



# Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: a milestone in the history of early childhood education in Peru



Research article  
<https://doi.org/10.19053/uptc.01227238.17826>

**Article history:**  
Received: 06/29/2024  
Reviewed: 02/10/2025  
Approved: 04/01/2025  
Published: 05/07/2025

How to cite this article:  
Robles Ortiz, Elmer. "Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: a milestone in the history of early childhood education in Peru." *Re-vista Historia de la Educación Latinoamericana* vol. 27 no. 45 (2025).

**Elmer Robles Ortiz<sup>1</sup>** ✉

National University of Trujillo, Peru  
HISULA Research Group  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9737-9472>

**José Esquivel Grados<sup>2</sup>**

José Faustino Sánchez Carrión National University, Peru  
Leaders for Educational Research and  
Innovation Research Group  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4591-9921>

## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to analyze the work of Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, a milestone in the history of early childhood education in Peru.

**1** Doctor of Education Sciences. Professor Emeritus for Life at the National University of Trujillo, Peru. HISULA Research Group, RENACYT P0001073 Researcher.

**2** Doctor of Education. Professor at José Faustino Sánchez Carrión National University Sánchez Carrión, Peru. Leaders for Research Research Group and Educational Innovation. RENACYT P0014531 Researcher. [jesquivel@unjfc.edu.pe](mailto:jesquivel@unjfc.edu.pe)

✉ **Correspondence:** Elmer Robles Ortiz, Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, Peru, Av. Juan Pablo II S/N Urb. San Andrés Trujillo – La Libertad, [ero\\_2502@hotmail.com](mailto:ero_2502@hotmail.com)



**Originality/contribution:** Early childhood education was neglected by successive Peruvian governments until 1931, which is incompatible with human development. However, in these circumstances and concerned about the comprehensive education of children marginalized from the education system, Barcia Boniffatti played a key role in founding the first state kindergarten that year in a context of political and socioeconomic crisis exacerbated by the Great Depression of 1929, a coup d'état in 1930, followed by an insurrection in 1932 and an assassination in 1933.

**Method:** In this qualitative research, biographical and analytical methods were used.

**Strategy/information gathering:** documentary analysis is used to process data related to the subject of study, obtained from written sources with index cards. This includes the accounts of four educators who participated in Barcia Boniffatti's direct experiences, which are included in the educator's autobiography published in 2015; the testimonies were processed in analytical tables.

**Conclusions:** Emilia Barcia Boniffatti is a pioneering figure in state early childhood education in Peru, whose fruitful teaching career spanned from 1921 to 1971. Her leadership enabled her to receive support from various and diverse government leaders for the implementation of kindergartens based on the ideas of Froebel, Claparede, Decroly, and Montessori, as well as from fellow countrymen such as Elvira García, founder of the first kindergarten in Lima (1902) and promoter of women's education, and Juana Alarco de Dammert, founder of the first nursery school for children of working mothers. Barcia Boniffatti crowned her masterpiece as an advisor to the Educational Reform Commission, which in 1972 formalized early childhood education as a level of the Peruvian educational system.

**Keywords:** *early childhood education; kindergartens; educational reform; educational level.*

## *Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: hito en el derrotero de la educación inicial en el Perú*

### **Resumen**

**Objetivo:** el propósito del artículo es analizar la obra de Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, un hito en el derrotero de la educación inicial en el Perú.

**Originalidad/aporte:** la educación inicial fue desatendida por sucesivos gobiernos peruanos hasta 1931, lo que es incompatible con el desarrollo humano; pero, en esas circunstancias y preocupada por la formación integral de los niños marginados del sistema educativo, Barcia Boniffatti fue clave en la fundación del primer jardín estatal el referido año en un contexto de crisis política y socioeconómica agudizada con la Gran Depresión de 1929, golpe de Estado en 1930, seguida de insurrección en 1932 y magnicidio en 1933.



**Método:** en esta investigación cualitativa se emplearon los métodos biográficos y analítico.

**Estrategia/recolección de información:** se recurre a la técnica del análisis documental para el procesamiento de datos relativos al objeto de estudio, obtenidos de fuentes escritas con fichas. Se incluyen los discursos de cuatro educadoras que participaron de experiencias directas de Barcia Boniffatti, los que se adjuntan en la autobiografía de la educadora que fue editada en 2015; los testimonios fueron procesados en tablas analíticas.

