

# Early Childhood Education in Brazil: The obstacles to a successful experience\*

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## La educación infantil en el Brasil: Obstáculos para una experiencia exitosa

• **Resumen:** *La Educación Infantil es un derecho reconocido en la Convención de Derechos de los Niños (2005). Sin embargo, este derecho ha sido pasado por alto, pues muchos países no tienen programas oficiales para los primeros años de infancia, o si tienen algunos programas, éstos no son efectivos. En 1966, el gobierno brasileño adoptó la política de integrar dentro del sector educativo la responsabilidad administrativa de las sala-cunas de niños y niñas de cero a tres años y de los preescolares de cuatro a seis años, lo cual fue un primer paso para la expansión de la provisión de Educación Inicial. Diez años más tarde, todavía hay una carencia de establecimientos públicos y los gobiernos locales no le dan alta prioridad en sus presupuestos a esta fase de la educación.*

*Este artículo se dirige a analizar la experiencia brasileña de Educación Inicial, con el fin de identificar los obstáculos que todavía impiden lograr las metas establecidas. El análisis empírico se enfoca hacia las diferencias entre las regiones del país y entre las etapas de expansión de la Educación Inicial, para medir la brecha existente entre el número de matrículas y la demanda por cupos. Se evalúan los datos oficiales, como el número de establecimientos y de matrículas desde 1996 hasta 2006. El análisis señala*

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*algunos obstáculos que deberían superar los gobiernos locales para poder mejorar la provisión y la calidad de la Educación Inicial.*

**Palabras clave:** Educación inicial, Descentralización, Políticas públicas, Brasil.

### **A educação infantil no Brasil: os obstáculos para uma experiência exitosa**

• **Resumo:** *Educação Infantil: Etapa inicial da educação reconhecida como direito da criança em inúmeros documentos (CRC/2005 e especificamente no Brasil: CF1988, LDB/96 e ECA/90) e presente na legislação interna da maioria dos países na atualidade. Tradicionalmente atende a crianças de 0 a 6 anos e se divide em duas etapas: a creche e a pré-escola. A LDB/96 introduziu uma política de integração do atendimento as crianças nesta faixa etária pelo setor educacional e não mais ligado à assistência social.*

*O presente trabalho busca traçar um diagnóstico da atual situação da Educação Infantil no Brasil com objetivo de identificar os principais obstáculos a serem superados para que tanto as metas quantitativas como as qualitativas sejam alcançadas.*

**Palavras Chave:** Educação Infantil, Descentralização, Políticas Públicas.

• **Abstract:** *Early Childhood Education is a right recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005). However, this right has been neglected, as many countries do not have an official program for the early years or, in case of having the program, it is not effective.*

*In 1996, the Brazilian government introduced a policy to integrate the administrative responsibility for nursery schools for 0-3 year-olds and preschools for 4-6 year-olds into the educational sector, which was a first step towards the expansion of Early Childhood Education provision. Ten years later, there is a lack of public establishments, and the local governments do not give high priority to this stage of education in their spending.*

*This paper is aimed at the Brazilian experience in Early Childhood Education in an effort to identify the remaining obstacles to accomplish the established goals. The empirical analysis focuses on the differences among regions and the stages of Early Childhood Education expansion, in order to measure the gap between the number of enrolments and the*

*demand for vacancies. It evaluated official data, like the number of establishments and enrolments from 1996 to 2006. The appraisal points out some obstacles that local governments should overcome in order to improve the provision and the quality of Early Childhood Education.*

**Keywords:** Early childhood education, Decentralization, Public policies, Brazil.

**I. Introduction. -II. Background of the Educational Politics. -III. Structure of Early childhood Education in Brazil. -IV. Conclusion. -Bibliography.**

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## **I. Introduction**

Early Childhood Education: first stage of education recognized as children's right in a number of documents (CRC/2005 and specifically in Brazil: CF1988, LDB/96 and ECA/90) and present in the internal legislation of most countries today. It traditionally attends 0-6 year-olds and is divided in two phases: nursery school (0-3 year-olds) and preschool (4-6 year-olds).

Presently, it is possible to observe the existence of different tendencies related to the first stage of Early Childhood Education. One of them defends the entrance of children in the institutions at a very early age, even before the child turns one year old. This happens because of women's demands for personal accomplishments and because of the advantages of collective education. This attitude has been, lately, more and more intensified because of the conquests obtained from the feminist movement. Another tendency is to extend maternity leave, with women staying at home so as to follow the child's development. This, under the traditional psychoanalytical perspective, would increase the chances of raising a happy and balanced adult. This process

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<sup>1</sup> Financial help granted by the government to mothers or fathers until the child turns 2 year-old in case they remain home taking care of the child during this period. It is necessary to prove that they have an annual gross income inferior to 14600 euros. More information at: <http://www.help.gv.at/Content.Node/8/Seite.080600.html>

is often stimulated by the government, as is the case of *kinderbetreuungsgeld*<sup>1</sup> in Austria. It is important to highlight that this last tendency is emphasized in technologically more developed countries.

