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THE SCHOOLARIZATION OF CHILDHOOD: THE INDELIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INITIAL TRAINING OF EDUCATORS IN PORTUGAL

ABSTRACT

In Portugal, the model of initial training of early childhood educators conditions the margins of curricular autonomy of higher education institutions, through the imposition by decree-law of a matrix organized in training components and disciplinary areas with uniform presence and weightings. In this article, we present the results of an analysis of the study plans, defined and published in the Official Gazette by each of the 29 institutions that currently provide initial training to characterize the tensions that are identified in them between schooling and childhood education, namely by the presence or absence of curricular spaces dedicated to daycare and kindergarten, the study of education and childhood and the construction of inter and transdisciplinary learning.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Teachers' education; Higher education.

A ALUNIZAÇÃO DA INFÂNCIA: O INDELÉVEL CONTRIBUTO DA FORMAÇÃO INICIAL DE EDUCADORAS/ES EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Em Portugal, o modelo de formação inicial de educadoras/es de infância condiciona as margens de autonomia curricular das instituições de ensino superior, através da imposição por decreto-lei de uma matriz organizada em componentes de formação e áreas disciplinares com presença e ponderações uniformizadas. Neste artigo, apresentamos resultados de uma análise dos planos de estudo, definidos e publicados em Diário da República por cada uma das 29 instituições que atualmente fazem formação inicial para caracterizar as tensões que neles se identificam entre a escolarização e a educação da infância, nomeadamente pela presença ou pela ausência de espaços curriculares dedicados à creche e ao jardim de infância, ao estudo da educação e da infância e à construção de aprendizagens inter e transdisciplinares.

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil; Formação inicial; Ensino superior.

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What's In A Name
I ask: what's in a name?
Of what thickness is made if attended,
what wars sustain him,
Parallel?
Lineages, servile grounds,
races tamed by a few syllables,
Foundations of history in the laws that were forged
Fire and flame?
Extirpated the name, will remain love,
thou shalt and I remain - even in death,
even if in myth only
And even the myth (listen!),
Our Brief History
which some will read as inert matter,
it will remain forever of the human.
And others
the will always collect,
when his century lacks it.
And, my love, greater strength of me,
We will be to them like the rose -
No, like your perfume:
Ungoverned, free
(Ana Luísa Amaral, 2020, s.p.).

1 INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, the training courses for educators have changed their names. They are now called “Basic Education” and “Preschool Education” instead of “Early Childhood Education”. Does this transformation, imposed by decree-law, carry with it a set of meanings? Or does it mean nothing and childhood, though unspoken, persists? What remains of the scent of excised Early Childhood Education, which was, the word childhood? Does the transformed name uproot it, mischaracterize it, subalternize it, expand it?

We wanted to stop and think about these issues because we are teachers involved in the initial training of early childhood educators, with positions coordinating training courses in two different schools, one public and one private. We wanted to write to know more, so that, through research, study and writing, we can expand our self/critical capacity and reflect on what we do - in this way, we can do better, different or not, but (re)recognizing and sharing the story, identifying the options and conditions in which we develop our work.

Stake (2007) tells us that the function of research is not to dominate the world, but to sophisticate its contemplation. Sharing this conviction, we began a research path that began in the study of a school that united us (GOMES; BRITO, 2018) and goes on, a bit like the scent of the rose, “ungoverned free” (AMARAL, 2020).

In this article, we present the first phase of an explanatory study (CRESWELL, 2014) that aims to analyze the initial training of Early Childhood Educators (FEI) in Portugal. Two central questions guide us:

- i) What coherence exists between the specificity of early childhood education (characteristics, purposes, research, practices, professionals, spaces, contexts, work models, references) and the EIF? The study plans of the FEI courses reflect the specificity of childhood education or are closer to the school curricular matrix?
- ii) Since the FEI is carried out in higher education (which in Portugal is a context of recognized scientific and curricular autonomy), what freedom do the HEIs present in the construction of the curriculum of the training they offer?

In what follows, we present the research and documentary analysis of the study plans of each of the 29 Higher Education Institutions (from now on, HEIs) public and private, polytechnic and university, which offer FEI courses in operation in 2020. The article begins by presenting the context of the research, with a summary of the literature review on early childhood education and on the FEI in Portugal. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the data that will allow us to make some considerations, as well as to redefine guiding questions for the continuity of the research.

2 BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW THAT SUPPORTS THE PROBLEM AND CLARIFIES THE CONTEXT

The debate around the construction and development of the curriculum in early childhood education has been intense and has revealed the pressures exerted by school form/grammar. These pressures exist, both with regard to the instrumental vision on the value of childhood education to reside in the promotion of greater school success, and in the reference grid used to organize the time, space, materials, and dynamics that present the curriculum in early childhood education, as evidenced in the works of Formosinho, 2020; Vasconcelos, 2019; Folque, 2019; Abramowicz, Cruz and Moruzzi, 2016; Gobbi, 2016;

Wood and Hedges, 2016; Garnier, 2014; Tomás, 2014; Soler and Miler, 2003, among others. From different perspectives and contexts, the authors reveal how the centrality of the child(s) has been fading in favor of greater control by adults, often with a view to a search for the guarantee of predictors of school success, and initiation to school learning, or training of inherent skills and attitudes.

Tomás (2014) considers the need to reconstruct the place of childhood cultures in childhood education. In dialogue with works by Manuel Sarmiento and Teresa Vasconcelos, it highlights a set of images and paradigms of childhood that have reinforced a conception of the child as an object of adult action, preventing their participation in the continuous reconstruction of the cultures of the world. One of the images results, precisely, in the *alunization* of children, which translates into an early schooling of their lives, and which is materialized, through:

Educational policies and practices focused on the early acquisition of school culture; Evaluation and quality management processes focused on technical-administrative dimensions; Standardization of organizational processes of accountability; Socialization process oriented to individualism (TOMÁS, 2014, p. 138).

