




REFLECTION

Child development and formation of human capital: overlap of economic aspects to the detriment of rights


Desenvolvimento infantil e formação do capital humano: sobreposição de aspectos econômicos em detrimento aos direitos

Desarrollo infantil y formación de capital humano: superposición de aspectos económicos en detrimento de los derechos


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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on child development over time, where the State's motivations to ensure minimum rights for children since the medieval era are perceptible, motivated by the guarantee of labor in the future. **Method:** theoretical-reflective study based on official Brazilian and international documents. **Results:** by ensuring quality of life from the early stage, the chances of this child reaching the healthiest adulthood are increased, as science has shown. However, over the years, several barriers have been broken down to the consolidation of children's rights and the legal guarantee of care for them. In Brazil, the legal finding that ensured rights in childhood only occurred from 1988, with the promulgation of the Citizen Constitution. From then on, new challenges have emerged that required a constant improvement of laws, since there was a conflict of interest between health agencies and industry, because the first aims at the well-being of children, while the second, profit. **Conclusión:** Child development must be ensured because it is a right and the idea that it will favour the economy should not be perpetuated and the latter should happen as a consequence.

Keywords: Child development. Child health. Economy.

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir acerca do desenvolvimento infantil ao longo dos tempos, onde ficam perceptíveis as motivações do Estado em assegurar direitos mínimos para o público infantil desde a era medieval, motivado pela garantia de mão-de-obra no futuro. **Método:** estudo teórico-reflexivo a partir de documentos oficiais brasileiros e internacionais. **Resultados:** ao assegurar qualidade de vida desde a fase mais tenra, aumentam-se as chances desta criança chegar a fase adulta mais saudável, como vem demonstrando a ciência. Porém, ao longo dos anos, várias foram as barreiras a serem rompidas para a consolidação dos direitos na infância e da garantia legal dos cuidados para com elas. No Brasil, a constatação legal que assegurou os direitos na infância só ocorreu a partir de 1988, com a promulgação da Constituição Cidadã. A partir de então, surgiram novos desafios que requereram um aprimoramento constante das leis, uma vez que existia um conflito de interesses entre os órgãos de saúde e a indústria, pois a primeira visa o bem-estar das crianças, enquanto a segunda, o lucro. **Conclusão:** o desenvolvimento infantil deve ser assegurado por ser um direito, não devendo ser perpetuada a ideia de que a mesma favorecerá a economia, devendo esta última acontecer como consequência.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento infantil. Saúde da criança. Economia.

RESUMÉN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre el desarrollo infantil a lo largo del tiempo, donde son perceptibles las motivaciones del Estado para garantizar unos derechos mínimos a los niños desde la época medieval, motivado por la garantía del trabajo en el futuro. **Método:** estudio teórico-reflexivo basado en documentos oficiales brasileños e internacionales. **Resultados:** al asegurar calidad de vida desde una etapa temprana, se aumentan las posibilidades de que este niño llegue a una etapa adulta más saludable, tal y como ha demostrado la ciencia. Sin embargo, a lo largo de los años, hubo varias barreras que romper para la consolidación de los derechos de la niñez y la garantía legal de su cuidado. En Brasil, la verificación legal que garantizó los derechos de la niñez ocurrió solamente después de 1988, con la promulgación de la Constitución Ciudadana. A partir de entonces, surgieron nuevos desafíos que exigieron un constante perfeccionamiento de las leyes, ya que existía un conflicto de intereses entre los organismos de salud y la industria, pues la primera apunta al bienestar de los niños, mientras que la segunda, al lucro. **Conclusión:** se debe asegurar el desarrollo infantil como un derecho, y no se debe perpetuar la idea de que favorecerá a la economía, debiendo este último ocurrir como consecuencia.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo infantil. Salud de los niños. Economía.

INTRODUCTION

The concern with child development goes beyond humanitarian issues of the desire to promote well-being for children and guarantee their full rights, identifying them as citizens. Public health actions aimed at this group have historically been expected at capitalist interests, such as the formation of a country's workforce, which is one of the justifications pointed out to date for prioritizing this phase of life.