In the Brazilian case, the first tendency prevails in the case of nursery schools, due to a higher and higher number of women, from all social strata, looking for institutions (official or not) that will receive their young children, in face of different reasons, among which their profession. At the same time, it is important to see the relation child-environment as responsible for the psychic integration of the child, and also to perceive the institution that receives the children as an equipment that is also integrating and that must work with all levels, being able to develop a positive and rich role in the development of children.

When preschool into account, research presents a number of benefits for children that attend this stage of education, like the reduction of mortality in this age range, a higher cognitive development, more time spent at school, reduction of school year repetition, and school dropout and even more vocabulary acquisition due to very early exposition to different environments (Haddad, 2005; Report EFA, 2006; Belsky et al., 2007). The child that goes to school has, in average, one more year of formal education than the child that entered primary school directly. And this child has 32% more chance to finish secondary school (MEC, 2006).

However, there are other concepts nowadays, particularly interesting is the vision resulting from the development of a new 'sociology of infancy'. This vision is present in the convention of children's rights (1989) as well in the general observation n°7 (2005) and sees the child as a subject of right, with her own voice and conceives the ECE as a stage of development, an important place for the present moment of the child and not a long run «investment» as in the traditional vision centered in the formation of human capital (Haddad, 2002; Trisciuzzi & Cambi, 1993).

Due to the broad recognition of the preschool contribution for children (independent of the adopted vision) and for the educational network as a whole some countries, like for example Mexico, have already included this segment as a compulsory stage in education. In Brazil, this stage of education is not compulsory yet. The history of attending children at an age earlier than the compulsory formal

education was marked, in its majority, by actions that prioritized children's care. In general, Early Childhood Education, and in particular the nursery schools, were responsible for attending the poor children, that is, the rendered services – either by the public power or by the religious and philanthropic entities – were not considered a right of the children and of their families, but as a donation instead, that was done – and many times is still done – without heavy investments. Besides these initiatives, the suburbs and slums population also attempted to create collective establishments to attend their children, organizing nursery schools and communitarian preschools. To do so, they built and adapted buildings with their own and few resources, which they still do in face of the absence of the State (MEC; 2006).

The Constitution of 1988 represented a great improvement, as it established as duty of the State, through the municipality, the guarantee to Early Childhood Education, with access for all the children from 0 to 6 year-old to nursery schools and preschools. This society conquest meant a change in conception. Early Childhood Education was leaving charity work to become, even if only legally, an obligation of the State and right of the child.

Both the research and studies and the pressures of the organized society reaffirmed these values in the LDB, proclaimed in 1996, that considers Early Childhood Education the first stage of the Basic Education. In LDB, the construction of new unities and the conservation of the school facilities were included in the budgets of education with the objective of increasing the number and quality of the supply of this service. From this point on, a series of legal documents is produced with the objective of defining the criteria of quality of the unities destined to the education of the child from 0 to 6 year-old. However, particularly in these aspects, service and facilities, there still are serious problems to be faced, according to the diagnosis presented in the Plano Nacional de Educação (National Plan of Education).

It is important to highlight however, a recent change in the legislation: until the year 2005, the compulsory school attendance focused on children from 7 to 14 year-old but, since the Law 11.274/2006 one more year was extended and included for the service to children who are 6 years old. This was an important measure, in the perspective of the guarantee of the right to education and of the existence of a supply correspondent to the demand, when considering

the difference between the enrolment of children up to 1 one year old and of the 6 year-old children, the second data is about 90 times superior to the first (Kappel & Kramer, 2001).

The present work seeks to trace a diagnosis of the present situation of Early Childhood Education in Brazil with the objective of identify the main obstacles to be overcome so that not only the quantitative aims but also the qualitative aims be reached. The study is divided in four parts, from which the first is this introduction; the second presents the *background* of the Educational Politics in Brazil; the third analyzes with base on empiric data the reality of the nursery schools and preschools and the last brings some comments in order to conclude it.

## II. Background of the Educational Politics

In the last two decades, the Educational Politics in Brazil passed through significant changes. Nowadays Basic Education is decentralized from the administration point of view and with its focus on Elementary Education, the stage of education that comprehends nine years of compulsory schooling (CF, 1988; LDB, 1996 and Federal Law 11.274, 2006). When considering the emphasis on Elementary Education it should be highlighted that it is one recommendation present in World Bank documents (Altmman, 2002) and easily identified by means of an analysis of the present model of funding of the Basic Education.