The analysis of this process of alunization of children and schooling of childhood education has been done in different countries, reflecting an internationalization and even globalization of current policies and models. Gobbi (2016), in his analysis of the common national curricular basis for early childhood education in Brazil, recalls that:

There are times, forms, values, contents, needs, conditions, diverse desires in the different groups and people that need to be considered and that cannot be converted into accelerated modes of knowledge production, regardless of age group (GOBBI, 2016, p. 126).

Abramowicz, Cruz and Moruzzi (2016) point out the effort “to try to think of early childhood education in a non-school perspective and the curriculum in a non-content perspective” considering that “these attempts are insufficient to the extent that the very idea of the existence of a common basis makes it impossible to break with the epistemology that erects it” (ABRAMOWICZ; CROSS; Moruzzi, 2016, p. 52). Garnier (2014) analyzing the case of France, finds that “the history of the nursery school can be read as that of its successive accumulation, its specific decline and its relative importance according to the contexts” (GARNIER, 2014, p. 66). This synthesis is also appropriate for the development of early childhood education in Portugal, as we will see later.

Wood and Hedges (2016), in characterizing the international situation surrounding the early childhood education curriculum as a battlefield, consider that:

Curriculum have moved from *laissez-faire* approaches towards control discourses that have previously applied to compulsory schooling, so that ECE must justify economic investment by proving its effectiveness, particularly in securing 'school readiness' (WOOD; HEDGES, 2016, p. 389).

Vasconcelos (2019, p. 20) tells us that “if we think about childhood education today, in its social, political, human context, two key words emerge: Frontier and hospitality”. Brito (2019) identifies three challenges to rethink the quality of childhood education: “We put the current scientific knowledge about the child at the center of our understanding of their development and learning”, “to know the reality of very young children and their families in Portugal”, “to be able to translate the knowledge(s) into concrete action in the face of the uniqueness of each context” (BRITO, 2019, pp. 32-35).

Participating in these debates and confronting the urgency they place on the redefinition of early childhood education and its quality criteria, at a time when more and more children attend formal educational institutions, from an earlier age, seems to us to be extremely relevant for the FEI. As such, in this article, we seek to situate the FEI in Portugal in the face of the above tensions, summarily, pointed out. Thus, the question we raise is to understand to what extent the study plans of FEI courses open space to thinking and debates about childhood education, about education and about childhood.

Larrosa (2013) wrote a long text questioning whether there is still time, space and opportunity to think about colleges/schools of education. Considers that the university/higher education is on a path marked by the:

Profound change in forms, procedures, ways of doing [...]. What we have is an attempt to make the logics of the internal functioning of the university strictly functional to the economic logics of society and the governmental logics of the state, or, in other words, the cancellation of what Rancière calls ‘the heterogeneity of forms’, that is, the difference between the school form (ambiguous, open to a multiplicity of options and meanings) and the strictly functional forms of production and government (LARROSA, 2013, pp. 145-146).

Knowing and following the FEI since the 1990s, we are interested in understanding and characterizing its transformation, illuminating its specificity and verifying the heterogeneity of the ways of doing training and being an educator in Portugal.

2.1. Foundations of history

As we have already observed in previous investigations (GOMES; BRITO, 2018), the development of the activity of childhood education is marked by a dialogue between care and educational functions, which complexifies the construction of initial training for professional practice, as well as hinders its understanding within the reading frameworks of training and teacher performance. However, in Portugal, the FEI has been approaching the format and legal framework of teacher training, just as early childhood education itself has been formally and partially included in the education system.

In fact, Law No. 46 of 1986 - Basic Law of the Educational System established Pre-school Education as the first stage of basic education. This Basic Law triggered a process of reorganization of the system, which includes pre-school education (aimed at children between 3 and 5/6 years old) and excluded daycare (aimed at children between 0 and 3 years old). Thus, after the publication of relevant studies that allowed the characterization of childhood education practices in Portugal, at the end of the 1990s, there was a set of educational policy decisions of great relevance for its reorganization. It was defined, for the first time, an official document of national scope that establishes the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-school Education (LOPES DA SILVA; NÚCLEO DE EDUCAÇÃO PRÉ-ESCOLAR, 1997); the Framework Law on Preschool Education was approved; There was a review and standardization of teaching careers at all levels of non-tertiary education, including pre-school education. In 2001, the general and specific performance profiles of teachers of basic and secondary education and pre-school education were defined in a Decree-Law, which circumscribe the specific professional exercise of early childhood education to its relationship with curricular guidelines.

All these measures were central to the development and valorization of childhood education in Portugal, and constituted a fundamental axis to correct the discrepancies between working conditions, salaries and careers of early childhood educators, teachers of basic and secondary education. On the other hand, they seem to have reinforced the existing split within childhood education, establishing a demarcated boundary between pre-school childhood education and kindergarten education. In fact, having been the most visible moment of implementation of childhood education policy, which gathered consensus and revealed scientific and empirical foundations, the truth is that it did so exclusively for pre-school education, reducing, in some way, childhood education to work with children from 3 to 6 years of age, on the threshold of entry to compulsory schooling.

It's also observed that, and as with any movement to build equality from strategies of standardization of the conditions of existence, the educators, their training, their practices, the places and the rooms of activities were, gradually, becoming more similar to each other. See, for example, the progressive disappearance of the formats of itinerant childhood education and community animation that, although provided for in the law, no longer exist in practice, given the way they move away from the uniform vision of what it's to be a teacher in Portugal, from the possibility of organizing, in school, the curriculum, as well as the time and space of pre-school education.

At the same time, higher education and initial teacher training have undergone major changes provided by national and international educational policy movements, including some phases of approximation to pedagogical movements (see in this regard, NÓVOA, 1992; SARMENTO, 2002; PINTASSILGO, 2012; NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATION, 2015, among others).

Throughout the 1990s, the restructuring of the FEI required the transition to the undergraduate level, as was the case with the training of all other teachers. The Degree in Early Childhood Education had a duration of four years in which there was an appreciation of the preparation for teaching in pre-school / kindergarten education, leaving to the discretion of higher education institutions the option to include, or not, the daycare center as a context of study and internship, and babies as an object of study, knowledge and understanding. This option is justified by the fact that only the work of educators in Kindergarten (JI - *Jardim da Infância*) is consensually considered teaching work, since only the JI/preschool education was politically assumed by the Ministry of Education, in accordance with the LBSE, with the consequent hiring of early childhood educators and opening of staff places in preschool education.

