

Childhood and normativity in the BNCC: meaning effects and silencings /

Infância e normatividade na BNCC: efeitos de sentido e silenciamentos

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the meanings produced about childhood in the discourse of the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and the silencing processes resulting from the construction of an idealized child subject, in dialogue with other discursive materialities. The study is grounded in French Discourse Analysis, particularly the contributions of Michel Pêcheux and Eni Orlandi, in dialogue with studies in the Sociology of Childhood. It is a qualitative, documentary, and bibliographic study whose corpus consists of selected excerpts from the BNCC (2017), analyzed in conjunction with academic texts, documents produced by social movements, and reports of pedagogical practices. The findings indicate that the child subject projected by the BNCC is shaped by a developmentalist and neoliberal logic that disregards the concrete conditions of Brazilian children and silences markers such as class, race, territory, and disability. It is concluded that these silencing processes stem from ideological choices embedded in the discursive materiality of curriculum policy and that the dialogue with other discursive materialities contributes to denaturalizing the official curriculum and reaffirming childhood as a plural, situated experience shaped by structural inequalities.

KEYWORDS: Childhood; Curriculum; BNCC; French Discourse Analysis.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os sentidos produzidos sobre a infância no discurso da Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) e os silenciamentos que resultam da construção de um sujeito infantil idealizado, em confronto com outras materialidades discursivas. A pesquisa fundamenta-se na Análise de Discurso de linha francesa, especialmente nas contribuições de Michel Pêcheux e Eni Orlandi, em diálogo com estudos da Sociologia da Infância. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, de natureza documental e bibliográfica, cujo corpus é constituído por fragmentos da BNCC (2017), analisados em articulação com textos acadêmicos, documentos produzidos por movimentos sociais e relatos de práticas pedagógicas. Os resultados evidenciam que o sujeito infantil projetado pela BNCC é marcado por uma lógica desenvolvimentista e neoliberal, que desconsidera as condições concretas das crianças brasileiras e silencia marcadores como classe, raça, território e deficiência. Conclui-se que esses silenciamentos decorrem de escolhas ideológicas inscritas na materialidade discursiva da política curricular e que o confronto com outras materialidades discursivas contribui para desnaturalizar o currículo oficial e reafirmar a infância como experiência plural, situada e atravessada por desigualdades estruturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Infância; Currículo; BNCC; Análise de Discurso Francesa.

1 Introduction

The Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) [Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum], as a normative document that guides Basic Education curricula in Brazil, presents itself as the expression of an educational project grounded in the commitment to ensuring learning rights, equity, and quality for all. Approved in 2017, amid a context of significant political instability and governmental transition, its formulation was marked by the decisive involvement of private foundations and multilateral organizations, such as the Lemann Foundation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which imbued the document with a managerial and standardizing rationality guided by the principles of neoliberal logic.

From the perspective of French Discourse Analysis (FDA), founded by Michel Pêcheux and further developed in Brazil by Eni Orlandi, language is understood as traversed by ideology and history, which means that meanings are not given in advance but are produced within discursive formations that delimit what can or cannot be said at a given historical moment.

Thus, the discourse of the BNCC, by presenting itself as the bearer of self-evident and universal truths about childhood, education, and the learning subject, produces naturalization effects that warrant critical examination. Such effects operate through the construction of an idealized child subject - autonomous, competent, participatory, and emotionally regulated - and through the exclusion of other possible ways of signifying childhood.

We are therefore interested in understanding how childhood is discursively constructed within the BNCC and which meanings are silenced in this process. By approaching silence not as the absence of language, but as the erasure of possible meanings (Orlandi, 2007), we propose to analyze the statements that organize the BNCC text in order to reveal the exclusions and interdictions operating in the constitution of a child subject regulated by normative expectations of development and learning.

This analysis is placed in tension through comparison with other discursive materialities, such as works by researchers in the Sociology of Childhood (Sarmiento, 2005), manifestos issued by the Movimento Interfóruns de Educação Infantil do Brasil (MIEIB) [Brazilian Inter-Forum Movement for Early Childhood Education], and situated pedagogical experiences, which produce plural meanings shaped by social markers of difference.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the meanings produced about childhood in the discourse of the BNCC and the silences resulting from the construction of an idealized child subject, in comparison with other discursive materialities. To this end, we selected specific excerpts from the document as the corpus - particularly from the General Introduction, the section devoted to Early Childhood Education, and the General Competencies - whose analysis is grounded in the concepts of discursive formation, subject, silence, and conditions of production, as mobilized within French Discourse Analysis. By foregrounding the effects of homogenization and the erasure of concrete childhoods - racialized, Indigenous, peripheral, neurodivergent, and disabled - we seek to contribute to denaturalizing the meanings that become hegemonic within the official curriculum and to developing

an educational critique that recognizes the multiplicity of childhoods and the symbolic struggles through which they are constituted.

