



Literacy at the Right Age Program (PAIC) in Ceará: achievements, contradictions and challenges

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This article reveals the results of an investigation carried out with education professionals working in the Literacy Cycle of municipal public schools, who weave the Literacy at the Right Age Program (Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa – PAIC) into their daily teaching practices. The general objective was to investigate the impact (achievements, contradictions and challenges) of the PAIC on the social quality of teacher training and teaching in the early stages of basic education in the Central Hinterland¹ of Ceará. This study was based on analyzing the theoretical categories of teacher training, language, children and human emancipation, supported by the concept that the educator is a socio-historical subject. As a methodology, we used a qualitative case study approach, based on historical and dialectical materialism. The results of this study include the perception that PAIC contributes significantly to overcoming persistent school failure.

Keywords: Teacher Training. Language. Children. Human Emancipation.

Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PAIC) no Ceará: conquistas, contradições e desafios

Resumo

Este artigo revela os resultados de uma investigação realizada com profissionais da educação atuantes no Ciclo de Alfabetização das escolas públicas municipais, que tecem, em suas práticas pedagógicas diárias, o Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PAIC). O objetivo geral foi averiguar os influxos (conquistas, contradições e desafios) do PAIC na qualidade social da formação docente e do ensino, nas etapas iniciais da Educação Básica no Sertão Central Cearense. Este estudo teve como base de análise as categorias teóricas formação docente, linguagem, criança e emancipação humana, com suporte na concepção de que o educador é um sujeito sócio-histórico. Como metodologia, recorremos a uma abordagem de natureza qualitativa do tipo estudo de caso, fundamentada no materialismo histórico e dialético. Entre os resultados deste estudo, destaca-se a

¹ One of the five micro-regions of the state of Ceará.





percepção de que o PAIC contribui significativamente para a superação do insistente fracasso escolar.

Palavras-chave: Formação Docente. Linguagem. Criança. Emancipação Humana.

1 Introduction

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The fact that Brazil is a rich, diverse country with exaggerated inequalities in many aspects is nothing new. The understanding that quality education, however, is a powerful artifact for promoting a social revolution forms an idea, a desire and a utopia that moves those who work with the perspective that “tomorrow, despite today, can become a beautiful day”, to paraphrase the beautiful poem by Guilherme Arantes (Amanhã, 1996). And it was with this in mind that a group of experienced educators put together what has now become the largest and longest-lasting Initial Literacy program in the state of Ceará and perhaps in Brazil.

It is imperative to highlight why we are aware that the re-democratization of the country did not happen easily. On the contrary: Herculean battles were fought between groups with conflicting interests, made up of workers and the owners of capital. There have been significant achievements, such as the Citizen Constitution of 1988 and the implementation of Fundef in the same year. Contrary to this, there were also major defeats promoted by the consolidation of neoliberalism, which reduced the size of the state, compromising social welfare policies and implementing a progressive wave of privatizations of strategic state-owned companies, mainly in the governments of Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

From this point of view, education was the scene of many disputes. Numerous fallacies have followed conservative governments in adopting policies, programs and actions that have failed to promote the promised socialization of quality education for all, as agreed at the World Education Conference in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. On the other hand, they dismantled workers' historic achievements by including Article 77 in the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional –





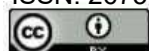
LDB, Law No. 9.394/1996) (Brasil, 1996), which opened up the possibility for philanthropic institutions (foundations, institutes and NGOs) to receive public money as long as they are non-profit organizations. It also maintains the two education systems (public and private), once again frustrating the wishes of those who want a single school for all, thus giving prominence to the commercialization of education.

In fact, the breakdown of the New Republic pact, which culminated in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, opened the way for reforms such as the labor and social security reforms, which led to countless losses of workers' hard-won gains, and the approval of Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 (Brasil, 2016), the spending ceiling, which froze public investment in health and education for 20 years, as well as suspending the 18% of the Union's tax collection to the education sector, promoting setbacks with incalculable consequences for the country's least favored population.