In 1999, the Bologna Declaration, signed by the countries of the European Union, launched a process of revision of the higher education systems in each of the acceding states in order to achieve a European area of higher education, with a common and comparable structure and language. To this end, some mechanisms have been developed, among which we can highlight the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which establishes eight levels of common qualification that serve as a reference for the organization of education systems with a view to their approximation to the European labour market - with qualification levels 5 to 8 relating to higher education. At the same time, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was created, which seeks to be a system for translating and circulating students' higher education experiences among the various European countries.

In this context, in 2006, in Portugal, the legal framework that enshrines the national commitment to adhere to the Bologna process emerges, reconfiguring the higher education system, within the scope of an amendment to the LBSE, which is followed by the revision of the structure of higher education institutions in Portugal through the Legal Regime of Higher Education Institutions. In addition, and as a mechanism for verifying and maintaining this progressive approximation of the national education system to the European area of higher education, it was decided to create a foundation, the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education, which certifies and authorizes the courses offered by each of the higher education institutions in Portugal, as well as the functioning of the institutions themselves.

In the course of this process, in 2007 the Decree-Law (DL) was published, which redefines the professional qualification of teachers for all levels of non-higher education, including pre-school education. Accordingly, from 2007/2008, the FEI will have the level 7 qualification (according to the EQF), being made through two cycles of higher education: Degree in Basic Education and Master in Pre-school Education or Master in Pre-school Education and Teaching of the 1st Cycle of Basic Education, during which students obtain between 240 credits and 270 ECTS credits, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Initial Formation of Early Childhood Educators (FEI), pre and post Bologna Declaration

	<i>FEI course designation</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>International correspondence</i>
<i>Pre Bologna</i>	Degree in Early Childhood Education	4 years	Not applicable
	Degree in Basic Education	3 years	Level 6 QEQ 180 ECTS
<i>Post Declaration of Bologna</i>	Master's Degree in Preschool Education	2 semesters (2007)	Level 7 QEQ 60 ECTS
		3 semesters (2014)	Level 7 QEQ 90 ECTS
	Master in Pre-school Education and Teaching of the 1 st Cycle of Basic Education	3 semesters (2007)	Level 7 QEQ 90 ECTS
		4 semesters (2014)	Level 7 QEQ 120 ECTS

Source: DL No. 79/2014; DL No. 43/2007.

There are several aspects that deserve to be highlighted. The first is the disappearance of the designation “childhood education” and the concomitant loss of specificity in training. This is because the Degree in Basic Education is the common basic training for the professional qualification of teachers in Pre-school Education (children from 3 to 6 years old) and for the 1st and 2nd cycles of basic education (for teaching work with children between 6 and 12 years of age). This aspect is reinforced by the fact that a new

offer of initial teacher training has been created common to the professional qualification as early childhood educators and as teachers of the 1st Cycle of Basic Education. The second is the speed of legislative changes that require curricular and organizational changes (from 1997 to 2007, from 2007 to 2014). Currently the training is even longer than initially planned, and the duration of the second cycle of studies has been extended by one semester, having been awarded another 30 ECTS credits, which places Portugal as a reference country for the requirement of initial teacher training in early childhood education as it notes Vasconcelos (2019).

In short, with the publication of the LBSE, the FEI in Portugal went from a secondary course with diversified and unequal structures, with little or no tutelage from the central state, to a bachelor's degree course, lasting 3 years, with exclusive operation in Higher Schools of Education recognized and authorized by the Ministry of Education. After a decade, the training began to be done through a degree course, lasting 4 years, in order to concretize and respond to the unification of teaching careers. After another decade, the training began to be done by obtaining a master's degree, with frequency of two courses, called cycles of studies of higher education, with a total duration of 4.5 years to 5 years, within the scope of the European area of higher education and respecting the standardization of the teaching careers in force in Portugal.

It's also interesting to specify the guidelines provided for in the law for the construction of qualification courses for the teaching profession, that is, the curricular structure to which the Bachelor's and Master's courses identified above must obey. DL No. 79 of 2014, currently in force, identifies as references for initial training, the LBSE, the curricular documents of the various levels of education and teaching, namely the Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education, as well as the general guidelines of educational policy (article 6). From here they emerge as necessary areas:

- a) Teaching area: "Aims to complement, strengthen and deepen academic training", promoting "the deepening of knowledge of subjects related to pre-school education and teaching areas, focusing on its advanced foundation";
- b) General educational area: "Covers the knowledge, skills and attitudes common to all teachers relevant to their performance in the classroom or classroom, in institutions intended for early childhood education or at school, and in the relationship with the family and the community", including, inter alia: "Developmental psychology, cognitive processes, namely those involved in the learning of reading and elementary mathematics, the curriculum and assessment, the school as an educational organization, special educational needs, and the organization and management of the classroom";
- c) Specific didactics: This is "the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the content areas and the teaching of the disciplines of the respective teaching group";
- d) Cultural, social and ethical area: which "is ensured within the scope of the other training components";

e) Initiation to professional practice: Which integrates “the observation and collaboration in situations of education and teaching and the supervised practice in the activity room or in the classroom, in the institutions of childhood education or in schools”, namely, the realization of “internship of a professional nature subject to final report” (DL 79/2014, Article 7th to 12th).

These training components must also have a differentiated presence in the study plans, operationalized in ECTS credits, which is defined in the same law and explained in table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of ECTS credits among the training components

	Degree in Basic Education	Master's in Preschool Education	Degree in Education	Master in Education	Pre-school and Teaching of the 1 st CEB
Teaching area	125		6		18
Minimum number of ECTS	15		6		6
General educational area	15		24		36
Minimum number of ECTS	0		0		0
Specific didactics: minimum number of ECTS	15		39		48
Cultural, social and ethical area	170		75		108
Minimum number of ECTS	180		90		120

Source: DL No. 79/2014.