The Constitution of 1988 defined the minimum percentage of the public revenue to be used for the funding of public education. The defined amount was: 18% of the budget of the Union and 25% of the revenue of taxes of the States and Municipalities. In 1996, LDB introduced a change in these percentages, since according to this Law the municipalities would be able to determine a different percentage for this end (always respecting the minimum of 25%) through the Organic Law of each town. As for decentralization, the Federal Constitution of 1988 defined the administration competencies in the area of education as follows:

**Table 1 – Legal Competencies**

|                           | Municipalities   | States   | Union   |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| Early Childhood Education | Its duty is to guarantee it to all parents that ask for it                         | Technical and funding cooperation to the municipalities (CF, art. 30)                      | Technical and funding cooperation to the municipalities (CF, art. 30)   |
| Elementary Education      | Its duty is to guarantee in regime of collaboration with the States (LDB, art. 11) | Its duty is to guarantee in regime of collaboration with the Municipalities (LDB, art. 10) | Technical and funding cooperation, seeking to guarantee the equalization of educational opportunities (CF, art. 211 e LDB, art. 75) |
| High School Education     | Offered only after the offer of children and Elementary Education                  | Prioritizing Attending (LDB, art. 10)  |   |

Source: Constituição da República (Republic Constitution) and Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (Law of Directives and Bases for Education) (LDB/96).

Thus, the municipalities are responsible for the provision of Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education. When considering the question of education funding a minimum percentage to be spent with the Basic Education is determined but there is not within this tie a specification of a minimum to be spent with the different stages that conforms it. The determination of the technical cooperation lacks more specification of the responsibilities that compete within each sphere of government. The municipalities, the sphere that is nearest to the population, are pressed and constantly forced to serve the local demands, which is not always their job.

Throughout the 90s, the majority of the municipalities directed a great percentage of these resources to Elementary Education and let the investments on Early Childhood Education, non-compulsory stage, subjected to the budget availability. In places where the State took over almost all the provision of Elementary Education, like in the metropolitan region of the São Paulo state, the municipalities invested and built a large structure of attention to the Early Childhood Education.

In 1996, the funding organ Fundef<sup>2</sup> was created to distribute resources to the states and municipalities according to the number of children enrolled in Elementary Education. A model of self-funding was designed and implemented, with rigid and clear rules that guaranteed not only the legal priority, but also the prevalence and permanence of a privileged nucleus. The concept of Basic Education, however, was not present in the formulation of Fundef. Neither did it contribute for the implementation of this new conception of education, which became necessary for all citizens, in the modern world.

Thus, the creation of this funding aggravated the funding situation of Early Childhood Education, even in the municipalities, which only offered this stage of education. The mechanism of funding collection and distribution caused the towns that did not have Elementary Education network loose profits when they became responsible for the implementation of Elementary Education in Brazil (EFA Report, 2000).

Besides that, a national tendency to remove 6-year-old children from preschools and enroll them in the following level with the objective of amplifying the volume of received funding was observed. This tendency associated with a demand for attending resulted in the Law 11.274/2006 and in the creation of the nine years Elementary Education.

Fundef was in force until 2006, when Fundeb was created – Fundo de Manutenção da Educação Básica (Fund of Maintenance of Basic Education) that corrected the flaws of the previous model regarding Early Childhood Education and started to send the funding according to the total of enrolments in all stages of Elementary Education.

From this moment on, it can be considered that Early Childhood Education is no longer conceived as a stage of education of minor importance. It gained political space, became technically settled and finds defenders in all spheres of society. Because of that, it is present in the Fundeb under the same conditions as the following stages of the educational process (Didonet, 2006). The following table illustrates the actual structure of provision of the Elementary Education in Brazil considering the public and private sectors:

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<sup>2</sup> Funding of Maintenance and development of Elementary Education and valorization of the professorship– composed of tied revenues of states and municipalities.

**Table 2 – Structure of Early Childhood Education in Brazil**

| 2005                  | Early Childhood |           |            |            |             |       |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|
|                       | BRAZIL          | N.School  | Preschool  | Elementary | High School | Total |
| <b>Establishments</b> | 32.296          | 105.616   | 162.727    | 23.561     | 324.200     | 42,54 |
| Public                | 17.086          | 79.324    | 143.631    | 16.570     | 256.611     | 37,57 |
| Private               | 15.210          | 26.292    | 19.096     | 6.991      | 67.589      | 61,40 |
| <b>Enrolments</b>     | 1.414.343       | 5.790.670 | 33.534.561 | 9.031.302  | 49.770.876  | 14,48 |
| Public                | 879.117         | 4.277.350 | 30.157.792 | 7.933.713  | 43.247.972  | 11,92 |
| Private               | 535.226         | 1.513.320 | 3.376.769  | 1.097.589  | 6.522.904   | 31,41 |
| <b>Teachers</b>       | 86.332          | 309.344   | 1.634.562  | 508.423    | 2.538.661   | 15,59 |
| Public                | 50.631          | 209.222   | 1.386.387  | 392.477    | 2.038.717   | 12,75 |
| Private               | 35.701          | 100.122   | 248.175    | 115.946    | 499.944     | 27,17 |