**Conclusiones:** Emilia Barcia Boniffatti es una figura pionera en la educación inicial estatal en el Perú, cuyo fecundo magisterio se extendió de 1921 a 1971. Su liderazgo le permitió recibir apoyo de diversos y disímiles gobernantes para la implementación de jardines de la infancia, basados en las ideas de Froebel, Claparede, Decroly y Montessori, y de connacionales como Elvira García, fundadora en Lima del primer Kindergarten (1902) y promotora de la educación femenina, y Juana Alarco de Dammert, fundadora de la primera cuna infantil para niños de madres obreras. Barcia Boniffatti coronó su obra maestra como asesora de la Comisión de la Reforma Educativa, la que en 1972 formalizó la educación inicial como nivel del sistema educativo peruano.

**Palabras clave:** *educación inicial; jardines de la infancia; reforma educativa; nivel educativo.*

## *Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, um marco no desenvolvimento da educação infantil no Peru*

### **Resumo**

**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o trabalho de Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, um marco no desenvolvimento da educação infantil no Peru.

**Originalidade/contribuição:** A educação infantil foi negligenciada pelos sucessivos governos peruanos até 1931, o que é incompatível com o desenvolvimento humano; mas, nessas circunstâncias e preocupado com a formação integral das crianças marginalizadas do sistema educacional, Barcia Boniffatti foi fundamental para a fundação do primeiro jardim de infância do Estado naquele ano, em um contexto de crise política e socioeconômica exacerbada pela Grande Depressão de 1929, um golpe de Estado em 1930, seguido de insurreição em 1932 e assassinato em 1933.

**Method:** Biographical and analytical methods were used in this qualitative research.



**Estratégia/coleta de informações:** A técnica de análise documental é usada para processar dados relacionados ao objeto de estudo, obtidos de fontes escritas com fichas de registro. Inclui os discursos de quatro educadores que participaram das experiências diretas de Barcia Boniffatti, que constam da autobiografia da educadora publicada em 2015; depoimentos processados em tabelas analíticas.

**Conclusões:** Ele é uma figura pioneira na educação infantil administrada pelo Estado no Peru, cuja prolífica carreira de professor durou de 1921 a 1971. Sua liderança lhe permitiu receber apoio de vários e diferentes governos para a implementação de jardins de infância, com base nas ideias de Froebel, Claparede, Decroly e Montessori, e de colegas peruanas, como Elvira García, fundadora em Lima do primeiro jardim de infância (1902) e promotora da educação feminina, e Juana Alarco de Dammert, fundadora da primeira creche para filhos de mães trabalhadoras. Barcia Boniffatti coroou sua obra-prima como consultora da Comissão de Reforma Educacional, que em 1972 formalizou a educação infantil como um nível no sistema educacional peruano.

**Palavras-chave:** *educação inicial; jardins de infância; reforma educacional; nível educacional.*

## Introduction

In Peru, early childhood education first appeared at the beginning of the century. XX. In the early days, Elvira García y García made her mark in Lima with the founding in 1902 of the first kindergarten, attached to the "Liceo Fanning"; In that same year, Juana Alarco de Dammert founded the first private nursery, Los Naranjos, to care for the children of working mothers in the Barrios Altos neighborhood. Years later, after training in Spain, Emilia and her sister Victoria Barcia Boniffatti founded the Modern Kindergarten in Iquitos, based on the guidelines of pioneering educators Froebel, Claparede, Decroly, and Montessori.

Several presidents of the Republic committed to establishing early childhood education following the experience in Iquitos. The first was Augusto B. Leguía, who called on sisters Emilia and Victoria Barcia Boniffatti to carry out the innovative kindergarten project. Next came Luis M. Sánchez Cerro, who overthrew Leguía, and David Samanez Ocampo, interim president, during whose term the experiment in Lima began operating under the motto: "Everything through love, nothing through force," an expression inspired by St. Francis de Sales, the "Saint of Kindness," who said: "Do everything through love, nothing through force." May 25, 1931, was the day chosen for the official inauguration of the first Peruvian kindergarten, and since then, that date has been celebrated as "Early Childhood Education Day in Peru."