The economic argument for the promotion of child development is also present in a publication of the World Bank translated to the Portuguese by singular publishing house, with the title "How to invest in early childhood: a guide to the discussion of policies and the preparation of early childhood development projects", which shows that the lack of investments in this phase generates high costs, difficult to compensate later in life, as the skills developed in childhood form the basis for future learning and success in the job market. ⁽¹⁾

A historical rescue of public health actions in Brazil shows that economic issues have always been present as a "backdrop". What has changed over time is that, instead of thinking about maintaining the workers' health, treating their illnesses, began to support the idea of forming the productive workforce in the long term. In addition, taking care of the child's health was also a way to increase the productivity of the worker, who would not need to leave his job for the care of the sick child.

This has been seen in Brazil since the 1920s, when the child begins to receive medical care as a dependent figure of industry workers. At the same time, the discussion begins about the role of breastfeeding as an important element in the fulfillment of the workload by workers, since it was related to the reduction of the illness of their children. In this same approach, new initiatives emerged in the following decades, but almost always of a curative and individualized character. The main concern of health policies for children was infant mortality, and this was the main focus until the end of the 1970s. Only in the following decade does the need for comprehensive child health care emerge, however, it should be emphasized that, until then, these actions were not seen as members of the consolidation of the rights of the child as a citizen. ⁽²⁾

This change in the centrality of health programs aimed at children was only possible through the evolution of the concept of childhood, going from invisibility to the recognition of its social role, and the development of scientific knowledge, which translated the origins of health problems from adulthood to aspects related to childhood. After all, "children [...] they have all human rights, not because they are the future, but because they are human beings today." ⁽³⁾

In this way, the present study aims to reflect on child development over time, where the motivations of the State to ensure minimum rights for children since the medieval era are perceptible, motivated by the guarantee of labor in the future.

METHOD

This is a theoretical-reflective study, whose foundation was obtained through readings of official documents from Brazil, as well as international publications and articles that addressed the theme worked and enabled the critical-reflexive construction, about the theme worked.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of childhood over time

Gilberto Luiz Tomazelli (2008)⁽⁴⁾, when he dissertation on "Natural Education and Childhood according to Jean Jacques Rousseau" carries out a historical resgaste of the conception of childhood that deserves to be highlighted for understanding how we conceive the care of our children.

In the medieval period there was no distinction between the child and the adult. Until the age of seven, the child was not counted in the family, in view of its intense fragility and high mortality rate. Only those who reached this age were a member of the family, but understood already in the adult universe. ⁽⁵⁾

We went, in the medieval period, from an anonymous childhood - in which the child was seen as imperfect and dependent, whose care was neglected - to a Christian childhood, from the seventeenth century, in which, despite not occupying a central role in the family, he no longer had his delegated care to third party. In the eighteenth century, with industrialization, childhood emerges as property and no longer has the social prerogative to be just "child". She happens to be the future, but still childish labor. Only at the end of the 18th century, childhood began to be considered a biological category, whose potentialities should be developed. In this aspect of the valorization of childhood, the Enlightenment occupies centrality, and we move on to the "innocent child of Rousseau", based on virtue, truth and beauty, whose obligation of society was to seek to preserve them through an education that respected their nature and contributed to the formation of a more just and egalitarian world. ⁽⁴⁾

Despite the continuous evolutions in the conception of childhood, especially from the perspective of psychology and its various currents of thought, such as constructivist approaches, we can say that Rousseau's vision is the one that most closely approximates the desirable one today, seeing the child as a social being endowed with potentialities to be developed, whose role must be occupied not only by the family or state, but by society as a whole. However, this understanding still places the child simply as an element that needs social protection, but does not recognize him/her as a citizen, endorsing with rights to be consolidated and respected.

Another important contribution of understanding the "ideal" concept of childhood, which makes us better understand development-related policies, happens in the 19th century, where, under the

influence of positivism, we start to think about the education of the population, placing the child in the centrality of actions to achieve progress. ⁽⁶⁾ Then, in the 20th century, childhood becomes an "aspect to be considered in the modern nation model". ⁽⁷⁾

However, it is necessary to highlight what childhood is being treated. It was not the childhood of all children, only that of families with recognized social merit. All minorities were excluded from it. Let's look at the example of the Brazilian case of our slave children. When did these children actually have the right to "childhood"? They were effectively part of the workforce, when, of course, they survived, in the face of precarious living conditions. It is to be expected that, only by acquiring the right to freedom, they could finally enjoy their childhoods. But that's not what happened.