As can be seen in the table above, the DL predetermines the curricular structure of the training, which becomes even more evident if we add that in the, the teaching area must include a minimum of 30 ECTS of Portuguese; 30 ECTS of Mathematics; 30 ECTS of Natural Sciences and History and Geography of Portugal and 30 ECTS of Expressions (Article 13 of DL No. 79/2014).

It can be seen that, in 2021, the FEI in Portugal is one of the most demanding in the world, in terms of the total duration of training and the academic degree to be obtained for career entry. And this is a very positive aspect. After all, how to refute the importance of the duration of training? How to question the option of FEI courses being predetermined, verified, scrutinized in order to guarantee their nature and functioning? How can we oppose the existence of salaries and a teaching career that respects and remunerates, equally, a kindergarten teacher and a teacher of Portuguese literature or mathematics, physics or philosophy of secondary education?

Maybe we can't. But, we can see that, in Portugal, the initial training of educators is also one of the most standardized, since the path to obtaining professional qualification is deeply uniform and standardized - decided by law, and independent of the previous paths of students or the options, history, projects and convictions of higher education institutions,

thus reduces, and from the outset, the heterogeneity of the forms enunciated by Rancière and brought to the debate on schools of education by Larrosa (2013). In addition, given the scope of training and the standardization it proposes for educators and teachers, it's further away from the position between borders that characterizes childhood education, as has been well maintained by Vasconcelos (2019):

We can affirm that childhood education is at the crossing of borders. If only psychology and psychologists dictated, at the end of the nineteenth century, what should be done with children, today childhood education is at the convergence of different disciplines: The neurosciences (study of the development of the human brain); anthropology and sociology (the contexts); sociology of childhood (the different childhoods), geography (places, contexts and cultures) (VASCONCELOS, 2019, p. 20).

3 METHODOLOGY: INQUIRING AND UNVEILING

As initially presented, the objective of this research is to contribute to the debate on the potential pressures that the school model of education has exerted on childhood education, highlighting the contributions made by the current characteristics of the initial training of educators in Portugal, from the research questions enunciated in the introduction and that refer to the coherence between childhood education and the study plans of the initial training courses of / the kindergarten teachers, and the autonomy of the institutions in the construction of their courses.

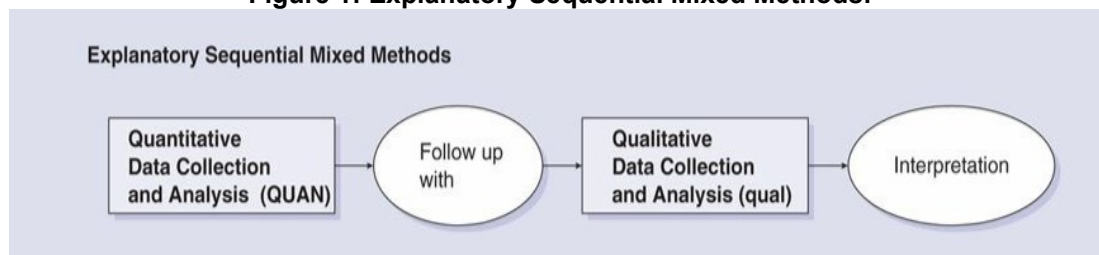
Taking into account the aforementioned disappearance of the Graduation / Degree in Early Childhood Education, we analyzed the legal support that, since 2007, puts in its place, the Degree in Basic Education followed by the Master in Preschool Education and Master in Preschool Education and 1st Cycle of Basic Education.

In this context, we have examined all the study plans of the courses that constitute the training offer in Portugal - from Private and Public Higher Education Institutions, Polytechnics and University - to the initial training of Educators in our country.

Our research thus approaches a mixed explanatory study / Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods (CRESWELL, 2014) that combines, in a first phase, a quantitative analysis - considering the totality of the training offer - and a qualitative analysis that seeks to understand the quantitative results through a subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data (CRESWELL, 2014, p. 267). The general intention of this type of explanatory studies is that the qualitative data help to interpret in more detail and depth the initial

quantitative results. Figure 1, based on the work of Creswell (2014, p. 270), shows its sequence:

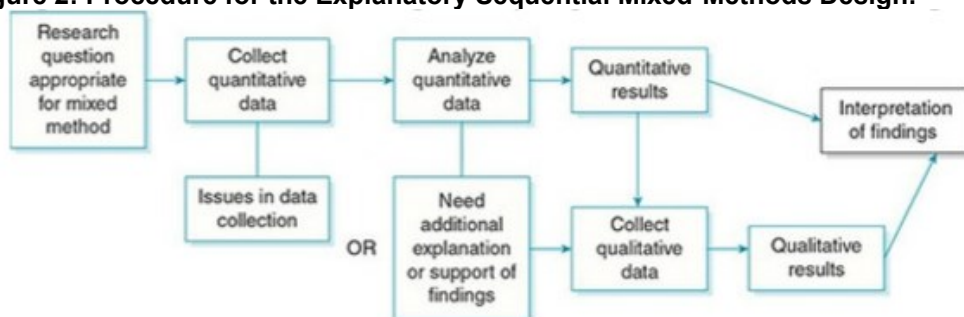
Figure 1: Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods.



Source: Creswell (2014, p. 270).

Data collection thus proceeds in two complementary phases with a rigorous quantitative approach in the first phase and a qualitative and intentional approach in the second phase. The key idea is that the collection of qualitative data is based directly on the issues raised by the quantitative results. It's intended, therefore, that the quantitative results can point to the qualitative questions to be posed so that they help to explain them (CRESWELL, 2014, p. 274) - the intention is that the qualitative data help to provide more depth, complexifying the quantitative results. According to Creswell (2014), the quantitative results that are sought and evidenced can be extreme cases, significant predictors, significant results related to the dimensions of analysis and little relevant results. Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019, p. 568), also based on the work of Creswell (2015), they present as one of the processes for conducting explanatory mixed studies what we highlight here by the connection to our investigative path:

Figure 2: Procedure for the Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design.