Moreover, not content with this, the shrewd representatives of non-profit institutions, appropriating the public agenda through the bourgeois media, ideologically disseminate information/propaganda that convinces the population that public services are inefficient and therefore need to be tutored and/or privatized². And so they are occupying spaces and guaranteeing their agendas in the reforms, such as the educational/curricular one, which was embodied in the making of the National Common Curriculum Base – BNCC (Brasil, 2017b), which, in theory, should translate the project of society we are aiming for into education, but in fact made possible the controversial reform of the high school (Law No. 13,415/2017) (Brasil, 2017a)³, which then altered its structure and made the curriculum more flexible, significantly reducing the time of traditional subjects and opening up significant space for a diversified area, called training itineraries, with its questionable

² The most recent example of this approach took place in Paraná, on June 3, 2024, when the State Legislative Assembly urgently approved Law No. 22.006/2024, which establishes the School Partner Program (Programa Parceiro da Escola). This program aims to outsource the administration of state schools, handing them over to the private sector.

³ After a national mobilization against the New High School Project, its implementation was temporarily suspended by the Ministry of Education and returned to Congress to be re-evaluated and voted on. After many disputes, a new version was approved by the Senate on June 19, 2024 and sent to the Chamber of Deputies for consideration and a vote.



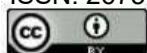


structuring axes, opening the doors of schools to the commercialization of courses, projects, workshops and teaching materials, once again serving external interests.

In fact, we are in an arena of permanent battles between antagonistic projects for society and, since the school is a significant part of this, it is also the subject of interests and disputes. Aware that it is not capable of everything, but that it can do a lot, we must not miss out on the spaces available to plan and build formative experiences that promote competence and awareness among the children and young people of our country. Literate people will certainly be able to emancipate themselves, make more conscious choices and write a different and renewed history for themselves and their community. As Rubem Alves wrote: “While the happy society doesn't arrive, let there be at least fragments of the future [...]” (2000, p. 166).

As a teacher trainer for decades in *hoc sensu*, and a researcher in the field, the first author of this essay felt instigated to invest in a study that would make it possible to unveil the Literacy at the Right Age Program (Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa – PAIC) (hereafter only PAIC) and understand what it has promoted in terms of possibilities, setbacks and demands for the training and practice of literacy teachers of public school children.

The general objective of the project was to investigate the impact (achievements, contradictions and challenges) of the PAIC on the social quality of teacher training and teaching in the initial stages of basic education in the Central Hinterland of Ceará. Meanwhile, the specific objectives consisted of: i) examine the aims of the PAIC through the curriculum and its pedagogical proposal, relating them to the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and the way in which they understand that the child learns and appropriates the language system; ii) to describe the perceptions of the professionals who took part in all the stages of the Program about its implications for their work as literacy teachers; iii) to reveal what material and human conditions have been designed in the state and municipal public policies that underpin the Project under scrutiny, to ensure the structural, material and human conditions, so that the teaching professional can carry out their pedagogical work of alphabetization and literacy of children in the school context with due competence,





skill and autonomy.; and iv) investigate what opportunities and strategies teachers are providing for children to develop their linguistic competence and love of reading in a structured literacy context.

2 Methodology

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Since this is a qualitative case study, after conducting a state-of-the-art study of research on the subject by reading theses and dissertations available on the CAPES portal, we analyzed documents about the program and interviews with professionals involved in it to collect data. In addition, the investigation was structured around four conjunctures: Phase 1 – Document research and literature review; Phase 2 – Characterization of the territory and institutions; Phase 3 – Interviews and school visits; and Phase 4 – Procedure for analyzing the indicators and preparing the final report.

The theoretical framework that anchored the study included the authors of the Vygotsky School of cultural-historical studies, Alexander Luria (2001, 2002), Alexander Luria and Lev S. Vygotsky (1993), Lev S. Vygotsky (1989, 1991, 2001, 2003, 2004), Aléxis Leóntiev (1998); as well as researchers in the field of Initial Literacy, such as Emília Ferreiro (1991, 2001, 2002), Emília Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky (1985) and Magda Soares (1993, 2002, 2004).

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Collective intention to overcome persistent school failure

Exactly eighteen years ago, in 2006, when the first author of this experiment was studying for a PhD in Brazilian Education at the UFC's Postgraduate Program in Education, she took part in the event to share the results of three studies on child illiteracy in Ceará, which gave rise to the document entitled *Educação de Qualidade Começando pelo Começo: relatório final do comitê cearense para a eliminação do analfabetismo escolar*





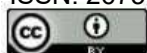
(*Quality Education Starting at the Beginning: final report of the Ceará committee for the elimination of school illiteracy*), published by the Legislative Assembly of Ceará (Aguiar; Gomes; Campos, 2006). Professors from the Program who worked and researched in the area of Language and Literacy and colleagues from Uece, UVA, Urca and Unifor took part in these investigations.