The Free Womb Law of 1871 was "the first Brazilian law that tried to effectively protect minors"⁽⁸⁾ by determining by which of the two destinations the slave groups, from the age of seven, could go: to be delivered to the care of the State in the orphanages or work until the age of 21 and be fortunate, that is, to be abandoned or have their slavery regulated and then be delivered to their own fate.

So, it would be likely that only with the liberation of slaves, having mothers and children "free", this reality would change. But history also shows us that this did not happen, because a social structure was not consolidated to support them. And to this day our black children, allied to so many other ethnic-racial minorities, continue to suffer from the inequalities of historically imposed opportunities, although our legislation makes no theoretical differentiation from them. Thus, the struggle remains so that they can have their childhood, in the terms we understand it today, surrounded by all social, economic and political importance.

Starting from the place socially occupied by the child, even with the advance in knowledge about childhood, from the medieval era to the twentieth century, the absence of an effective participation of the same in the economy delegated to him a figurative image, without direct political role and, therefore, unable to claim rights. Nevertheless, according to Oliveira (2016) ⁽⁶⁾, "if we evaluate that it is recent the valorization of children in historical terms, it is possible to perceive that we are walking, even in slow steps".

The Brazilian case translates the statement above ⁽⁶⁾, because despite the considerations about childhood and its role in the economic and social development of the country, only in 1988, the country recognizes this phase as a priority in the realization of its rights through art. 227 of the Federal Constitution. In 1990, in line with the need for comprehensive protection for children and adolescents, the Statute of children and adolescents was launched, and only in 2016, the Legal Framework of Early Childhood was approved.

The previous legislation on childhood has simply assistanceist and repressive characteristics, being totally arbitrary, as can be seen in the reading of the Mello Mattos Code of 1927, considered the first legal

Child development and formation of human capital.. document for the protection of children, and the Code of Minors, 1979. ⁽⁹⁾

Child: citizen of neglected right to the immediate interests of financial capital

Until the child went from an invisible being, in the social sphere, to the level of citizen, it was a long and tortuous trajectory. Despite the acquired status, what is witnessed in our most current history is that their rights remain neglected, especially when economic issues led by the large food and pharmaceutical business esotry are imposed. The following examples include that even the prerogatives of promoting human capital, through the promotion of child development, are in the background, when the legal aspects of consolidation of children's rights and industrial capitalist interests are put in the balance, showing how much our historical heritage of the relations between state and commerce perpetuates.

In 1988, the Brazilian Standard for The Marketing of Infant Foods was created, which aimed to protect breastfeeding, an important element for child development, through the prohibition of advertising of food products for children, donation of free samples to mothers, promotion of these products in health services, among other measures. ⁽¹⁰⁾

This standard was revised in 1992 and 2001/2002, where it only became law in 2006 and, nine years later, in 2015, it was regulated through Decree No. 8522, pointing to a time lapse of almost 30 years. Despite their contributions to the improvement of breastfeeding indicators, the reports published by the International Network for the Defense of the Right to Breastfeed in Brazil (IBFAN) show that violations are constant, as they hurt the powerful dairy formula and early childhood products industry. ⁽¹¹⁾

Similarly, publications from the Consumer Protection Institute (IDEC) continuously show violations of the Brazilian Standard for The Marketing of Foods for Infants and Children of 1st Childhood, Beaks, Pacifiers and Bottles (NBCAL)⁽¹²⁾. From 2007 to 2014, the marketing and advertising of products governed by NBCAL were the largest responsible for the irregularities identified, being attributed to the first 66% of the infringements and, in the second, 95.6%. ⁽¹³⁾ In 2018, IDEC again denounces the disrespect for the rights of the child, showing that a dairy compound was being promoted as a healthy option for children, when in fact it had in its composition unrecommended elements, such as sugar and food additives. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Additionally, new advertising strategies not provided for by law are created, such as social media, in addition to constantly verifying the influence on professionals who work with children, causing a conflict of interest, which serves mainly industrial capital. Exemplifying this, we can mention the repudiation note of IBFAN Brazil on NESTLÉ'S partnership with the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (BPS) in a program for young pediatricians, of July 10, 2020. In this note, IBFAN Brasil expresses its repudiation as a result of the launch of NESTLÉ'S J. PEDIA 2020 e-learning program for pediatric resident physicians (not yet certified pediatricians) from all