The founding of the first state kindergarten occurred at a time of overwhelming political, social, and economic crisis in the context of the 1929 crisis or Great Depression, which

spread in the 1930s. Despite the tense atmosphere, the experience of founding gardens continued unabated until 1964, when Emilia Barcia took the initiative to create the National Institute of Preschool Education to train kindergarten teachers, which in the 21st century became the Emilia Barcia Boniffatti Public Higher Education School of Education.

The experiences in the kindergartens that operated in various parts of Peru thanks to the work of Emilia Barcia Boniffatti inspired commissioners Walter Peñaloza Ramella and Carlos Castillo Ríos to promote educational reform through the General Education Law of 1972, which established early childhood education as a level or stage in the structure of the Peruvian education system<sup>3</sup>. Emilia Barcia was also invited to join the team of advisors to the Educational Reform Commission, chaired by educator Emilio Barrantes Revoredo, to contribute her insights on early childhood education, which placed Peru at the forefront of this issue. In this regard, educator Peñaloza Ramella noted:

*There needs to be a system that precedes primary school, and that is precisely what Professor Castillo Ríos and I proposed; that is why early childhood education was created, which is a very important innovation. Early childhood education (ECE) cannot be compared to preschool education. The latter is preparatory education for primary school. Early childhood education, on the other hand, does not prepare children for primary school; rather, it aims to ensure that children's mental, emotional, physical, and bodily abilities do not deteriorate; it seeks to prevent the effects of marginalization and poverty<sup>4</sup>.*

According to this explanation by the promoter of early childhood education, its purpose is not to prepare children for the next level. The idea behind early childhood education is that it begins with the birth, until it must address the next level, primary education.

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However, in Peru, prior to the 1972 educational reform, based on the "Wawa Wasi," a novel experiment founded in 1968 on the initiative of Caritas Puno, and considering that since 1972 early childhood education had already been recognized as an educational level, the Experimental Project for Non-School Early Education (Propedeine) was created, which was later renamed the Non-School Early Education Program (Pronoei) to serve children aged 3 to 5. This innovative program made Peru a pioneer in early childhood care, operating in rural and marginal urban areas with coordinators and facilitators, and with a modest state budget.

Given the importance of understanding efforts to provide comprehensive education to young children, the objective of this article is to analyze the educational work of Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, considered a milestone in the history of early childhood education in Peru. This analysis is based on the opinions of the biographee, interviews with people who knew the teacher and were included in the autobiographical book published posthumously in 2015, and existing literature on Barcia Boniffatti, based on the axiom that the person is the product, actor, and producer of their experiences.

3 Martha Llanos Zuloaga, "Pioneering non-school early childhood education programs in Peru and their impact on overcoming educational inequalities among women," *Advances in Psychology* 24, no. 1 (2016): 33–49.

4 Walter Peñaloza Ramella, "Towards an educational reform suited to our national reality." In various authors, *Educational reforms in Peru, Latin America, and the Caribbean* (Pedagógico San Marcos, 2000), 21.

## Content development

### Preschool education in Peru: Emilia Barcia Boniffatti

Emilia Barcia Boniffatti was a dedicated teacher and promoter of early childhood education in Peru. She was the daughter of José Barcia Boente, a Spaniard, and Elena Bonifatti, an Argentinean of Italian descent. She was born in Iquitos in 1904. From her native Amazonian city, she traveled with her sister Victoria to Spain to study early childhood education at the University of Madrid. Her sister Basilia, the only one who chose to marry, did not participate in this adventure.