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In fact, the three studies (1 – O diagnóstico da leitura e escrita dos alunos da 2ª série de escolas da rede pública de ensino do estado do Ceará [Diagnosis of the reading and writing skills of 2nd grade students in public schools in the state of Ceará]; 2 – Identificação das condições e formas de organização do trabalho escolar e trabalho docente [Identification of the conditions and forms of organization of school work and teaching work]; and 3 – Avaliação de programas e instituições de formação de docentes para as séries iniciais do ensino fundamental [Evaluation of teacher training programs and institutions for the initial grades of elementary school]) carried out in 2004/2005 aimed to “map and diagnose the problem of school illiteracy in the state; to draw up a profile of the physical, material and pedagogical conditions of the schools in the municipal education networks, and also to evaluate the teacher training programs and institutions for the initial grades of elementary school” (Aguiar; Gomes; Campos, 2006, p. 17).

Furthermore – although the aforementioned academic demands only revealed the variables that contributed to the very discouraging and insistent rates of school illiteracy in Ceará, detected by external evaluations – there were nevertheless indications that some consistent initiative was in the offing.

In fact, as was the case in the municipality of Sobral, legislators passed laws that ensured the necessary foundation for the implementation of an intervention program aimed at eradicating child illiteracy, such as Law No. 14.026, of 17/12/2007 (Brasil, 2007b), which officially created PAIC, and Law 14.023/2007 (Brasil, 2007a), which determined that, since that year, the distribution of ICMS education resources would be based on the Educational Quality Index (IQE) of the municipalities, guaranteeing resources for the operation of the Program in the municipalities, as well as technical-pedagogical assistance from Seduc, the MEC and consultants in the area of education and evaluation. In 2005, 2006 and 2007, all





the municipalities joined the PAIC, signing a Cooperation Pact with the state. In 2011, the program was extended to the 5th grade, changing its name to Learning at the Right Age Program – PAIC+5 and, in 2015, in addition to kindergarten and the 1st to 5th grades, the project also began to serve the 6th to 9th grades and was renamed MAIS PAIC.

At first, the PAIC was organized around five structuring axes: Municipal Education Management, Kindergarten Education, Literacy, Literature and Reader Training and External Evaluation. The coordination of the Kindergarten and Initial Literacy cycle was taken over by Professor Amália Simonetti, from the Home Economics course at the Federal University of Ceará (Universidade Federal do Ceará – UFC), who has vast experience as a researcher and coordinator of institutions for kindergarten and children's literacy, including the publication of books in the field.

It is worth highlighting this intention, from whose partnership the Didactic Proposal for Literacy Letting (the famous green book) was created. This volume, together with the material from the MEC's Continuing Education Programs, Pró-Formação and Pró-Letramento, served as theoretical aids for the Continuing Education of municipal literacy teachers.

The researcher began by searching, inventorying and analyzing 30 reports of master's theses and dissertations, obtained from the CAPES portal from 2013 to 2023, about the program in focus, using the descriptor “Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa no Ceará – PAIC”. The research sample consisted of the eight municipalities that make up the Regional Education Coordination (CREDE 12): Banabuiú, Boa Viagem, Choró, Ibaretama, Ibicuitinga, Quixadá, Quixeramobim and Madalena. The intention was to interview: 04 professionals working directly in the PAIC Literacy Cycle; 02 teachers, if possible, one who worked in the rural area and one who worked in the urban area, who had participated in the implementation of PAIC or who had been working in education for at least ten years; the school's pedagogical coordinator; the municipal Portuguese language trainer(s) for the literacy cycle (1st, 2nd and 3rd year) and/or the PAIC manager in the municipality; as well as the regional Portuguese language trainer for the literacy





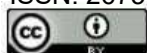
cycle; the coordinator and advisor of the PAIC Coordination in the Municipalities – COPEM at CREDE and the intellectual mentor of the Program.

At the end of the field visits and interviews in the municipalities of Ibareta, Ibicuitinga, Quixadá and Quixeramobim, which are respectively the two smallest and two largest in the region in terms of area and population, it was clear that there was enough information to answer all the basic questions in the study. Each professional/author of the fragments of speech mentioned in the body of this text has been given the codename of a deity⁴ from Greek mythology.