Source: Own elaboration from data from INEP

Researches have pointed out the lack of access as an obstacle to the provision of ECE and the supply as the main focus of exclusion not only in Brazil but also in Latin American as a whole (Haddad, 2007; IIEP, 2006; Umayahara, 2004; Unicef, 2006). In this sense, Table 2 brings empirical data with the objective of depicting the participation of Early Childhood Education in the education network as a whole. The last column represents the percentage participation of Early Childhood Education in relation to the total of variables under analysis. This way, it is clear that Early Childhood Education concentrates the smaller contingent of students in relation to the total of the school network and that Elementary Education is the focus of school structure in Brazil.

However, when analyzing the percentage per administrative sector, that is, when separating public and private sector there appear results that deserve to be looked at more attentively: the establishments of Early Childhood Education represent approximately 37% of the total of public educational establishments and 61% of establishments of the private sector. Besides that, the participation of the private sector in relation to the total of establishments is around 47% when considering nursery schools. It is a substantial difference in relation to the other levels of education and it makes clear the insufficiency of supply of the public sector in this segment. The participation of the

private sector in the total of enrolments reaches 38% when looking at the data, which refer to the nursery schools and to 26% in preschool. It should be highlighted that in general Early Childhood Education establishments comprise a small number of classrooms and a total of students per class a lot inferior to the other stages, which also contributes for this result.

Another relevant data is the distribution of the total of teachers in activity per level of education and administration. The table shows that 15,59% of the teachers are in the first stage of Elementary Education but when considering only the private sector this number reaches 27,17%. Thus, 27,17% of the teachers are responsible for the classes in 61% of the educational establishments. It is common that the same teacher works at more than one establishment and even in both sectors (public and private), which leads to this result. It is also worth to observe that usually a single teacher, which does not occur in the other segments in which there is a division of teachers according the subjects to be taught, orients the Early Childhood Education class.

After situating the Early Childhood Education within the school network and verifying the existence in deficiencies in school service (supplied by the private sector), it is important to evaluate how the evolution of this attending throughout the last years was. The next table brings data that illustrate the increase due to the changes in legislation cited above and a greater recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education. The data are divided in regions and unities of federation with the objective of showing that there are differences in the evolution in the intra-regional and inter-regional contexts. The approach is done in three moments, in the years of 1991 and 2000 when the ratio was calculated with base on the data of the demographic census and in the data of enrolments made available by MEC; and in the year of 2005 with base in the date of the school census and PNAD.