2 Childhood at the Intersection of Discourses: Theoretical and Analytical Foundations

French Discourse Analysis, the theoretical and methodological framework underpinning this study, understands discourse as a material process of meaning production, constituted by power relations, ideological formations, and the historical conditions that make utterances possible. Far from directly reflecting reality or expressing individual subjectivity, discourse constitutes a field of symbolic struggles in which meanings are contested, regulated, and often erased. In this sense,

Discourse is not the expression of thought, but rather the historical and material process of meaning production, traversed by conditions of production that are ideological. The subject of discourse is always an effect of this materiality: the subject speaks from positions that they do not control, but which determine them (Pêcheux, 2014, p. 147).

From this perspective, language is not a transparent instrument of communication, but a social practice that participates in the constitution of subjects and in the ways in which they are interpellated within specific contexts. Meanings, therefore, are not given; they are historically produced and inscribed within discursive networks that operate through both repetition and erasure. It is within this space of conflicts and regularities that childhood is also signified, not as a biological essence or a homogeneous stage of human development, but as a discursive construction marked by ideological disputes, sociopolitical contexts, and positions of enunciation. Thus, “discourse is an effect of meanings between interlocutors. This means that it is neither individual nor universal: it is historical. Meaning is always determined by the ideological positions brought into play within the socio-historical process in which words are produced” (Orlandi, 2007, p. 21).

In this process, it is essential to consider what Pêcheux (1999), in *The Role of Memory*, refers to as displacement, that is, the process of destabilizing the effects of self-evidence produced by discursive memory. By reiterating certain meanings while silencing others, memory tends to stabilize meanings, producing an impression of naturalness. Displacement, in turn, opens up space for

questioning these seemingly self-evident meanings, allowing new formulations to emerge and challenge discursive homogeneity. Thus, when reinscribed within other discursive materialities, childhood may escape the fixity imposed by normative memory and come to signify in plural and non-hegemonic ways.

In the educational field, this perspective makes it possible to destabilize discourses that present themselves as technical, objective, or universal by interrogating the effects of naturalization and erasure operating in the formulation of public policies and official documents. It is within this framework that the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) [Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum] is situated, whose apparent technical neutrality conceals the ideological determinations underpinning the construction of a regulatory, standardized curriculum guided by a performative logic of competencies. As Veiga-Neto (2003) points out, curricular discourses are permeated by symbolic struggles and operate as technologies for governing subjects, regulating ways of being, knowing, and acting.

This understanding converges with the discussions developed by Tomaz Tadeu da Silva, for whom the curriculum constitutes a field of symbolic and political struggles in which meanings, identities, and differences are produced. From this perspective, the curriculum goes beyond the technical dimension of content selection and comes to be understood as a discursive practice implicated in the production of ways of being, knowing, and acting. Curricular documents thus participate in the constitution of particular forms of subjectivation, legitimizing certain discourses while marginalizing others (Silva, 2010).

For French Discourse Analysis, one of the fundamental concepts involved in this regulatory process is that of discursive formation, understood as the set of knowledges and ideological positions that delimit what can and cannot be said at a particular historical moment. Discursive formation refers not only to the content of utterances, but also to the conditions that authorize or constrain particular statements. In the case of the BNCC, we identify its affiliation with a discursive formation that constructs an image of the child as active, autonomous, participatory, and emotionally balanced - an idealized model that distances itself from the concrete and plural experiences of childhoods in Brazil.

The child subject that emerges from official discourse does not pre-exist language but is constituted through it. Here, we draw on the concept of the subject as an effect of language, that is, as one who speaks from specific ideological positions, even while under the imaginary effect of autonomy.

The subject is an effect of meaning. The subject is interpellated by ideology to occupy the position assigned to them within the discursive formation, producing the imaginary effect that they are the source of what they say. Thus, the subject believes they speak for themselves, but what they enunciate is determined by the historical and ideological conditions that constitute them (Pêcheux, 2014, p. 147).

The child invoked by the BNCC, therefore, is not a real, historically situated child, but rather a discursive figure constructed through naturalized meanings that project an ideal of full and universal development. Such an ideal disregards the intersections of class, race, territory, and social condition that shape childhoods in Brazil, thereby producing an effect of homogeneity.

From this perspective, the child is interpellated as a subject of rights and duties, yet through the lens of measurable competencies and skills aligned with a performative logic. As Sarmiento (2005, p. 56) observes, childhood should be understood “as a social and historical category, plural and marked by inequalities,” which challenges the universalizing and normative discourse embedded in the BNCC. By invoking this idealized child subject, the document erases experiences that fall outside its regulatory rationality, such as peripheral, Quilombola, Indigenous, and neurodivergent childhoods, whose lived experiences resist such curricular standardization.

