends to praise the logic of the market and the economy, with the causes of the crisis driving social inequality; education would then be a mechanism for achieving poverty reduction and the development of productive capacity. Thus, Early Childhood Education, from the perspective of flagged ECD, becomes the object of programs and policies in the States as an investment of future capital - and, as a good social investment, it has become the epicenter of the agenda of institutions linked to the Third Sector in Latin America.

Take Brazil as an example, through the Maria Cecília Souto Vidigal Foundation (FMCSV), a partner foundation of Todos pela Educação (TPE). The Institution has been converging with the World Bank's agenda of *investing in early childhood with great returns* by guiding entrepreneurs to support the DPI, whose Early Childhood Education is seen as a business with a social impact in programs that involve the education of parents, family members, caregivers and health and social development professionals (FMCSV, 2016). Regarding business opportunities for Early Childhood Education, the Foundation highlights possibilities in teacher training; infrastructure for schools; toys, apps or management tools; organization of philanthropic spaces by the number of children out of school (BORTOT; SCAFF, 2020).

By way of conclusion, the arguments of the World Bank for ECD, since 1970, have incorporated the speech of alleviation of poverty for great economic returns and, in the last years, guide that partnerships between the public and private sectors are firmed, implying the “development of a new sphere of power entirely dedicated to private purposes, not social ones” (Wood, 2010, p. 36), in which the term ‘political action’ is linked, under a new guise, to economic action, through the business community on an agenda of decentralization, ideological influence and privatization of public education services.

It is argued that developing early childhood is fundamental from a critical, emancipatory, and decolonial perspective so that we can advance as a society interested in the integral development of subjects and not from a perspective based on economic and commercial interests. It is necessary to break with the production of scientifically endorsed knowledge that provides the guidelines and recommendations through which the poor child population is

compared to the norms of healthy human development and prepared to become productive in the long term.

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