**Table 3 – Evolution of Enrolment Ratio  
by Units of the Federation**

| Early Childhood Education  |                    | Gross Enrolment Ratio |       |       | Network Ratio |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|---------------|
| 0-6 years                  | Enrolments<br>2006 | 1991                  | 2000  | 2005  | 2005          |
| <b>Brazil</b>              | 6.082.651          | 14,23                 | 23,03 | 33,20 | 31,02         |
| <b>North Region</b>        | 438.171            | 9,35                  | 15,39 | 25,35 | 22,75         |
| Roraima                    | 12.868             | 13,34                 | 28,33 | 27,47 | 24,41         |
| Pará                       | 197.981            | 8,25                  | 16,19 | 26,61 | 23,46         |
| Amapá                      | 20.890             | 18,17                 | 22,20 | 26,94 | 25,10         |
| Tocantins                  | 38.069             | 9,4                   | 20,88 | 27,15 | 23,97         |
| <b>Northeast Region</b>    | 1.600.073          | 14,3                  | 21,81 | 33,25 | 30,80         |
| Maranhão                   | 230.422            | 17,28                 | 24,02 | 39,02 | 35,53         |
| Piauí                      | 93.442             | 17,39                 | 26,74 | 35,17 | 32,82         |
| Ceará                      | 277.659            | 15,39                 | 30,29 | 40,15 | 38,37         |
| Rio Grande do Norte        | 108.209            | 22,75                 | 31,97 | 38,26 | 36,94         |
| Paraíba                    | 110.029            | 12,15                 | 23,24 | 32,67 | 29,71         |
| Pernambuco                 | 270.506            | 15,51                 | 15,12 | 29,70 | 27,89         |
| Alagoas                    | 67.419             | 12,19                 | 13,85 | 20,58 | 19,21         |
| Sergipe                    | 58.956             | 24,01                 | 30,32 | 37,07 | 33,50         |
| Bahia                      | 383.431            | 8,89                  | 16,62 | 29,75 | 26,84         |
| <b>Southeast Region</b>    | 2.831.843          | 16,25                 | 26,99 | 36,85 | 34,71         |
| Minas Gerais               | 525.056            | 15,13                 | 22,97 | 26,75 | 25,87         |
| Espírito Santo             | 127.857            | 17,14                 | 27,09 | 36,60 | 34,45         |
| Rio de Janeiro             | 459.906            | 14,56                 | 21,89 | 34,96 | 33,87         |
| São Paulo                  | 1.719.024          | 17,4                  | 30,99 | 42,49 | 39,37         |
| <b>South Region</b>        | 818.855            | 13,32                 | 22,95 | 32,21 | 30,80         |
| Paraná                     | 347.682            | 11,57                 | 24,39 | 32,59 | 32,01         |
| Santa Catarina             | 222.193            | 22,23                 | 31,28 | 41,75 | 40,91         |
| Rio Grande do Sul          | 248.980            | 10,15                 | 16,80 | 26,51 | 23,92         |
| <b>Central West Region</b> | 393.709            | 10,76                 | 16,53 | 26,97 | 24,96         |
| Mato Grosso do Sul         | 81.256             | 11,81                 | 20,57 | 30,96 | 30,40         |
| Mato Grosso                | 87.168             | 5,75                  | 15,41 | 24,95 | 24,01         |
| Goias                      | 133.014            | 14,11                 | 15,40 | 23,65 | 21,77         |
| DF                         | 92.271             | 17,37                 | 27,60 | 33,36 | 28,42         |

Source: Own elaboration from the data of demographic census (1991 and 2000), PNAD 2005 and school census.

Table 3 shows that in the last fifteen years there was an average increase of approximately 20% in the attendance of 0-6 year-olds (measured from the gross enrolment ratio). There was in fact an expansion of the network but this result cannot be attributed only to this factor: there are demographic factors, like the reduction of the fertility ratio and consequent reduction of the total of the 0-6 year-old population, which influence these ratios.

In relation to 1991, there is a variation in the inter-state context in the distribution of the attendance: the state of Sergipe, until then, covered the highest percentage (24%) of the 0-6 year-old populations whereas in 2005 the highest percentage refers to the state of São Paulo (42%). This way, previously the state that had the higher number of attendance belonged to the Northeast region, not very developed, and characterized the existence of an effort of the public sector (Demo, 1995). However, the same effort cannot be attributed to the new results due to an expansion of the supply of the private sector, which explains, partially, the new percentage distribution of the gross enrolment ratio. Because it is not an compulsory stage and, as previously cited in this text, for lack of definition of which are the legal competences of the government spheres in a regime of technical cooperation concerning Elementary Education, the investments in Early Childhood Education oscillate according to the priorities of each local government even with the existence of a valorization of this segment of education in a national level.

Nowadays, it is observed when comparing the five regions that the higher attendance is in the Southeast region (approximately 37%), an economically more developed region, which is responsible for the education of 47% of the 0-6 year-olds in the country. Only the Southeast region presents in the year of 2005 a ratio superior to the national one but because it is the most populated region the small difference in percentage is sufficient to raise the gross enrolment ratio in the country.

In the intra-regional context there are significant differences as is clearly observed when comparing the ratio of the state of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, which in spite the fact that they are 'neighbors' they present a percentage difference of 15% in the attendance to this stage of education. It should also be observed that this ratio involve the total of enrolments of the public and private sectors and that for this reason, more economically developed localities, like the state of São

Paulo, where the population has a higher income there will be more attendance because of a higher supply not only of the public sector but also of the private sector (responsible for 48% of the enrolments in nursery schools and 19% of preschools in this state).

Thus, there still is strong elitism in Early Childhood Education (Plank, Sobrinho & Xavier, 1994; Umayahara, 2004). There was strong expansion of the public sector in special in preschool but this expansion was accompanied of the private sector, especially by means of nursery schools. The present administrative structure of the educational establishments, the elitism, and the profile of these establishments will be object of analysis in the next item.