To capture the teachers' perceptions of the issues listed, a semi-structured interview was set up with three dimensions: In the Introduction, there are questions about the professional's life story and training. In Item 1 – Implementation and operation of the PAIC, questions were asked about how they found out about the Program, how it was implemented in the school where they work, the resistance and how they taught literacy before and after the Program. In the second item – Perceptions of the PAIC, after 17 years of its existence, the question dealt with progress, challenges, working conditions, support material, the continuing education program, planning, evaluation, inclusion and multigroup classes. In the final item – Challenges and perspectives on the continuity of the PAIC, the questions were about what it was like to teach during the covid-19 pandemic and to what extent this disease affected the teacher's practice, the children's learning and the socio-emotional development of both, and what the municipality proposed to reverse this reality.

In the following report, each of the study's specific objectives is highlighted, and the answers found in the research are explained in a continuous essay format, permeated by fragments of the respondents' speech, which illustrate how they think and act. Finally, an answer is given to the general objective, which is answered by covering a little of each specificity.

⁴ According to Greek mythology, there were deities who were part of the religiosity of the ancient Greeks, known as Greek gods, who inhabited Mount Olympus.





3.2 Examine the aims of the PAIC through the curriculum and its pedagogical proposal, relating them to the teacher's pedagogical knowledge and the way the teacher understands that the child learns and appropriates the language system

It is imperative to note that both the initial PAIC Teaching Proposal and the current training documents⁵ that underpin the Continuing Education Program for Regional Portuguese Language Trainers in the Literacy Cycle use a concept of interactive language as their guiding principle when they propose working with the children in productive groupings in which exchanges are made during activities and they help each other solve the problem situations proposed by the teachers or contained in the textbooks.

PAIC's Continuing Education currently takes place under the following dynamic: First, the regional teacher/trainer (from each CREDE) takes part in two days of training in Fortaleza, facilitated by the state coordinator of the Literacy area, then the state trainers/consultants take part in training on a bimonthly basis. When they return to their regional office, they pass on the information to the teachers/trainers, who, in this case, are the eight municipalities of CREDE 12 or the SME of Quixadá. Following this logic, the municipal teachers/trainers, when they return to their municipalities of origin, also pass on to the literacy cycle teachers, managers and pedagogical coordinators what they have assimilated from the training they have attended and what they feel needs to be added, based on the local reality.

According to the testimonies of regional teachers/trainers, there is no way to be completely faithful to the content received from the source, as each professional leaves a bit of their mark on the training they organize and facilitate⁶. See the continuity.

⁵ Fascículo Formativo 2: **Ciclo de Alfabetização** – Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada – O Direito de toda Criança ser alfabetizada na Idade Certa (Seduc, 2024).

⁶ The Continuing Teacher Education Programs are organized under the guidance of the Common National Basis for Continuing Teacher Education, implemented by CNE/CP Resolution No. 1/2020, which established, in line with the BNCC, a clear vision of teaching work with an emphasis on practical action.





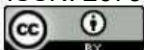
[...] After spending a good while as a temporary teacher in the state, when I was studying Pedagogy, I applied to the municipality and took over a classroom in the Literacy cycle and had my first contact with the PAIC routines. After six years as a Literacy Teacher, I was selected by CREDE 12 as a regional trainer for priority schools. It was a “pilot action by the state” as a strategy to give greater support to those schools where the results of external evaluations had not been so good. So that's where I came into even closer contact with PAIC. Because it's one thing to know PAIC as a teacher, but it's another thing for me to know PAIC as a trainer. We start to socialize ideas and strategies directly with the SEDUC consultants, directly with the trainers from all over the state of Ceará. [...] in the training sessions with the SEDUC consultants, who give us the support material, which is the material we will use as a basis for preparing our training in the regional offices. When we return, there is a moment of “alignment with the CREDE team”, which is when they listen to how the training went, what strategies we are bringing from SEDUC to apply in the region. And based on the training in Fortaleza and the alignment with the CREDE, we prepare the regional training. And we add something, or take away what doesn't fit our reality [...] and pass on this training to the municipal teachers, who in turn also adapt it to the reality of their municipality. In other words, each municipal trainer ends up having a bit of autonomy to add something they think is important within the PAIC proposal. [...] (Zeus, 2024).

It is important to underline the idea that, at the beginning of the program, the teachers all came to Fortaleza, even to learn about the practical experiences that inspired the teachers who wrote the pedagogical proposal. In the interviews, the older teachers spoke with emotion about this moment. They seemed to feel like they were part of “a crusade to eradicate school failure”. Let's take a look at their narratives.