Source: Privitera e Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019, p. 568).

3.1. Stages of the research path

3.1.1. *Constitution of corpus*

From the preliminary analysis of the database of the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education, A3ES¹, searching the field of “Results of accreditation processes of study cycles”² (April, 2021), we found the existence of 9 Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), 19 Public HEIs, of which 13 in Polytechnic Higher Education and 7 in University Higher Education³, a total of 29 HEIs. The following tables present the list of institutions, identifying their training offer.

We start with private higher education institutions (Table 3), since, in Portugal, the training of early childhood educators has a longevity and a longer permanence in this subsector of higher education. As has already been widely observed (GOMES; BRITO, 2018; PINTASSILGO, 2015; SARMENTO, 2004, among other authors), early childhood education and the training of educators suffered from a great state disinvestment throughout the Estado Novo, namely from the 30s with the closure of the Normal Schools, which, when they reopened, did not maintain a training offer for childhood education. In short, this scenario allowed the flourishing of projects and private institutions for the training of educators that stand out here, because they predate democracy, the School of Educators of Lisbon / ESEI Maria Ulrich, the João de Deus School and the Paula Frassinetti School. It's also noted, in global terms, that the private offer is composed of nine training schools that are located in the metropolitan regions of Porto (ESE Paula Frassinetti, ESE de Fafe; ESE Piaget Arcozelo; ISCE Douro) and Lisbon (ESEI Maria Ulrich, ESE João de Deus, ISCE, ISEC, ESE Piaget de Almada, ESE of Lusophony). Finally, the reading of Table No. 3 shows that most of these HEIs offer both courses: MEPE and MEPE1CEB, with the exception of the ESE of FAFE, the ESE Piaget of Arcozelo, the ISCE of Douro and the ESE of Lusophony.

¹<https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/sistema-de-ensino-superior-portugues?plid=371>

²<https://www.a3es.pt/pt/acreditacao-e-auditoria/resultados-dos-processos-de-acreditacao/acreditacao-de-ciclos-de-estudos>

³According to the General Directorate of Higher Education “Higher education is Portuguese organized in a binary system that integrates university education and polytechnic education and is taught in public and private institutions (...). University education includes universities, university institutes and others (...). Polytechnic education comprises polytechnic institutes and other polytechnic educational establishments”. <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pagina/sistema-de-ensino-superior-portugues?plid=371>.

Table 3: Private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Portugal that confer professional qualification teaching - Childhood Educators.

IES Private	Training offer		
	LEB	MEPE	MEPE1CEB
Associação de Jardins-Escolas João de Deus ESE João de Deus	x	x	x
Associação de Pedagogia Infantil/ISPA & Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, Crl - ESEI Maria Ulrich & ISPA Instituto Universitário	x	x	x
Instituto De Estudos Superiores De Fafe, Lda - Escola Superior de Educação de Fafe	x		x
Instituto Politécnico Jean Piaget do Sul - ESE Piaget - Almada	x	x	x
Instituto Piaget - Cooperativa para o Desenvolvimento Humano, Integral e Ecológico, Crl - ESE Piaget - Arcozelo	x	x	
Instituto Politécnico da Lusofonia - ESE da Lusofonia	x		x
Pedago, Sociedade de Empreendimentos Pedagógicos Lda. – Instituto Superior de Ciências Educativas (ISCE);	x	x	x
ISCE do Douro	x		x
Província Portuguesa do Instituto das Irmãs de Santa Doroteia - ESE Paula Frassinetti	x	x	x

Source: A3ES - Accredited study cycles and respective HEIs.

With regard to the training offer within the public polytechnic subsystem (Table 4), it's observed the existence of thirteen training schools, with a strong territorial coverage that extends to different districts of mainland Portugal. Also here it's verified that most of the HEIs offer the two master's degrees (7 of the 13), and that, among the remaining 6, 4 offer only the MEPE1CEB, highlighting the cases of the ESE of Lisbon and the ESE of Portalegre for being the only ones that offer exclusively the MEPE (which, as has already been noted, exclusively enables teaching in early childhood education).

Table 4: Public polytechnic higher education institutions in Portugal that confer professional qualification for teachers - Childhood Educators.

Public Polytechnic IES	Training offer		
	LEB	MEPE	MEPE1CEB
Instituto Politécnico (IP) de Beja - Escola Superior de Educação	x		x
IP Bragança - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Castelo Branco - Escola Superior de Educação	x		x
IP Coimbra - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Guarda - Escola Superior de Educação, Comunicação e Desporto	x		x
IP Leiria - Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais	x	x	x
IP Lisboa - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	
IP Portalegre - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	
IP Porto - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Santarém - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Setúbal - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Viana do Castelo - Escola Superior de Educação	x	x	x
IP Viseu - Escola Superior de Educação	x		x

Source: A3ES - Accredited study cycles and respective HEIs.

In university higher education there are 7 HEIs, which extend the training offer to the archipelagos of the Açores and Madeira (Table 5). Among these, only two offer training in the two master's degrees - Universities of Évora and Minho. Most universities offer MEPE1CEB exclusively: UTAD, Universities of Aveiro, Madeira and Açores, with the exception of the University of Algarve, which offers MEPE.

Table 5: Public university higher education institutions in Portugal that confer professional teaching qualification - Childhood Educators.

Public University HEIs	Training offer		
	LEB	MEPE	MEPECEB
Universidade dos Açores - Department of Educational Sciences; Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities	x		x
Universidade do Algarve - School of Education and Communication	x	x	
Universidade de Aveiro	x		x
Universidade de Évora - School of Social Sciences	x	x	x
Universidade da Madeira - Faculty of Social Sciences	x		x
Universidade do Minho - Institute of Education	x	x	x
Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD) - School of Humanities and Social Sciences	x		x

Source: A3ES - Accredited study cycles and respective HEIs.