### III. Structure of Early Childhood Education in Brazil

In item 2 there was an approach to the matter of decentralization and division of the responsibilities among the unities of the federation. In this topic there will be an analysis of the distribution of enrolment per stage of the Early Childhood Education, per administration and per geographic region with the objective of identifying the present structure of the ECE in Brazil. The next table will show the division of enrolments within the public sector:

**Table 4 – Administration Structure (enrolment per administration)**

| ECE<br>2005         | Nursery School |        |           |        | Preschool |         |           |           |
|---------------------|----------------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|
|                     | Federal        | State  | Municipal | Total  | Federal   | State   | Municipal | Total     |
| <b>Enrolments</b>   |                |        |           |        |           |         |           |           |
| Brazil              | 893            | 17.264 | 860.960   | 879117 | 1.668     | 249.001 | 4.026.681 | 4.277.350 |
| North Region        | --             | 1.696  | 54.855    | 56551  | 280       | 32.134  | 388.726   | 421.140   |
| Northeast Region    | 175            | 6.634  | 250.276   | 257085 | 317       | 47.845  | 1.301.381 | 1.349.543 |
| Southeast Region    | 379            | 4.609  | 336.658   | 341646 | 703       | 33.564  | 1.755.775 | 1.790.042 |
| South Region        | 260            | 1.761  | 165.757   | 167778 | 328       | 79.016  | 409.971   | 489.315   |
| Central West Region | 79             | 2.564  | 53.414    | 56057  | 40        | 56.442  | 170.828   | 227.310   |

Source: INEP

The city governments' responsibility of Early Childhood Education is evident not only in relation to the nursery school but also to the preschool. The table even allows observing that, independent of the government sphere responsible for the administration, the gross enrolment ratio is always superior in the preschool. This data depicts the reality of the public sector, which in general concentrates the supply in this stage, which becomes quite evident when analyzing the share between the public and private sectors in both stages of Early Childhood Education as presented in table 5.

Table 5 – Enrolment per administration per UF

| Enrolments share           | N. School  |             | Preschool  |             |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|                            | Public (%) | Private (%) | Public (%) | Private (%) |
| <b>2005</b>                |            |             |            |             |
| <b>North Region</b>        |            |             |            |             |
| Acre                       | 93,01      | 6,99        | 90,77      | 9,23        |
| Amapá                      | 47,59      | 52,41       | 72,57      | 27,43       |
| Amazonas                   | 79,81      | 20,19       | 81,20      | 18,80       |
| Pará                       | 90,04      | 9,96        | 84,84      | 15,16       |
| Rondônia                   | 70,60      | 29,40       | 74,14      | 25,86       |
| Roraima                    | 82,84      | 17,16       | 86,65      | 13,35       |
| Tocantins                  | 80,37      | 19,63       | 78,14      | 21,86       |
| <b>Northeast Region</b>    |            |             |            |             |
| Alagoas                    | 71,61      | 28,39       | 81,09      | 18,91       |
| Bahia                      | 82,34      | 17,66       | 73,53      | 26,47       |
| Ceará                      | 74,73      | 25,27       | 66,46      | 33,54       |
| Maranhão                   | 91,69      | 8,31        | 76,59      | 23,41       |
| Paraíba                    | 88,62      | 11,38       | 74,70      | 25,30       |
| Pernambuco                 | 49,77      | 50,23       | 59,57      | 40,43       |
| Piauí                      | 76,06      | 23,94       | 71,80      | 28,20       |
| Rio Grande do Norte        | 77,26      | 22,74       | 63,79      | 36,21       |
| Sergipe                    | 78,04      | 21,96       | 80,94      | 19,06       |
| <b>Southeast Region</b>    |            |             |            |             |
| Espírito Santo             | 85,63      | 14,37       | 83,25      | 16,75       |
| Minas Gerais               | 43,51      | 56,49       | 70,03      | 29,97       |
| Rio de Janeiro             | 49,84      | 50,16       | 58,26      | 41,74       |
| São Paulo                  | 52,02      | 47,98       | 80,59      | 19,41       |
| <b>South Region</b>        |            |             |            |             |
| Paraná                     | 66,91      | 33,09       | 71,31      | 28,69       |
| Rio Grande do Sul          | 60,63      | 39,37       | 77,02      | 22,98       |
| Santa Catarina             | 75,93      | 24,07       | 80,67      | 19,33       |
| <b>Central West Region</b> |            |             |            |             |
| DF                         | 5,10       | 94,90       | 60,99      | 39,01       |
| Goiás                      | 61,10      | 38,90       | 59,80      | 40,20       |
| Mato Grosso                | 84,63      | 15,37       | 80,02      | 19,98       |
| Mato Grosso do Sul         | 79,06      | 20,94       | 76,29      | 23,71       |