[...] At the beginning of PAIC I was a trainer for [...] year, and I still have Amália Simonetti's material, it's wonderful, it came for each student with inserts and games to highlight, it was great, I loved that material, it doesn't come anymore. [...] I have one of these with the proposal autographed by her, I took part in the training with her and asked her to autograph it (Afrodite, 2024).

[...] I took part in training sessions with the writer Amália Simonetti, I was at the Center, where she helped both children from the outskirts of town and those from higher social classes, and she argued that everyone had the chance to learn. So it was in this search, in this exchange, in this rapport, that ideas and strategies began to emerge so that we in the municipality could also achieve success (Deméter, 2024).

It was curious to witness the pride with which the teachers remembered having known the precursor of the Pedagogical Proposal and the PAIC training courses, and how they showed nostalgia when they referred to the teaching material she had produced. They





described in detail the quality of the activities and the simple, precise language that enabled the children to understand what was being asked of them. The inserts allowed each child to put together words and sentences or play games.

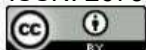
With regard to their perception of how children learn, many interesting answers were recorded that don't fit in an article, but one of these answers illustrates a little of what was found:

[...] They learn when we awaken learning in them. When we awaken their autonomy. I learned this from Emília Ferreiro and Teberosky's books, when she observed the children. So I learned to observe more, in the teaching process, so that I could intervene. [...] (Hera, 2024).

According to the psycholinguist Emília Ferreiro (2002, p. 36), one of the main points to be faced by those who work with children is to understand them as beings with multiple determinations:

[...] we cannot reduce the child to a pair of eyes that see, a pair of ears that hear, a speech apparatus that makes sounds and a hand that clumsily presses a pencil on a sheet of paper. Behind (or beyond) the eyes, the ears, the phonation apparatus and the hand, there is a subject who thinks and who tries to incorporate this marvelous means of representing and recreating language, which is writing, all writing, into their own knowledge (our emphasis).

It is worth noting that Vygotsky and his colleagues proved the importance of mediation for children's learning and development. On the one hand, through signs such as language, and on the other, through the support of a well-prepared subject to help them advance cognitively. Following the authors' logic, by relying on the teacher's collaboration to solve problem situations, for example, at a later stage the student will solve the questions themselves. In other words, what the child does with help today (zone of actual development) they will do on their own tomorrow (zone of potential development) (Vygotsky, 1989, 2001).



3.3 Describe the perceptions of the professionals who participated in all stages of the Program about its implications for their work as literacy teachers

Considering that social quality education is a basic prerequisite for the socio-economic and cultural development of a country, and a basic social right guaranteed by the Citizen's Constitution for all Brazilians, it is up to the states and municipalities, with the support of the Union, to find alternatives and partnerships to offer a school where people can stay, learn and develop their potential to the full.

According to teacher Hestia (2024), the PAIC has changed the reality of education in the municipalities of Ceará:

PAIC has changed the history of education in Ceará's municipalities. Seeing and remembering the beginning and seeing it now, the teacher has a different attitude. The manager also has a different attitude. Not least because in addition to the educational side, there's the financial side. The ICMS transfer to municipalities is based on education. So they run after it. The award for the top 10 school is based on Spaece. So they come together because they want to get a better education, but also because it's hard on their pockets. And financially, when the municipality realizes it could make a loss, it runs after it, it makes it happen [...].

In addition, the professionals were unanimous in their responses that the PAIC changed the position of the municipal teams when faced with the challenge of making children literate. And we suspect that the fact that the consultants and trainers have classroom experience as literacy educators on their CVs, coupled with the fact that they come from successful backgrounds, makes them believe that they can do it too. This fact is explicit in some of the testimonies. These are the words of one teacher:

[...] I worked for the state as a temp and had experience in middle school. When there was an exam in 2010, I moved up to elementary school. When I arrived here it was such a shock for me that I was... I despaired as a teacher. I used to say: "My God, how am I going to work in literacy? Because in the experience I had, in middle school, everyone was already literate, everyone knew how to read, everyone knew how to write [...]. I started in August, replacing a third-grade teacher who had retired. It was a difficult six months for me. The following year, they put me in a second-grade class, and that's when the problem was big. But there was **training**. When I received my first training, it was like a blanket that covered me and gave



me a guide (I get goose bumps) to literacy. [...] The training was very good and we left there with the plan for the month ready and with activities to work on at all levels. Because we never get a homogeneous classroom, right? We were given all the levels of psychogenesis, which are: pre-syllabic, syllabic, syllabic-alphabetic and alphabetic [...] and with this training I was given a guide. Although it's not easy, it's difficult, but it's wonderful (laughter and crying, our detail) (Ártemis, 2024).