Thus, in global terms, we found that in Portugal, in 2020, there were 29 HEIs that train early childhood educators. Based on this preliminary stage, the corpus was constituted exclusively by the study plans of, MEPE and MEPE1CEB published in the Diário da República, constructed in sequence of DL No. 43/2007 (the first post-Bologna) and DL No. 79/2014 (the second, still in force) and that explain the convergence between the curricular matrix required by law and the curricular matrix built and adopted by the HEI. Thus, the corpus integrates 29 study plans of the, 25 study plans of the MEPE1CEB and 18 study plans of the MEPE, making a total of 72 study plans. In the study plans whose convergence between the curricular matrix required by law and the curricular matrix constructed and adopted by the HEI is distinct, only information is collected on the items that do not depend on this matrix for analysis, namely: a) UC whose designation refers to the thematic area of Education and Childhood (Education, Didactics, Pedagogy, among others); and b) UC of Initiation to Professional Practice (IPP) in the Degree in Basic Education, or Supervised Teaching Practice (PES) in both Masters.

After gathering all the study plans of the and Masters - MEPE and MEPE1CEB - of the referred HEIs, we then weave our framework of analysis from the questions posed, which served as guidance and support for its elaboration. Thus, an analysis strategy was carried out considering three dimensions, as explained below.

3.1.2. Analysis strategy

The analysis of the 79 study plans was based on the following premises:

i. Verify, in each study plan, the use given to the curricular flexibility / autonomy granted to HEIs, translated into the empty ECTS of content/training component in DL 79/2014 (that is, in each legal diploma the minimum number of ECTS of each training area is fixed, and this minimum number does not make up the total number of ECTS of each course); in particular, we highlight which areas were contemplated. This is an analysis that will allow (or not) to identify some trends of concerns/preferences in each HEI;

ii. Do a content analysis of the study plans in order to:

a. Within the component Training in the area of Teaching, “FAD”, identify the amount of ECTS and UC of monodisciplinary character (mathematics, grammars, plastic arts...); and the number and designation of multi, interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary UCs;

b. Throughout the syllabus, present the amount and designation of UC on childhood education, education and on childhood / children.

c. Within the “IPP” and “PES” component, expose the amount and designation of internship UC (and, if possible, contexts where they take place).

As part of this analysis strategy, we used the following protocol:

i. Completion of the analysis instrument presented in the annex, recording the distribution of ECTS by the training areas provided for in the DL, in each study plan of each HEI, highlighting the components that exceed the minimum number of ECTS provided for in the Law;

ii. In each syllabus of each HEI, the following must be identified and registered:

a. The number of UC and ECTS of FAD of monodisciplinary character, in each year / semester of the course;

b. The designation, number of ECTS and semestre / year in which each FAD UC is located that has a multi / interdisciplinary character (when two disciplinary fields are clearly related - e.g. In-depth topics of Portuguese and Mathematics) or transdisciplinary (when its designation does not translate a scientific discipline - e.g. Portfolio of competences);

c. The designation, number of ECTS, semestre / year in which it's located and training component of each UC that is on education topics, including instruction (e.g. Currents of pedagogy, SEN, History of education, Didactics of...) or on children / childhood (e.g. Childhood and Contemporary World, Developmental Psychology);

d. The designation, number of ECTS, semester/year in which each UC IPP/PES is located and, when possible, identify the contexts in which the internships take place.

Once the categories were defined, each author completed the analysis instrument (attachment) for three institutions of the total *corpus* (independent coding). Sharing its filling, they reflected and resolved the differences, clarifying it.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA: WHAT'S IN A NAME

“What's in a name? If given another name
Would your perfume be less sweet to the rose?”
Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II,
translated and quoted by Ana Luísa Amaral (2020, s. p.).

4.1. Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The Legal Regime of Higher Education Institutions (Law No. 62/2007) states that “public higher education institutions enjoy statutory, pedagogical, scientific, cultural, administrative, financial, patrimonial and disciplinary autonomy in view of the State, with the differentiation appropriate to their nature”. (Article 11, No. 1) and adds that “in view of the respective founding entity and in view of the State, private higher education institutions enjoy pedagogical, scientific and cultural autonomy”. (Article 11, No. 3). The law goes even further and enshrines, operationalizing, the pedagogical autonomy that we consider to be the most relevant to our problem and that we highlight here:

Pedagogical autonomy gives public higher education institutions the ability to draw up study plans, define the object of curricular units, define teaching methods, allocate resources and choose knowledge assessment processes, with teachers and students enjoying intellectual freedom in teaching and learning processes (Article 74).

Given this circumstance, we wanted to understand how the HEIs that offer training for kindergarten teachers express their autonomy in the study plans that they publish in the “*Diário da República*”. In the specificity of the problem presented above, in the analysis of the corpus, we consider the following indicators of autonomy:

- a) The decision to create (or not) the two master's degrees (MEPE and MEPE1CEB);
- b) The decision on the organizing criteria of the study plans published in the “*Diário da República*”;
- c) The terminology used to name the curricular units;

d) The decision to include (or not) the daycare center as an object of study and context of internship;

e) The decision on the distribution of ECTS not predetermined in DL no. 79/2014 (10 ECTS in, 15 in MEPE, 12 in MEPE1CEB) by the components of training / scientific areas.

As has already become clear in the presentation of the *corpus*, among the 29 HEIs that offer training in analysis (see Tables 3, 4, 5), about half (14) offer the two master's degrees provided for in the law, eleven HEIs offer exclusively the MEPE1CEB and four offer exclusively the MEPE. In future terms, it will be interesting to place this decision within the framework of the institutional project of each HEI; for now, we can only emphasize that there is more supply of MEPE1CEB, which, from the outset, may promote a shorter time of dedication of future educators to the study and experimentation in early childhood education, given the need, equally relevant, to prepare themselves to become also teachers of the 1st CEB.