Source: Own elaboration from data from INEP

Thus, in 12 states certain equivalence between the participation of the public sector in both stages of Early Childhood Education can be observed. In general, in the North and Northeast regions there is a higher attendance on the part of the government with the exception of the states of Pernambuco and Amapá. These regions have a smaller degree of socio-economical development and low school attendance (as shown in table 3), which can be an indicator that the higher attendance in the more developed regions and that concentrate the enrolments (like the Southeast region), exists in function of a higher participation of the private sector. The supply of education by the private sector in general is conditioned to the income (Demo, 1995; Campos, 2006) and local demand. There are regional differences that explain alterations regarding local demand, like, for example, demographic factors: the North and Northeast regions have the highest percentage of 0-5 year-old population in relation to the total in the country, high fertility and bigger families (number of components). The relation with the demand for Early Childhood Education is direct. It is worth to highlight the hypothesis assumed in the initial part of this study: the need of a place to leave the children and enter the market. When the family is bigger and the number of older brothers to 'take care' of the younger ones is each time bigger, there can be observed a tendency to choose to leave the children with a member of the family instead of searching for an educational establishment.

However, it is not possible to assume that these are the only reasons for the variations found in table 5. As it has been already mentioned in this text, there are differences in the degree of investment in Early Childhood Education, which has as a cause the existence (or not) of 'political will' on the part of the governors.

In 4 states and in the Federal District (DF), the participation of the private sector is even superior to that of the public sector in the nursery school supply, which is an indicator of the strong elitism that exists in this stage of education, being: Amapá, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais.

Until the present moment the concern of this study was to quantify the attendance of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, to show the different inter-regional and intra-regional contexts and highlight the question of elitism in the country. Now, the focus will be on the provision of this service which will be evaluated by means of an analysis of the basic structure of the educational establishments with

the objective of finding other relevant factors that can contribute to identify the main obstacles so that the country reaches a model of Early Childhood Education that fulfills indeed the role of first stage of Basic Education.

The structure of the educational establishments will be evaluated based on the presence of basic items for the good functioning of a school like access to water, electricity, sewage and the existence of bathrooms.

In Brazil, a great number of environments destined to the education of children younger than 6 years of age function under poor conditions. Basic services like water, sanitary sewage and electricity are not available for many of the nursery schools and preschools (MEC, 2006). Besides the poorness or even the absence of basic services, other elements referring to infrastructure involve not only physical health but also the development of children as a whole. Among them is the absence of outside areas or alternative spaces that would provide children with the possibility of being outside, in free movement activities, having their space for sociability, for play and exploration of the enriched environment.

It is worth to mention that, according to more recent data from MEC, there are improvements in relation to the sanitary conditions evaluated until then. This might mean that there has been an effort to respond to the new legal demands. However, such information concern authorized establishments (authorized to function). This way, it is possible to affirm that there still are establishments, especially the ones that are not in the formal network, but not only those, attending children in environments with poor conditions. Tables 6 e 7 present data that illustrate the reality of the Early Childhood Education educational establishments in Brazil.

**Table 6 – Basic Resources in the Nursery Schools**

| Schools 2005        | Nursery Schools |           |       |             |        |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------------|--------|
|                     | Total           | Bathrooms | Water | Electricity | Sewage |
| Brazil (Total)      | 32296           | 21822     | 32288 | 32002       | 32088  |
| North Region        |                 |           |       |             |        |
| Rural               | 387             | 38        | 386   | 305         | 350    |
| Urban               | 889             | 468       | 888   | 888         | 885    |
| Northeast Region    |                 |           |       |             |        |
| Rural               | 3636            | 474       | 3631  | 3431        | 3497   |
| Urban               | 5706            | 3299      | 5705  | 5703        | 5694   |
| South Region        |                 |           |       |             |        |
| Rural               | 257             | 133       | 257   | 257         | 256    |
| Urban               | 5470            | 4400      | 5470  | 5470        | 5466   |
| Southeast Region    |                 |           |       |             |        |
| Rural               | 413             | 194       | 413   | 411         | 409    |
| Urban               | 13790           | 11470     | 13790 | 13790       | 13784  |
| Central West Region |                 |           |       |             |        |
| Rural               | 31              | 14        | 31    | 30          | 30     |
| Urban               | 1717            | 1332      | 1717  | 1717        | 1717   |

Source: Edudatabrasil/INEP

**Table 7 – Basic Resources in the Preschool Establishments**

| Schools 2005        | Preschools |           |        |             |        |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|
|                     | Total      | Bathrooms | Water  | Electricity | Sewage |
| Brazil (Total)      | 105616     | 39068     | 105130 | 95399       | 99548  |
| North Region        |            |           |        |             |        |
| Rural               | 6615       | 115       | 6552   | 3812        | 5100   |
| Urban               | 3173       | 1383      | 3168   | 3160        | 3154   |
| Northeast Region    |            |           |        |             |        |
| Rural               | 32491      | 928       | 32093  | 25297       | 28171  |
| Urban               | 17750      | 7807      | 17739  | 17727       | 17683  |
| South Region        |            |           |        |             |        |
| Rural               | 2597       | 1000      | 2597   | 2594        | 2590   |
| Urban               | 11719      | 8079      | 11718  | 11719       | 11708  |
| Southeast Region    |            |           |        |             |        |
| Rural               | 3391       | 495       | 3388   | 3342        | 3336   |
| Urban               | 22900      | 16697     | 22899  | 22899       | 22888  |
| Central West Region |            |           |        |             |        |
| Rural               | 922        | 74        | 918    | 792         | 866    |
| Urban               | 4058       | 2490      | 4058   | 4057        | 4052   |