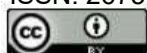
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The helplessness that teacher Ártemis faced, with a huge challenge on her hands, expectations of results as a result of external evaluations and not knowing which way to go, until she was welcomed by this team of trainers, is heartbreaking, but there is no doubt that this is the reality of many of her peers in multiple places in Brazil.

Certainly, from the proposal of countless reforms, through political promises, blaming children, families and teachers for persistent failures, to the disputes between scholars and researchers in the field about methods, conceptions and paradigms, there have been repeated experiences of failure in and at school. We agree with the ideas of the late Magda Soares, when, in one of her last speeches at the commemoration of World Literacy Day and her 90th birthday, in Florianópolis, by the Brazilian Literacy Association – ABAlf (via videoconference), she vented her frustration:

[...] There's not much to celebrate when after a lifetime of struggle, a great struggle for literacy, broadening the term, for the introduction of all citizens into the culture of writing that dominates today's societies, and without this introduction into the domain of the culture of writing, these citizens lose a strong weapon in the fight against inequalities and social injustices. [...] you see, at this point we still have around 11 million illiterate people in this country, [...] 11 million people prevented from integrating into written culture, and therefore discriminated against, and therefore in a position of inequality, on the other hand, if we think that the PNE – National Education Plan defined that by 2024 we would have eradicated [...] illiteracy. Thinking about the millions of children, especially those from working class backgrounds, the children who attend public schools in this country, we have done very little, or almost nothing. And after the pandemic, it's even more difficult to tackle this issue [...] (Agradecimento, 2022).

It is worth noting that in 2013, under the Dilma Rousseff government, there was an initiative worthy of recognition with regard to the Continuing Education of Literacy Teachers: the implementation of the National Program for Literacy at the Right Age (Programa Nacional de Alfabetização na Idade Certa – PNAIC), by Ordinance No. 867 of





04/07/2012 (Brasil, 2012), which, in the case of Ceará, worked as an addition to what was already being done in terms of Teacher Training and Initial Literacy. It is also important to mention that this program was inspired by the Ceará experience.

Against the backdrop of history, on April 11, 2019, with Law No. 9,765 (Brasil, 2019), the government of Jair Bolsonaro established a National Literacy Plan (Plano Nacional de Alfabetização – PNA) to combat absolute illiteracy and functional illiteracy. According to the document, there was a proposal aimed at applying practices based on national and international scientific evidence. In reality, the old phonic method of a synthetic nature came to light, to the bewilderment of researchers in the field, but, at least in Ceará, it didn't affect the program underway in the public school system.

On June 12, 2023, the current government of Luiz Inácio da Silva, through the MEC, launched the National Child Literacy Commitment (Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada – CNCA), which, with five structuring axes, aims to promote: governance and management of literacy policy; training education professionals and improving teaching practices and school management; improvement and qualification of physical infrastructure and teaching aids; evaluation systems; and recognizing and sharing good practices. This policy is in line with goal 5 of the National Education Plan and aims to support states and municipalities in their initiatives to improve children's literacy and restore learning that has been left deficient as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, through the National Network for Articulation and Management, Training and Mobilization (Rede Nacional de Articulação e Gestão, Formação e Mobilização) (RENALFA).

It is worth noting that, in legal terms, we have been well served in recent years with intentions to promote the population's access to literate culture. Currently, one training program runs concurrently with another. One even wonders who is interested in so many courses. Could it be that if we took the time to study what has already been produced and invested these resources in building schools, buying literature books or educational games, or even safer school transport for students, there wouldn't be more of a contribution to achieving good results?





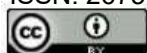
3.4 Reveal what material and human conditions have been designed in the state and municipal public policies that underpin the project in question, to ensure structural, material and human conditions, so that the teaching professional can carry out their pedagogical work in the process of alphabetizing and literating children in the school context with due competence, skill and autonomy

When asked if the teaching and human materials that arrived at the schools were sufficient and if they met the demands of the children, there were a variety of positions from the teachers interviewed.