This naturalization also operates through what Orlandi (2007) terms discursive silence. Unlike the absence of speech, silence, within this theoretical framework, refers to the erasure of possible meanings that are constrained within a dominant discursive formation. As the author points out, “silence is not emptiness, but a mode of signification. It indicates the unsaid that sustains what is said, functioning as a condition for the production of meanings” (Orlandi, 2007, p. 53). In this sense, to silence is to render invisible certain modes of existence, subjectivity, and experience, as occurs in the BNCC when it omits or marginalizes racialized, Indigenous, peripheral, neurodivergent, or disabled childhoods, whose ways of living, playing, learning, and making sense of the world fall outside the hegemonic model of childhood.

This naturalization also operates through what Orlandi (2007) calls the politics of silence. Unlike founding silence - which corresponds to the constitutive unsaid of any discourse, since every act of saying necessarily leaves other meanings unspoken - the politics of silence concerns specific processes of silencing. Orlandi (2007) distinguishes two types: constitutive silence, understood as the necessary erasure of certain meanings so that others may signify; and local silence, characterized by the interdiction of particular utterances, preventing them from producing meaning and thereby compelling the subject to say otherwise.

In the case of the BNCC, the discursive construction of childhood is not limited to constitutive silence (the necessary unsaid inherent in any discourse), but operates strongly through local silence, that is, through the interdiction of meanings associated with racialized, peripheral, Indigenous, neurodivergent, and disabled childhoods. These modes of existence are erased not merely as a natural absence, but as a discursive interdiction linked to the BNCC's conditions of production: a document developed under the strong influence of private foundations, corporate rationalities, and neoliberal parameters of regulation. Thus, the childhood projected by the BNCC is the effect of a discursive politics that controls what can be said about children in schools, reaffirming a normativity that responds more closely to the interests of standardization and management than to the concrete plurality of childhoods in Brazil.

To further develop this critique, it is necessary to consider that childhood is likewise not a natural or biologically determined category, but rather a historical and discursive construction shaped by social markers of difference. Authors such as Manuel Jacinto Sarmiento (2005) and Moyses Kuhlmann Jr. (2002) contribute to shifting the understanding of childhood away from the notion of a universal stage of human development and toward its conceptualization as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. In this sense,

Childhood must be understood as a generational social category, rather than as a universal stage of development. It is experienced in plural and unequal ways, shaped by divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, and territory that configure it within specific historical and cultural contexts (Sarmiento, 2005, p. 25).

By addressing childhood in its plurality - childhoods, in the plural - these authors challenge discourses that operate through homogenization and bring to the fore the inequalities that structure children's lives across different contexts. As Kuhlmann Jr. (2002, p. 14) further emphasizes, "childhood is a historical phenomenon and, as such, its ways of experiencing and making sense of the world change according to social and cultural conditions." Childhood is thus simultaneously constituted by multiple forms of belonging and situated within contexts of inequality, making it inseparable from concrete conditions of existence.

Within this framework, it is essential to understand the conditions of production of the BNCC discourse, that is, the institutional, ideological, political, and economic elements that make the formulation of certain meanings possible while excluding others. The BNCC was developed between 2014 and 2017 in a context of intense political instability, marked by disputes within the educational field, cuts to social policies, and the growing influence of private foundations and international organizations, such as the Todos pela Educação [All for Education] movement and the Lemann Foundation. These actors exerted considerable influence on the development of a competency-based curriculum emphasizing outcomes, performance, and standardization, thereby revealing how official discourse is traversed by a neoliberal logic of regulation.

This configuration can be understood in light of Stephen Ball's analyses of contemporary education policy. According to Ball, policies are not produced exclusively by the State but emerge from the operation of networks connecting governments, international organizations, private foundations, and various economic actors, thereby producing new forms of educational governance. Within this context, national curriculum documents come to embody political disputes and diverse interests, extending beyond a strictly pedagogical dimension (Ball, 2014).

3 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The analysis undertaken in this study is grounded in the theoretical assumptions of French Discourse Analysis (FDA), based on the understanding that language, sustained by ideology, does not merely communicate but also produces meanings and subjects. Building on the discussion presented

in the previous section, the analysis focuses on the meaning effects mobilized by the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) [Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum] in its discursive construction of childhood, particularly with regard to Early Childhood Education. The concepts of discursive formation, subject, silence, and conditions of production guide the processes of reading and interpreting the corpus, providing analytical tools for denaturalizing the statements that structure official discourse.