This hypothesis is reinforced by the analysis of the data related to indicator c), since it's observed that the expressions "Childhood Education", "Kindergarten" and "Nursery" occupy a very residual place in the designation of the PAs that make up the study plans. In fact, there are nine HEIs that do not use any of these three expressions in their study plans. Overall, in each of the study plans, "childhood education" appears between 0 and 7 times, making a total of 73 occurrences in the complete *corpus*; "kindergarten" appears between 0 and 4 times in each of the study plans, making a total of 28 occurrences in the 72 study plans; daycare appears between 0 and 3 times in each study plan, making a total of 34 occurrences. It's clear that, beyond the name of the study cycles, the basic vocabulary of childhood education is little present in the training offer that configures the professional qualification. On the other hand, and crossing the indicators c) and d), we emphasize that "daycare" still maintains its presence in the study plans, even with a greater number of occurrences than "kindergarten".

Still with regard to the terminology used to designate the UCs, we highlight that several HEIs have chosen to adopt the language proposed in DL No. 79/2014, specifically to name the internships that, in many cases, have the name of "Initiation to Professional Practice", in the, and "Supervised Teaching Practice" in the master's degrees, as will be seen later. Somehow, all, HEIs, within their pedagogical autonomy, and teachers of higher education, with the intellectual freedom provided for in the law, we are aligned with political decisions and make a scant use of the language of early childhood education to name the curricular units we build.

In accordance with the information presented above (see Table 2), DL No. 79/2014 gives HEIs full autonomy to decide the allocation to scientific areas or training components of 10 ECTS in the, 15 in the MEPE and 12 in the MEPE1CEB. The following table summarises the information collected on this indicator.

Table 6: Training component further reinforced by HEIs in each course

	LEB	MEPE	MEPE1CEB
Teaching area	4	2	3
General educational area	7	6	10
Specific didactics	6	2	2
Initiation to professional practice / Supervised teaching practice	1	3	2
Equitable distribution between 2 or more training components	8	1	3
Study plans without identification of the training components of DL No. 79/2014	3	4	4
Total	29	18	24

Source: Study plans of HEIs published in the “*Diário da República*”.

In the analysis of these data, we begin by noting that there are 4 HEIs that have chosen to publish their study plans in the Official Gazette identifying the scientific areas in which each UC is integrated, but without any reference to the training components provided for in DL No. 79/2014. In the continuation of this study, it will be interesting to understand with the HEIs the reason that led to this decision; for the purposes of this article, we consider that this is a translator option of the scientific, pedagogical and organizational autonomy of HEIs. Another aspect that seems relevant to highlight is the fact that the Educational Area has been reinforced most often by the HEIs in the construction of the study plans of all courses. As can be read in the table above, of the 24 study plans of MEPE1CEB, 10 mainly reinforced this area; of the 18 MEPE study plans, 6 also opted for this area; in the, of the 29 existing study plans, 7 reinforced this area. Thus, it seems to be a consensus that HEIs tend to consider that training in the area of education is little present in the curricular matrix dictated by the law, opting, for the most part, to reinforce this area.

4.2. Between the fluidity of early childhood education and the corset of school form

With the analysis of the study plans we seek to understand how the HEIs gave form and content to each of the training components provided for in the Law. In what follows, we present the main trends found, with regard to the composition of the study plans of LEB, MEPE and MEPE1CEB.

Even before we get into the specificity of each of the training components, it's worth mentioning the large amount of UC that must be performed to obtain the qualification. In fact, the study plans are predominantly composed of UC with a semester duration, which is an option that, in itself, leads to an increase in the number of UCs and a greater pulverization of the training path. The study plans analyzed allow accounting for between a minimum of 28 UC and a maximum of 42 UC in the, between a minimum of 10 UC and 17 UC in the MEPE; in MEPE1CEB the interval is between 14 UC and 24 UC, which means that the training course if it's and MEPE may have between 38 and 61 UC, and if it's and MEPE1CEB it may have between 42 and 66 UC.

One of the characteristics attributed to the school form is the fragmentation of knowledge worked from strong disciplinary boundaries, as well as its decontextualization, given the arbitrary value that is attributed to the areas of knowledge considered (FOLQUE, 2019; FORMOSINHO, 2020). As such, it seems relevant to us to verify to what extent the designation of UCs conveys a more disciplinary nature (that is, maintaining the boundaries between disciplinary areas) or whether they have a more interdisciplinary meaning (appealing to a dialogue between clearly identified disciplinary areas) or even transdisciplinary (that is, using alternative designations to the disciplinary criterion). The analysis showed a strong predominance of UC of a disciplinary nature (e.g.: Mathematics; Portuguese Language; Language; History of Portugal).

In the context of the problem presented, one of the focuses of our analysis was also the careful observation regarding the quantity and designation of UC on childhood education, education and on childhood/children. In this sense, and because the analysis of the training components of the Teaching and Supervised Practice / Internships Area were the subject of particular study, this attention fell mainly on the UC of Didactics and General Educational Training.

At first, we record their designation, number of ECTS, semestre / year in which they are and the training component of each UC, either on education topics, including instruction

(e.g. Currents of Pedagogy, Special Educational Needs, History of Education, Didactics of ...) or on children/childhood (e.g. Childhood and Contemporary World, Developmental Psychology).

We verified, in this analysis, the presence of axes that allow us to fit the UC in the global scope of the study plans of each HEI - which oscillate between a maximum of 14 UC and a minimum of 6 UC per course - and the number of ECTS of the training that corresponds to them according to their relative weight in the legislation (and Masters) and in the training components reinforced by each HEI within the scope of its autonomy.

Most study plans present UC in the areas of Psychology (developmental, learning or education) and Theory/Management of the Curriculum. On the other hand, we found the presence, very small, punctual, of the Pedagogy of Childhood, of Playfulness, of the Sociology of Childhood, of the Philosophy of Education, of Inclusion and Pedagogical Differentiation, of Parental Involvement, of the Methodologies of Education in Nursery and Kindergarten, of (critical) Thinking about contemporaneity. In addition, occasionally, there are UC of Ethics and Professional Deontology and of Personal Development, Reflective and Critical, of the future professional.

Within the component of Initiation to Professional Practice (IPP) and Supervised Teaching Practice (PES), we also analyzed the quantity, the designation of internship UC and, whenever possible, the contexts where they take place.