In terms of the amount of material, textbooks are satisfactory. Surprisingly, in some places, the teacher works in 1st and 2nd year classes of the literacy cycle with three materials from different publishers at the same time. According to the interviewees, it's even difficult to carry out so many activities. There is the book from the National Textbook Program (Programa Nacional do Livro Didático – PNLD), which comes to all students. The structured material from the state of Ceará, which is published by Nova Escola, and, in some places, the City Council buys books with the justification of helping to reinforce learning. See the teachers' testimonies:

[...] I've already worked with teacher Amália Simonetti's material, I've worked with Caminhos, I've worked with Avança Mais, and now we're going to work with Nova escola (structured material) emphasis added. [...] So, considering practice, Amália Simonetti's material is more like our classroom experience. He's closer to our students. We can work better. The teaching is different. It had different support. With posters, games, movable letters, all included in the material. Now I, teacher Gaia, find it more difficult to work with this new material (Gaia, 2024).

Hera points out that they currently receive books from the PNLD and the Nova Escola publishing house. However, as some of the students don't keep up with the level of the books, the Seduc technicians send PDFs of complementary material to be printed in the schools.





[...] They send very good material (complementary) emphasis added. We always use the material that SEDUC provides. But they don't send printed material. I know that not all the students will need to work with that material and there's the "productive grouping", which you won't have to print for everyone. But you should have at least "X" amount, you know? Because each school received a printer, but it requires paper and ink. And we know that the materials are great, but it comes down to resources. Sometimes we don't even have enough to print. [...] Another thing that's making it difficult now is that we have material that was produced by Nova Escola, which is very good, but it's not at the level of Ceará over the last two years. [...] If it had been for the investment in Explorando Saberes itself, in these last 2 years of the post-pandemic, it would have been a much better investment. [...] At the beginning of PAIC, we adopted material from the publishers, then came Amália's material. Amália's came with all the cards, the alphabet, everything very wonderful, O pé de imaginação, I loved that material. So it made a lot of things easier, and now it doesn't. Some material came from Nova Escola, [...], but for the level Ceará was at before the pandemic, it fitted in too much. Because it had been working on the whole text, many more advanced descriptors... and there's no way they could keep up with it [...] (Hera, 2024).

The professionals' accounts led us to ask why a material that the state owns the copyright to and which had been meeting the demands of teachers and students was taken out of circulation, only to be replaced by another that causes so much dissatisfaction. And why insist on keeping it, despite so much resistance? The justification given by some professionals is that it was prepared before the pandemic and they didn't count on a pause in classroom activities of almost two years, in which children started arriving at school to enter 2nd grade without ever having attended a regular classroom, consequently presenting many gaps in learning, a reality that was not taken into account because the books were ready and needed to be consumed.

It's worth noting that one strategy that has long contributed to correcting problems in learning is that, in addition to the individual diagnostic evaluations carried out at the beginning of each two-month period by the teacher, so that she can intervene more assertively in each person's difficulties and help them make progress, schools with below-average results in external evaluations are adopted by another school that has done well in the same evaluations. And children diagnosed with learning distortions are given specific tasks to restore their learning.

In terms of human resources, the teachers interviewed said that progress had been made in some municipalities by assigning teachers to the areas of science, geography and





history, guaranteeing each literacy teacher a day and a half to plan, develop activities and enter information about the class into the pedagogical monitoring system. Curiously, only in one municipality did the teacher refer to the size of the classroom and the lack of a suitable place for the children to play, as it was a school that had students up to the 9th grade, as well as the lack of support material, as a result of problems with the school's accountability.

The initiative linked to the Children's Literature and Reader Training Axis, responsible for implementing the Literary Education public policy, to promote public notices for Ceará authors to publish their books, enriching the literary collection of schools, was a commendable idea, which contributes to the formation of fluent readers. A study carried out between 2008 and 2018 by Anjos and Ribeiro (2024) showed that 213 books had been published in PAIC's prose and poetry collections for children aged between four and ten. These books are sent to schools and support the reading strategies organized by educators.

3.5 Investigate what opportunities and strategies teachers are providing for children to develop their linguistic competence and *love of reading* in a structured literacy context⁷

It is important to note that, as well as the PAIC's aim of ensuring literacy among children in the early years of elementary school, through continued teacher training, support for school management and the development of structured material, it also promotes the distribution of literature collections to schools, ensuring that children have access to literate culture. To develop a love of reading, one of the fundamental conditions is pleasant interaction with literature, through listening to storytelling and literary reading of marvelous tales, fables, legends, poetry, among others.

⁷ Literacy is being used in the sense of appropriating the alphabetic system in everyday social situations. Like identifying a label on a cookie, a symbol on a bathroom door sign, understanding the plot of a story or the lyrics of a song. Even before becoming literate, people need to experience the uses and functions of their mother tongue.