The research corpus consists of selected excerpts from the approved version of the BNCC (2017), as well as discursive materialities of an activist, theoretical, and pedagogical nature that challenge the meanings produced within the document. The corpus was constituted following a comprehensive reading of the BNCC, through which statements directly addressing childhood, Early Childhood Education, and the constitution of the child subject were identified. The selection of excerpts was guided by criteria of discursive relevance, prioritizing statements that reveal regularities in the production of meanings about childhood and that mobilize the concepts of discursive formation, subject, silence, and conditions of production. Accordingly, six excerpts were selected because they are representative of the main discursive regularities identified in the document and enable analytical comparison with other discursive materialities of an academic, activist, and pedagogical nature.

Within the BNCC, priority was given to excerpts from the General Introduction, which sets out the purposes of the document and its conception of the subject; sections addressing learning rights and fields of experience in Early Childhood Education; and the General Competencies, which, although intended for Basic Education as a whole, interpellate childhood as a formative stage. In contrast with these official statements, the analysis considers discourses produced by social movements, critical intellectuals, and pedagogical experiences that displace the normative conception of childhood embedded in curriculum policy, thereby making it possible to identify the meaning effects and processes of silencing operating within the BNCC text.

Thus, we understand that

Discourse is an effect of meanings between interlocutors. It is not a matter of transmitting information, but rather a socio-historical process of meaning production in which language

is not neutral but traversed by ideology. What is said and what is silenced are part of this same movement (Orlandi, 2007, p. 21).

The statements that constitute our corpus were analyzed in light of the historical and institutional conditions that made their formulation possible. Developed between 2014 and 2017, the BNCC emerged in a context of political shifts and growing influence of private organizations and international bodies on Brazilian education policies. The involvement of actors such as the Lemann Foundation, the Todos pela Educação [All for Education] movement, and the OECD contributed to the consolidation of a technicist rationality oriented toward performance indicators, which structures the document and shapes its representations of the subject, school, and learning.

Within this framework, the analysis sought to highlight: (1) the naturalized meanings of childhood present in the text, particularly those that construct the notion of the child as active, competent, and emotionally regulated; (2) the subjectivation effects produced by the BNCC discourse, which interpellates the child as an idealized and decontextualized subject; (3) the discursive silences that exclude racialized, Indigenous, peripheral, neurodivergent childhoods, among others; and (4) the ways in which the school is called upon to function as a space for reproducing this hegemonic model of childhood, which is often detached from the concrete living conditions of Brazilian children.

Rather than seeking a “true” meaning of the BNCC, this analytical framework aims to bring to light the effects of naturalization and exclusion inscribed in official discourse by confronting them with other materialities that produce diferente - and often rendered invisible - meanings regarding what childhood can be within the school context.

4 Meanings of Childhood and Silences in the BNCC Discourse: Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is grounded in the perspective of French Discourse Analysis (FDA), understanding the BNCC as a normative public policy that produces meanings about childhood and operates processes of marginalization. To this end, excerpts from the version approved in 2017 - particularly from the General Introduction, the Early Childhood Education section, and the General Competencies - were selected and analyzed in light of concepts such as discursive formation, subject,

conditions of production, and silence. The aim is to demonstrate how the document projects an idealized and decontextualized conception of childhood while simultaneously erasing the plural and unequal experiences that concretely shape childhoods in Brazil.

It is important to emphasize that, in this study, the BNCC is not approached as a homogeneous discursive whole. From the perspective of Discourse Analysis, every discursive materiality is understood as traversed by tensions, contradictions, and disputes over meaning, allowing statements that affirm diversity, equity, and the recognition of differences to coexist with others that produce effects of normalization and homogenization. Accordingly, this study does not seek to exhaust the meanings produced by the BNCC; rather, it focuses on the analysis of excerpts that reveal the discursive construction of an idealized childhood, in accordance with the research objective.

Table 1 below presents the selected excerpts, whose meanings are discussed in dialogue with authors from Discourse Analysis and the Sociology of Childhood, with the aim of denaturalizing the official curriculum and bringing visibility to the ideological struggles involved in the constitution of the child subject within Brazilian education policy.

Table 1 – Excerpt 1 – Introduction to the BNCC

The BNCC is based on the principle that all students have the right to learn. Accordingly, it seeks to ensure equity, quality, and equal learning conditions for all.

Source: Research data (2025).

This statement mobilizes a discourse of apparent social justice and universality, producing the effect of self-evidence that the right to learning would be equally guaranteed to all school subjects. However, by asserting “equal conditions” as an abstract principle, the BNCC text leaves aside the historical, social, and territorial inequalities that shape Brazilian educational reality. Here, normative language produces a displacement: rather than confronting the material contradictions of the education system, the document constructs an idealized student subject who is decontextualized, homogeneous, and stripped of social markers.