over the country, in partnership with BPS. In view of the BPS brings together professionals dedicated to the health care and nutrition of children, which presupposes the duty to promote, protect and support breastfeeding and healthy complementary feeding, there are conflicts of interest. IBFAN Brasil understands that the e-learning program J. Pedia clearly exposes this conflict, because it associates professionals in early career with the company whose profit comes from the commercialization of products that undeniably compete with breastfeeding. This close relationship that is intended to be established between physicians in training and the aforementioned industry cannot be seen as ethical. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Another example that focuses on disrespect for the rights of the child and, consequently, child development, concerns the amount of folic acid isolated in its commercial versions by the pharmaceutical industry. Folic acid is directly related to neurodevelopment, acting at the beginning of pregnancy, on the closure of the neural tube, allowing adequate structural formation of the nervous system.

Commercial versions of folic acid correspond to 5 mg, a concentration that exceeds 5 times the maximum tolerable value (UL), a parameter defined from the presence of adverse health effects. In 2013, the Ministry of Health reduced the recommendations in the Supplementation Program for pregnant women from 5 mg to 400mcg, but the distribution remains the same, because it is not economically interesting for the industry to produce isolated folic acid supplements with lower concentrations. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Once again capital is based on the law and, in this case, may include and even harm children's health by over-ingested, such as the development of childhood asthma. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The examples presented give only an idea of the real extent of the violation of the rights of the child. Investing in childhood brings financial return: "It is estimated that the cognitive and educational deficiencies accumulated by children with growth delay result in a 22% loss in annual income in adulthood." ⁽¹⁸⁾ Despite the strong economic appeal, which should not overlap with the right of the child as a citizen, there is a struggle of unequal forces between those who advocate for comprehensive attention to child development and lobbyists of food and pharmaceutical companies.

Another point that illustrates the struggle of forces between *lobbyists and advocacy* is the existence of a large number of entities that fight for the rights of the child to be respected, such as the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents - Conanda (<https://www.direitosdacrianca.gov.br/conanda>), Fflood ABRINQ (<https://fadac.org.br/a-fundacao>), the Alana Institute (<https://alana.org.br/>), the Maria Cecilia Souto Vidigal Foundation (<https://www.fmcsv.org.br/pt-BR/>), and the Shuttlebed Network (<https://www.chegadetrabalhoainfantil.org.br/>).

Their presence in the country has represented a collective effort to promote full child development. But, in the current national scenario, marked by the

Child development and formation of human capital.. internal destructuring of important ministries and councils by structural reforms, criminalization of social movements, deliberate approval of pesticides and constitutional amendments that only precarious health, education and social assistance policies, we question how it is possible to overpower the rights of the child to the interests of private capital. Despite the recognition that this will always be a space of disputes, the most recent events have diminished the possibilities of confrontation by those who advocate in favor of childhood.

When we think about child labor, the issue becomes even more evident. The legislation on it has not been sufficient to prevent thousands of children from still being exploited at a stage where they should have their development promoted. Data from the 2015 National Household Sample Survey show that 400,000 children aged five to nine are exploited for paid or domestic child labor. ⁽¹⁹⁾ The situation is even more worrisome when the country's executive leadership uses social media to declare that "work dignifies man, woman, no matter age", in a context where it shows the desire to decriminalize child labor, stating that it will not send a proposal to congress because it would be "massacred".

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the events throughout history - and the most recent ones show that child development is a "capital good", as it guarantees the productive strength of the country - it should not be promoted because it favors the economy, this being only a consequence. It must be ensured because it is a right of the child as a citizen. We cannot allow past mistakes to remain recurrent.

Unfortunately, the existence of so many institutions and even sectors within the State itself that advocate for the promotion of child development, give us the notion of how much this right, although legally constituted, still lacks so much practical application. It is necessary to change the view of adults about children and, effectively, recognize them as citizens, subjects of rights, so that more than prevent someone from preventing them from developing, we act in their full promotion. It is the right of the child and it is the duty of the State and of all of us.

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