Source: Edudatabrasil / INEP

The tables consider the presence of basic infrastructure in the schools. This way, of the 32296 Brazilian nursery schools 32288 have water, 32002 have electricity and only 21822 have bathrooms. The data was even classified according to localization in rural and urban areas with the purpose of depicting the lack of equity in the supply of Early Childhood Education not only in the inter-regional context.

Thus, attention is drawn to the fact that only 45% of the total of the establishments of Early Childhood Education in the country have bathrooms. The situation is even more serious if we consider the establishments in rural areas. It must be highlighted that the regions with more participation of the public sector (as presented in table 5) are the ones that appear with the lower levels of access to basic infrastructure. A more detailed analysis reveals that this percentage of 45% is reached by 81% of the private educational establishments and

only 28% of the establishments managed by the public sector have bathrooms<sup>3</sup>. The observed difference when comparing the basic resources offered in nursery schools with the results of preschool are also explained when one remembers that the participation of the private sector in the supply of nursery schools is superior to that of the preschools. This data confirm the hypothesis that the private sector acts where there is more demand and income, offering establishments with higher quality than the public sector and, this way, it covers the lack of options of establishments with proper infrastructure for the higher classes. Again the analysis points to the strong elitism of this stage of education.

It is not positive to obtain high participation of the public sector, which is the case of the North region, if the supply does not even cover the basic requirements disposed in Law (PCB, 2000) for the good functioning of an establishment. Early Childhood Education is one stage of formation, centered in the binomial teach-take-care and as such must offer proper conditions of hygiene, space, lighting and ventilation.

This section had as an objective trace a diagnosis of the present situation of Early Childhood Education by means of an analysis of the supply. The next will bring some comments and will present the conclusions of this study.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

According to the analysis in this article, there is an improvement in the country in the direction of the recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education. It can be even observed the existence of various obstacles to be overcome so as to obtain a successful experience, an education of quality with equity to everybody that wishes it. The main obstacles to be overcome according to the data presented are:

- a) Funding – the lack of resources is one of the main obstacles; without budget projects cannot be executed. The funding is insufficient in a number of municipalities and the population that is not attended cannot count on own resources to afford the

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<sup>3</sup> Data calculated based on scholar census 2005 made available by INEP.

formation of their children in the private sector. Early Childhood Education still is funded with the remainder budget according to political will;

b) Elitism – a problem generated by the funding obstacle. The poor families are the ones that need education the most and the ones that have least access: «the logic of the privileges is opposed to the necessities» (Demo, 1995). The ones who are responsible and that have resources put their children in private establishments, which appear with strong participation in this segment of education supplying a demand that is not attended to in qualitative and quantitative terms. The attending of this age range is increasing but it is still very low, especially concerning nursery schools;

c) Equity of Supply – extreme discrepancy of the supply in the national territory, showing that Early Childhood Education is still conditioned to governments, not having reached the condition of institutional politics; this discrepancy also happens in the informal supply, even being the public a reason of great concern;

d) Basic Infra-Structure – in spite of the efforts promoted by MEC and by the Conselho Nacional de Educação in orienting the work of the networks and institutions concerning facilities, materials, personnel, health care and administration of the units, the inspection of the nursery schools and preschools is flawed and risk situations for the children remain in many cases both in the public and private sectors. The lack of adapted bathrooms in 55% of the establishments is an alarming data and proves that the access to basic resources still is an obstacle to be overcome.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

- CF: Constituição Federal (Federal Constitution).
- CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ECA: Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (Child and Teenager Statute).
- ECE: Early Childhood Education.
- Fundeb: Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Maintenance and Development Funding of the Basic Education).
- Fundef: Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação e Valorização do Magistério (Maintenance and Development Funding of the Elementary Education and of Professorship Valorization).
- Inep: Instituto Nacional de Estudos da Educação e Pesquisa (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research).
- LDB: Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (Law of Directives and Bases of Education).
- MEC: Ministério da Educação (Ministry of Education).
- PCB: Parecer da Câmara de Educação Básica (Basic Education Chamber Report).
- PNAD: Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (National Survey per Sample of Homes).
- UF: Unidade Federativa (States – parts of the federation).