The verb “ensure” in this statement produces an effect of certainty and guarantee, as though the document itself had the capacity to effectively realize the principles of equity and quality. However,

by linking this “ensuring” solely to learning conditions circumscribed within the school setting, the text relegates other fundamental conditions - social, economic, and historical - to a secondary position, despite their role in structuring educational inequalities. A displacement is thus produced: the right to learning appears as a normative given, independent of the concrete reality of social conditions. What remains unsaid in this statement is precisely that schools alone cannot ensure equity in a society structured by systemic racism, poverty, territorial exclusion, and the erosion of public policies. The apparent guarantee articulated by the BNCC erases material contradictions, interpellating the school subject as though all students were situated under equal conditions from the outset.

From the perspective of French Discourse Analysis, this statement is shaped by discursive formations that produce naturalized meanings while erasing their conditions of production. The school subject is interpellated as one who has the right to learn, yet this right is presented as something guaranteed by the norm rather than as an object of political struggle. As Orlandi (2007) observes, discourse produces meanings while simultaneously erasing other possible meanings: in this case, childhoods facing concrete barriers to learning are marginalized, including lack of access to schooling, institutional racism, urban violence, hunger, digital exclusion, and the precarization of teaching work.

By positioning the school as a promoter of equity, the BNCC transfers to educational institutions and teachers the responsibility for overcoming structural inequalities, thereby relieving the State of its role in guaranteeing the material conditions necessary for education. As Apple (1989) points out, this type of technical-legal discourse tends to mask power relations by transforming political issues into pedagogical ones. Thus, rather than questioning the foundations of inequality, the principle of equity reinforces the imaginary construction of the school as a redemptive institution capable of compensating for social injustices through curricular standardization.

This abstract and decontextualized conception of childhood, already produced in the opening section of the BNCC, extends to the statements concerning Early Childhood Education. In the next excerpt (Table 2), we observe how the notion of guaranteeing rights becomes associated with the construction of an idealized child subject, once again rendering invisible the social forces and conditions that constitute childhoods in Brazil.

Table 2 – Excerpt 2 – Early Childhood Education

The BNCC proposes learning experiences that ensure children's rights to social interaction, play, participation, being heard, exploration, expression, and knowledge.

Source: Research data (2025).

In this excerpt, the child subject is discursively constructed as endowed with multiple competencies and rights, articulating a positive image of the child as active, participatory, and fully developed. The linguistic formulation universalizes an ideal of childhood: all children, regardless of their contexts, would be equally capable of participating, exploring, expressing themselves, and learning, provided that they were offered appropriate “learning experiences.” What is at stake here is the production of a naturalization effect through which childhood is treated as an abstract and homogeneous category.

Here, the verb “ensure” reappears, now articulated with the notion of learning rights. Once again, an effect of self-evidence is produced: it would seemingly be sufficient to guarantee pedagogical experiences within the school for these rights to be effectively realized. However, by framing rights exclusively within the domain of learning, the statement does not encompass the social and economic rights that condition children's ability to play, interact, and explore - such as the rights to food, housing, territory, health, and protection from violence. There is, therefore, a latent contradiction between what is said (ensuring learning rights) and what remains unsaid (the social rights that make learning possible).

By restricting the notion of rights to the school setting, the BNCC operates through local silence (Orlandi, 2007), limiting the inscription of structural inequalities within official discourse. The result is the construction of an abstract child subject whose rights appear to be fully guaranteed by the school, even when the concrete conditions of existence of Brazilian children reveal otherwise.

From the perspective of French Discourse Analysis, this statement is inscribed within a discursive formation that defines and regulates what can be said about childhood in curriculum policy. The child constructed by the BNCC is interpellated as a subject of rights and competencies, yet these rights are formulated in generic terms and detached from the concrete inequalities that shape

childhoods in Brazil. Discursive silence, as defined by Orlandi (2007), operates by erasing meanings that could problematize this idealized view. Indigenous, Quilombola, peripheral, disabled, and neurodivergent children, whose experiences fall outside normative models, are rendered invisible.

As Sarmiento (2005) points out, childhood is a social and historical construction, plural and marked by inequalities. By disregarding these divisions, the BNCC produces a discourse that claims to guarantee rights without considering the conditions necessary for those rights to be effectively realized. Rather than recognizing childhood as constituted through territories, cultures, and struggles, the document reiterates a normativity based on a universal child who learns, interacts, and develops according to performative parameters. Play, being heard, and participation are all presented as discursive guarantees rather than as practices that encounter concrete obstacles within Brazilian public schools.