With regard to the, 21 HEIs do not specify the context in which the IPP takes place, designating, in several cases, the UCs by IPP followed by the corresponding number in the study plan (IPP I, IPP II, etc.). We also found that, although the total ECTS of each HEI has little difference between the minimum stipulated by law, 15 ECTS and the maximum of 20 ECTS that two HEIs present, the way they are divided by the initial 3 years of training of the Early Childhood Educators is different. As an example, in a distribution that oscillates between 2 UCs and 6 UCs along the, we found study plans with clearly stipulated internship hours along with 8 others in which, in addition to not specifying the contexts of the IPP, the UCs do not have associated internship hours.

Thus, we highlight the HEIs that present specific contexts of practice and, particularly in the scope of our study, those that offer internship experiences in nursery and JI or nursery and pre-school education. In the, of the 8 HEIs that explain the contexts where the IPP will be held, only 4 refer to the daycare context, 3 of which along with the context of JI and one with the internship in EPE, in addition to the contexts of the 1st and 2nd CEB that are also part of the IPP in the training path. Corresponding to the to the first three years of formation of the educator / or of Childhood, this finding demands a deepening of the contexts and

hours of internship not specified or non-existent, to better understand their place in this first stage of formation.

With regard to the Master's Degrees, which confer professional qualification to the Childhood Educator, we also found that of the 18 HEIs that offer the MEPE, only half explain the context in which the PES is performed: 6 present as internship contexts the nursery and JI or the nursery and EPE; 2 only contextualize the internship in EPE and one HEI refers, globally, that all internships are carried out in Early Childhood Education.

In MEPE and 1st CEB, training offer of 25 HEIs, once again, in 12 Study Plans the internship context is not specified; of the remaining 13 HEIs, 7 have internships in nursery and JI and 1st CEB; two in nursery, EPE and 1st CEB; and 5 in EPE and 1st CEB.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When analyzing the problem of schooling in childhood education, Formosinho (2020) notes that “the constituent pedagogical and professional diversity gave rise to the incessant search for organizational uniformity, professional convergence and pedagogical standardization” (p. 14-15).

Throughout this article, we have presented data that allow us to affirm that, although we continue to identify strategies for preserving autonomy and alternatives on the part of institutions, the model of initial training of early childhood educators seems to contribute to accentuate this risk of schooling. We highlight, in the study plans of the 29 public and private, polytechnic and university higher education institutions, which offer initial training of early childhood educators in operation in 2020: 1) the large amount of UC that must be carried out to obtain the qualification; 2) a strong predominance of UC of a monodisciplinary nature (e.g.: Mathematics; Portuguese Language; Language; History of Portugal); 3) the prevalence, in the scientific areas of Didactics and General Educational Training, of UC of Psychology and of Theory/Management of the Curriculum, noting the residual presence of Pedagogy of Childhood, Playfulness, Sociology of Childhood, Philosophy of Education, Inclusion and Pedagogical Differentiation, Parental Involvement, Methodologies of Education in Daycare and Kindergarten, of (critical) thinking about contemporaneity and of the UC of Ethics and Professional Deontology and of Personal, Reflective and Critical Development, of/of the professional future; 4) the absence of specificity in 21 HEIs about the context where the internship takes place, within the component of Initiation to

Professional Practice (IPP) and Supervised Teaching Practice (PES), highlighting, in a small number, the HEIs that present specific contexts of practice and, particularly in the scope of our study, those that offer internship experiences in daycare and kindergarten or daycare and preschool education.

Given these predominant characteristics in the study plans analyzed, we fear that the spaces and times to think about childhood, education and childhood education will be extinguished, which we defend should be guided “by a perspective in which experimentations, the creations of new possibilities, thoughts, from make-believe and play, something impossible to be encapsulated, prevail. Universalized” (ABRAMOWICZ; CROSS; MORUZZI, 2016, p. 52) and fixed in the law.

However, more than reaching conclusions, we are interested in presenting questions that remain open and that will lead to new stages of research.

What opportunities exist for future kindergarten educators to study children, in their plurality, through reading grids that overcome the standardization of their development and the circumscription of learning within a curricular matrix marked by school form?

What opportunities exist for students of initial training courses to build a comprehensive and integrated epistemological vision that allows them to observe, understand and include plural ways of knowing and thinking about childhood education?

Que oportunidades existem para as futuras educadoras contactarem e conhecerem formas não escolares/não escolarizadoras de promover o bem-estar, a participação e a educação das crianças?

We end by recalling the need to open new spaces, within initial formation, for the fabric and plurality of childhood and for the heterogeneous specificity of childhood education. We end with the conviction and hope that, in this search, its essence and the opportunity may emerge so that, also in higher education and in the formation of early childhood educators, we remember that “teaching is creation, and this cannot be disregarded or disqualified as an expression of division in those who think and who execute, still present in certain professional activities”. (GOBBI, 2016, p. 128-129).

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APPENDIX

Analysis instrument

Designation of the Higher Education Institution: _____

Identification of DR publications of each study plan:

LEB _____

MEPE/ MEPE and 1CEB _____

Use of autonomy margins in the distribution of ECTS granted by Law to HEIs

2014+	LEB (180 ECTS)			MEPE (90 ECTS)			MEPE1CEB (120 ECTS)		
	Margins 10 ECTS			Margins 15 ECTS			Margins 12 ECTS		
Training in the area of teaching (FAD)	125 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			6 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			18 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES		
General educational area (AEG)	15 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			6 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			6 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES		
Specific didactics (DE)	15 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			24 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			36 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES		
Initiation to professional practice (IPP)	15 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			39 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES			48 ECTS in law _____ ECTS in IES		
Supervised teaching practice (PES - Masters)	_____ ECTS in IES			_____ ECTS in IES			_____ ECTS in IES		

Content analysis of each study plan

Categories of analysis	LEB	MEPE	MEPE1CEB
FAD: Number of UCs and ECTS of monodisciplinary character			
FAD UCs and ECTS inter and transdisciplinary			
UC on Education and Childhood			
UCs and their internship ECTS - contexts/duration			