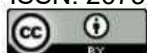


Teberosky and Colomer (2003) state that numerous studies have shown that by sharing the reading of a book with a child, the adult is not only providing a pleasurable activity, but also an important moment of learning about the functions and structure of written language, even bridging the gap between oral and written language. It is also an excellent opportunity for children to hear, see, handle and ask questions about this important textual medium and its specific characteristics.

School is an important means of socializing culture, especially for people who are unable to access these resources due to financial limitations. However, we risk suggesting that if everyone had access to cultural goods, such as bookshops, cinemas, theaters, art galleries, museums, the most varied instruments for accessing information and the knowledge produced and systematized historically by humanity, it might not be necessary to insist on a story that has been read so many times, such as training children to use language properly in situations where they need to speak, listen, read and write (linguistic competence).

3.6 To investigate the impact (achievements, contradictions and challenges) of the PAIC on the social quality of teacher training and teaching in the initial stages of basic education in the Central Hinterland of Ceará

According to the professionals interviewed, it is worth noting that, among the achievements obtained through PAIC, the following are worth mentioning: the assertive and consistent way in which they have come to understand and carry out the process of teaching-learning process of speaking, reading and writing in schools; obtaining hours to plan protocols, routines and activities that make it possible to intervene with precision in situations where children are in need, helping them to advance in their acquisitions and learning; the improvement of material and human working conditions, with the achievement of professional stability and the expansion of the book collection; and, above all, the composition of a web of continuing education and support, which intertwines all those who make up the literacy cycle in public education systems.





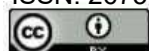
As contradictions, we mention: the excess of evaluations, making what would work as a guiding diagnosis for interventions and a promoter of progress towards achieving the planned goals, sometimes suffocating for children and teachers with the excessive demands for results⁸; the change of a teaching material approved by all the teachers, without plausible justification; the permanent guardianship of the teacher's work, which, while on the one hand is supportive, paradoxically compromises the professional's autonomy, authority and authorship (Kramer, 1994; Moreira, 2009; Oliveira; Falcão, 2023).

Challenges include: Ending multi-grade classrooms in rural areas of municipalities; to promote the real inclusion of special children, by preparing adapted teaching materials and providing a support person (scholarship holder), most of whom are university students, to take part in planning and help with the student's educational activities; propose initiatives that bring families to participate in school activities, so that they learn to help their children with pedagogical demands when necessary; invest in actions that promote the socio-emotional development of teachers, children and families, considering that we are still living with the losses and after-effects of the recent pandemic; guaranteeing schools with a better physical structure, equipment and materials to ensure better support for teachers' work; and making it possible to tackle violence in and around educational facilities.

4 Conclusions

Understanding educational processes and intervening in them is an exercise that involves many variables, so it requires permanent and attentive reflection on practice, because this, reflected in the light of theories that underpin it, gives rise to a more consistent and competent practice, in other words, true pedagogical praxis.

⁸ To learn more about this, read the doctoral thesis: *Os efeitos do Programa Aprendizagem na Idade Certa (PAIC) no Trabalho de Professores Alfabetizadores*, by Roberta Silva, presented at the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at the University of Fortaleza – Unifor, in 2018.





In fact, to paraphrase Freire (1998), the pedagogical space is seen as a text that must be constantly read, interpreted, written and rewritten. In this way, it is necessary to enter the classroom through research and teaching discourses and unveil the processes of teaching/learning and the production of knowledge that exist in the bonds of interaction and mediation between the teacher and the student, through verbal language and literate culture.

By way of conclusion, even though we are aware that no matter how much we try to describe, map or portray reality, no matter how perfect and approximate the productions we make, we will never be able to replicate the real thing. Representations are attempts to get closer to a reality that is never fully revealed. Striving, however, for this revelation is what drives researchers and gives meaning to science.

This journey through literature, research and the intricacies of the municipal public school in the Central Hinterland of Ceará was extraordinarily rich. Seeing former students occupying strategic positions in education management, as well as facilitating teaching-learning processes in educational institutions with such mastery and competence, was an indescribable thrill. In short, the PAIC literacy teachers, the authors of this essay and so many of their colleagues in the arduous, challenging and rewarding profession of teaching, are working to promote social and emancipatory quality education.

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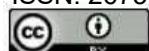
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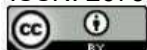
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