The invocation of an active, expressive, and fully developed child acquires even greater significance when we examine the General Competencies formulated by the BNCC. It is within these competencies that the production of an emotionally regulated subject, prepared for social interaction, becomes particularly evident, reinforcing the normative logic of curriculum policy. The following excerpt (Table 3) illustrates how this ideal unfolds in prescriptions concerning social interaction and socio-emotional competencies.

Table 3 – Excerpt 3 – General Competencies

Exercise empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation.

Source: Research data (2025).

This excerpt is part of the formulation of the BNCC's General Competencies, which guide all stages of Basic Education. The school subject interpellated by this statement is emotionally balanced, capable of engaging in dialogue, resolving conflicts, and cooperating with others. By proposing this ideal of social interaction, the BNCC discourse constructs an image of the student as peaceful, ethical, and self-regulated, mobilizing meanings associated with so-called socio-emotional competencies. The

language employed appears neutral and universal, yet it carries a strong normative potential: it constitutes an educable subject shaped according to the values of social interaction expected by the prevailing education policy.

The choice of the verb “exercise” is significant in this process of interpellating the subject. The statement suggests that the child already possesses the capacities for empathy and cooperation and merely needs to put them into practice. This formulation reinforces the effect of naturalization: it presupposes an already constituted, emotionally prepared subject whose task is simply to maintain and further develop competencies that have already been internalized. The result is a twofold silencing - both of the formative processes and social mediations required for the development of these competencies and of the experiences of children who, because they are exposed to violence, exclusion, racism, and inequality, have not been called upon to develop such affective repertoires under the same conditions.

Discursive analysis reveals that this statement conceals the social conditions that hinder - or even prevent - the development of these competencies in many school contexts. Racism, social inequality, symbolic violence, ableism, and discrimination based on gender or territory are erased from the discursive scene. The child subject is held responsible for their capacity for empathy and dialogue, while the role of the State, public policies, and the school structure remains obscured. As Veiga-Neto (2003) points out, curricular discourses operate as forms of governing subjects, as they prescribe ways of being and acting in the world, legitimizing certain behaviors while constraining others.

The school is called upon to function as a harmonizing environment in which children are expected to learn how to coexist, often without recognition of the asymmetries embedded in social relations. Black, peripheral, and disabled children, for example, experience multiple forms of violence both within and outside educational institutions - forms of violence that cannot be overcome merely through the “exercise of empathy.” The discourse therefore produces effects of erasure regarding these tensions, establishing an ideal of subjectivity that is neither always attainable nor necessarily desirable for all childhoods.

This universalized model of childhood projected by the BNCC begins to shift when confronted with other discursive materialities that produce different meanings regarding what it means to be a child

and the role of the school (Table 4). These statements - of an activist, theoretical, and pedagogical nature - destabilize the ideal of a competent, regulated, and emotionally prepared childhood, while bringing into view child subjects who are historically situated and constituted through relations of inequality.

Table 4 – Excerpt 4 – MIEIB Manifesto (2022)

We recognize childhoods in their plurality and complexity as experiences shaped by social inequalities, racism, territorial exclusion, ableism, and institutional forms of violence that schools themselves often contribute to reinforcing.

Source: Research data (2025).

The statement produced by the Movimento Interfóruns de Educação Infantil do Brasil (MIEIB) [Brazilian Inter-Forum Movement for Early Childhood Education] displaces childhood from the realm of universality and neutrality, reinscribing it as a situated and unequal experience traversed by structures of oppression. In discursive terms, what emerges here is the materialization of a counter-hegemonic discursive formation that challenges the official curriculum and disrupts the notion of childhood as a homogeneous and harmonious stage of human development - an image repeatedly projected by the BNCC.

By explicitly naming social markers such as racism, ableism, and territorial exclusion, the excerpt disrupts the erasure produced by curriculum policy and brings to the fore the concrete conditions that constitute childhoods in Brazil. As Ribeiro (2017) argues in discussing childhood and racism, “Black childhood in Brazil is marked by a continuous process of dehumanization and symbolic erasure” (p. 89), a process that is frequently naturalized by educational institutions. In this sense, the MIEIB discourse makes explicit what the BNCC erases: that the school is also a site where inequalities are reproduced, rather than merely a space of compensation or inclusion.

The child subject that emerges from this statement is collective, historical, and vulnerable to institutional violence. This is not an autonomous and emotionally regulated child - such as the one that appears in the BNCC discourse - but rather a childhood engaged in struggle, marked by social

interdictions and structural inequalities. This conception aligns with what Barbosa and Corsino (2018) refer to as “subalternized childhoods,” that is, childhoods experienced in contexts where children’s ways of living, playing, and learning are regarded as deviations from the norms imposed by schooling.

