Chapter 9

Are Teaching Practices Suitable for Classes of Six-Year-Old Children?

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ABSTRACT
The present study is the result of an investigation carried out for eight months, from March to October 2006, comprises Grade 1 classes at the Sao Paulo Public Education System, Brazil. Forty teacher students performing literacy activities during their pre-service activities simultaneously conducted this action research in 40 Grade 1. Six-year-old children were moved from preschool education to elementary schools since 2006 in order to respect the legal determinations defined by the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educacao Nacional (Brasil, 1996), which expanded basic education from 8 to 9 years. Such democratic governmental action, however, has raised issues concerning the way very young children are taught in a typically school-like context. From this perspective, our study enables us to raise sociocultural problems regarding the non-inclusive pedagogical practices in use. Results show non-inclusive pedagogical practices, as well some paths to change this educational setting.

INTRODUCTION
Brazil, which became a democratic presidential state in 1984, is one of the world’s largest countries, both by geographical area (8,515,767 km²) and by population (204,450,000 inhabitants). Brazil has the largest national economy in Latin America and the eighth largest economy in the world. The country is a federation composed of 26 Provinces (States), one Federal District (which contains the capital, Brasilia) and 5,564 municipalities. The legal presidential system is based on the New Democratic Federal Constitution, which was established on October 5th, 1988. Education, with its own New Democratic Law (Brasil, 1996), is a collaborative system where national, provincial and municipal governments have responsibilities.

In this process, there are still many challenges to overcome, especially when it comes to the universalization of quality primary education for children aged four and older. Defining a national curriculum connected to the knowledge of children...
and the education of teachers is one of such challenges. Formal education in Brazil is undergoing major adjustments. One of these adjustments started to take place between the years of 2005 and 2006, based on federal laws that modified the LDB (Law of Directives and Bases of National Education) (Brasil, 1996). The anticipation of compulsory registration for six-year-old children in primary schools, thus expanding basic education to nine years, represented the starting point of such changes. The law in force now set a new organization for the Brazilian primary school system. Primary schools must admit six-year-old children, totaling nine years of mandatory primary education. As a consequence of the law, the Municipal Education Secretariat of São Paulo began enrolling six-year-old children in 2006 in its primary schools to comply with the changes in legislation (Brasil, 2006a). According to the guidelines provided by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (Brasil, 2006b), primary schools should develop programs which recognize children’s rights to play and get in touch with the universe of knowledge, taking into account the student’s historical, social and cultural background. The guidelines state that literacy activities should be taught in a new play-based learning experience and critical thinking program. Six-year-old children were then moved from kindergarten to primary schools, thus expanding the number of years of primary education from 8 to 9 years. Without previous research of its impacts, policy makers have simply moved children from kindergarten to first grade and introduced them to untimely literacy classes. The results are that children have entered primary schools without the necessary adjustments in the schools, something that clearly disrespects children’s rights to learn in quality contexts. This chapter presents the process and findings of an eight month collective Educational Action Research developed in partnership with a Teacher Training Program and the São Paulo Public School System. This research took place inside 40 first-grade classes and aimed at pedagogical strategies and their effect on six-year-old children who had been moved from kindergarten to elementary schools as a result of the new national educational policy. It discusses primary schools’ structure as well as teacher literacy and pedagogical strategies to address whether the current teaching practices are suitable for six-year-old children.

**BACKGROUND**

Many studies have been conducted since the changes in the legislation and have also contributed to understand the impact of nine years of primary education on educational policies as well as the organization of the schools. Brazilian researchers as well as the author have no doubt (Neves, Kalish, Lauretti, Bahiana & Salvetti, 2015; Arelaro, Jacomini & Klein, 2011; Kramer, 2006;) that this policy is important to improve democratization in the Brazilian education system but the way it was implemented seems to negatively impact children’s learning as well as their development.

In the last decade there have been many studies dedicated to understanding the inner world of these policies in order to understand how the teachers that had to change their educative practices in different Brazilian cities perceive them. One comprehensive research study has taken place in the states of Rondónia, Bahia and Mato Grosso do Sul. There has also been a study in the small city of Dourados in the countryside of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (Santos & Catanante, 2011; Pansini & Marin, 2011; Scaff & Silva 2010). Both studies were set out to investigate the conditions of implementation of the nine-year primary education. Results indicate that the implementation of the above-mentioned program at the schools was hasty, leaving the schools without the preparation that would guarantee the necessary structural changes, as well as not making the curriculum adaptations and/or discussions/creation of pedagogical teams that teachers and communities needed. They also reveal that the lack of clarity
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