Furthermore, by denouncing the school’s role in reproducing these forms of violence, the manifesto directly challenges the ideal of the school as a neutral and redemptive institution. As Adriana Friedmann (2019) observes, “the school frequently operates as a space of standardization that affords little recognition to the cultural and affective repertoires of children from peripheral communities, traditional peoples, or children with disabilities” (p. 102). Thus, the excerpt dismantles the idealization of the school as a universal space of inclusion and justice, demonstrating how it also participates in producing displacements beyond the boundaries of what can be said.

From the perspective of Discourse Analysis, this statement produces an important effect of displacement: by naming what is interdicted by the dominant discursive formation, it acts upon the boundaries of the sayable, bringing to light the effects of exclusion that operate silently within the BNCC. As Orlandi (2001) reminds us, discursive silence is not absence but an effect of ideology, and it can only be disrupted when other meanings are able to emerge within discursive struggle. The manifesto, therefore, does more than denounce: it produces a counter-discourse that restores visibility to systematically erased childhoods, opening fissures within hegemonic discourse and calling upon the school to confront its political role.

Table 5 – Excerpt 5 – Sarmiento (2005, p. 25)

Childhood must be understood as a generational social category, rather than as a universal stage of development. It is experienced in plural and unequal ways, shaped by divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, and territory that configure it within specific historical and cultural contexts.
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Source: Research data (2025).

Sarmiento’s statement (Table 5) introduces a significant conceptual and discursive displacement: by conceptualizing childhood as a generational social category, it breaks with the developmentalist paradigm underpinning the BNCC discourse, which universalizes stages, competencies, and forms of child subjectivation. Rather than treating childhood as a homogeneous

stage of human development - marked by linear and predictable trajectories - the author reinscribes it as a historical and relational construction, always traversed by symbolic and material struggles. As Sarmento (2008) emphasizes, “there is not one childhood, but rather childhoods, socially produced within specific contexts and marked by inequalities” (p. 37).

This formulation produces important effects for the discursive analysis of the curriculum. The child subject invoked by the BNCC is abstract, performative, and emotionally self-sufficient - an ideal detached from the lived experiences of Brazilian children. As Steinberg (2014) argues, the standardized conception of childhood found in global education policies operates through the depoliticization of the subject, disregarding the impact of power relations and social inequalities on the subject’s constitution. By projecting this ideal of a fully empathetic child, capable of social interaction and self-regulation, the BNCC discourse renders invisible the markers of class, race, and territory that structure concrete experiences of childhood.

In this sense, Sarmento’s statement destabilizes the logic of discursive silence, as formulated by Orlandi (2007), by naming what the BNCC conceals: the structural divisions that shape children’s conditions of existence. As the author reminds us, “silence functions as a condition for the production of meaning. It defines what can or cannot be said” (p. 54). By reinscribing childhood within the realm of politics, the excerpt disrupts the discursive interdiction that regulates what can be said about children within curriculum policy.

The articulation between childhood and inequality proposed by Sarmento converges with the analyses of Gouvêa and Junqueira Filho (2020), who highlight how the official curriculum frequently operates “in the production of an idealized, normative, and universalizing child subject that erases differences in the name of equity” (p. 68). Rather than promoting social justice, this curricular normativity reaffirms a hegemonic model of childhood that disregards the multiple forms of violence and exclusion experienced by Black girls, Indigenous and Quilombola children, children with disabilities, and those living in contexts of extreme poverty.

By naming inequalities and making the plurality of childhood explicit, Sarmento’s statement reactivates meanings rendered unviable within official discourse, shifting the focus away from development as a natural endpoint and toward childhood as a field of symbolic and material struggle.

It therefore constitutes a discursive position that resists the homogenization promoted by the BNCC and affirms that childhood cannot be understood apart from the historical and social conditions through which it is constituted.

Table 6 – Excerpt 6 – Account of Pedagogical Practice in a Quilombola School (2023) [1]

Here, children learn to read the world through the oral traditions of their elders, through the land, and through the struggles of their people. Childhood is lived through ancestry and with the whole body, not only with the mind. The school learns alongside the community.

Source: Research data (2025).

This excerpt (Table 6), drawn from a pedagogical experience developed in a Quilombola school, articulates a conception of childhood that radically breaks with the normative logic of the BNCC. Rather than interpellating the child as a rational, autonomous, and emotionally balanced subject, the discourse here inscribes the child as a subject whose knowledge is rooted in territory, orality, and collectivity. It is a childhood lived with the whole body - an expression that disrupts the Cartesian and fragmented rationality of schooling, which separates reason from sensibility, affect from cognition, and the individual from the community.

This formulation brings into operation another discursive formation that directly challenges the logic of curricular control and standardization. As Gonçalves and Silva (2021) argue in their discussion of Black and Quilombola pedagogies:

The bodies of Black children in Brazilian schools carry a silenced ancestry. Breaking this silence means allowing their ways of learning, their temporalities, and their rhythms to be recognized as legitimate within the school space. Listening to community narratives, the knowledge of elders, and the relationship with the land is part of a pedagogy that does not separate knowing from living. As educators, we need to understand that the curriculum is also a territory of struggle and memory (Gonçalves; Silva, 2021, p. 113).

[1] Excerpt from an account of pedagogical practice prepared during a supervised teaching practicum conducted at Escola Municipal Quilombola São Miguel, in the municipality of Aparecida, Paraíba, Brazil, in 2013. This is an internal document produced as part of field research undertaken within an initial teacher education program in Pedagogy.

The statement in the account of pedagogical practice thus operates as a discursive and political displacement. It disrupts the workings of the self-evident by reinscribing the school as a space of reciprocity, where learning does not mean adapting to an ideal model of competencies, but rather sharing experiences, histories, and affects. The statement “the school learns alongside the community” unsettles the hierarchy between school knowledge and popular knowledge, between institution and territory, and proposes an ethics of encounter, listening, and interdependence - a dimension that is virtually absent from the BNCC discourse.

Within Discourse Analysis, this gesture is fundamental: it produces a fissure in dominant meanings, allowing the unsaid - in this case, ancestral pedagogies, community-based ways of learning, and the Black bodies of childhood - to emerge as discourse. As Orlandi (2007) states, “it is through the presence of silence that meanings are displaced and subjects are able to reinscribe themselves” (p. 59). The childhood articulated here is lived, collective, and situated; it does not respond to the performative demands of the curriculum, but rather to the ancestry through which it is constituted.

By placing orality, embodied experience, and territory at its core, this Quilombola pedagogical practice operates as a form of epistemological resistance. As Ribeiro (2019) points out, “the Quilombola school is a site of insurgency: it teaches through life, affects, and struggles” (p. 87). By reinscribing childhood outside the developmentalist model and neoliberal rationality, this excerpt materializes what the BNCC seeks to marginalize and, in doing so, reveals that other childhoods are both possible and already exist.

Final Considerations

This article aimed to analyze the meanings produced about childhood in the BNCC discourse and the silences resulting from the construction of an idealized child subject, in comparison with other discursive materialities. Grounded in the perspective of French Discourse Analysis, the analysis made it possible to understand that the child subject invoked by the BNCC is projected through an ideal of a

universal, autonomous, self-regulated, and emotionally competent child - an abstract subject detached from the concrete living conditions that shape childhoods in Brazil.

By operating through generalizations and erasures, the BNCC reproduces structural inequalities such as racism, ableism, territorial exclusion, and poverty. In doing so, it produces a contradiction in relation to the discourse of equity that it claims to uphold, since the universality articulated by the document relies precisely on the erasure of the concrete differences that constitute childhoods in Brazil. As the analysis of the excerpts demonstrated, an ideological process is at work that naturalizes a normative and homogeneous conception of childhood, rendering invisible the materiality of actual childhoods and their multiple ways of existing, learning, and resisting.

However, by confronting the BNCC statements with other discursive materialities, such as the MIEIB Manifesto, critical academic scholarship, and an account of pedagogical practice in a Quilombola school, it was possible to identify the emergence of other meanings of childhood. These excerpts demonstrate that childhood is not a natural given, but rather a contested field in which different discourses struggle for hegemony. Within these materialities, childhood emerges as a plural experience shaped by historical, territorial, and identity-related forces, reaffirming its situated and politically constituted character.

The contrast between the discourses analyzed revealed that the curriculum is neither neutral nor consensual. Rather, it is constituted through ideological choices that shape what can and cannot be said about children and their experiences. By opening fissures in the workings of the self-evident, Discourse Analysis makes it possible to denaturalize such formulations and render visible the interplay of forces that structures meanings within the educational field.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the silences produced by the BNCC cannot be reduced to the constitutive silence inherent in language; rather, they constitute a politics of local silencing (Orlandi, 2007), that is, the interdiction of particular possible meanings. The absence of explicit references to markers of class, race, territory, or disability is not merely accidental or a structural limitation of language, but an effect of the BNCC's conditions of production, which are traversed by neoliberal and corporate logics of educational control. Thus, the official discourse on childhood

operates not only through generalization but, above all, through interdiction: meanings that could otherwise emerge are prevented from doing so.

We therefore conclude that, by adopting a technician and apparently neutral language, the BNCC produces effects of exclusion through the projection of an idealized childhood. In response, it becomes urgent to listen to the discourses that resist such normativity - discourses emerging from pedagogical practices, social movements, and academic scholarship committed to social justice. It is within this struggle over meanings that a more powerful, more plural, and, above all, more ethical conception of childhoods can be constructed.

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