After completing her teacher training, Emilia returned to Peru in 1920 and devoted herself, together with her sister Victoria, to education. With Victoria, on June 13, 1921, in her beloved Iquitos, she opened the first "Modern Kindergarten" with the motto: "Everything through love, nothing through force," which over time became an axiom of early childhood education. As Otero<sup>5</sup> notes, this kindergarten was based on the guidelines of German educator Friedrich Froebel, the founder of kindergarten-style early childhood education in the 19th century, as well as those of distinguished educators Édouard Claparède, Ovidio Decroly, and Maria Montessori. In 1924, Emilia also founded the "Junta de Defensa de la Infancia" (Child Defense Board) in Iquitos to protect disadvantaged children through volunteer service. In 1925, she created the "Loreto Departmental Leprosy Board" and, as Barcia<sup>6</sup> reports, launched a nutritional support program with the evocative name "La Gota de Leche" (The Drop of Milk), whose antecedent was more Mrs. Alarco de Dammert's experience in Lima spanned two decades. Years later, that name also resonated in Trujillo, a city where, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a kindergarten attached to the Colegio Nacional de Santa Rosa, run by Dominican nuns, operated for a short time.

Upon learning about the educational innovations of the program undertaken by the Boniffatti sisters, President Augusto B. Leguía invited them to replicate their experience in Lima, the capital<sup>7</sup>. The president was very interested in implementing early childhood education. Emilia recalled that the president told her: "Well, it's here now. It's been difficult, but now we're going to organize this branch of education that I was missing. I would like to see this done soon and see this new world in action... The minister will give you all the facilities you need"<sup>8</sup>. It was an important political decision, and the project was launched with the strong support of José Ángel Escalante Fuentes, Minister of Justice, Education, Worship, and Charity. She undertook the project as a major challenge with the premise: "I think that in the Kindergartens we will create, each teacher should be a mother who treats each child as her own"<sup>9</sup>.

5 Rafael Otero, *Los jardines de Emilia* (The Gardens of Emilia) (Congress of the Republic of Peru, 2017).

6 Tato Barcia, *Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: Revolutionary Teacher of Early Childhood Education in Peru* (ProyContra, 2019). <https://proycontra.com.pe/emilia-barcia-boniffatti-maestra-revolucionaria-de-la-educacion-inicial-en-peru/>

7 Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, *Educar es vivir* (Centauro Editores, 2015).

8 *Ibid.*, 121.

9 *Ibid.*, 129.

**Figure 1.** Emilia Barcia Boniffatti



Source: Barcia (2015).

In August 1930, progress on the kindergarten project was abruptly interrupted by the coup d'état carried out by Luis M. Sánchez Cerro. However, Sánchez Cerro, as president of the Military Junta of Peru, resumed the Boniffatti sisters' innovative project. As Leguía had done before, the military coup leader also instructed Emilia: "I want you to begin the task of creating these

Kindergartens. The task of the Ministry of Education and yours will be seen. The Ministry of Education will take care of it"<sup>10</sup>. She thanked him for his confidence and as she said goodbye, she told him: "Mr.

President, to educate is to live." The political will was there; it was just a matter of putting in the necessary effort to establish state-run early childhood education.

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**Figure 2.** Outdoor classes at the first state kindergarten, Lima, 1931.



Source: Barcia (2015).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

In the midst of a period of extreme political turmoil, Emilia and Victoria worked tirelessly. Thus, on May 25, 1931, during the Samanez Ocampo administration, the first state-run early childhood education facility, Jardín de la Infancia No. 1, was officially inaugurated. It was located in a large house across from the Santa Teresa church, at 12 José Díaz Street, near the National Stadium. From then on, for a quarter of a century, Emilia Barcia devoted herself to the organization and implementation of 329 early childhood education centers throughout Peru. The first Experimental Kindergarten served children under the age of 6 and provided guidance to the teachers who worked with them.

**Figure 3.** Emilia Barcia Boniffatti with children in La Mar Park, now Parque de la Reserva, Lima, 1931.



Source: Barcia (2015).

The 1940 census recorded 763,942 preschool-aged children (3 to 6 years old); However, in 1945, there were only 42 kindergartens and one National School of Preschool Education in operation, 50% of which were concentrated in Lima and La Libertad<sup>11</sup>; in addition, Arequipa, Huancayo, Ancash, Cusco, and Cajamarca had two kindergartens each, and the other departments had one or no kindergartens. This figure indicates the clear centralization of early childhood education and that a very high percentage of children were excluded from receiving an education in kindergartens.

In 1940, nine years after the first state kindergarten was founded, Emilia Barcia was appointed general inspector of Peru's Kindergartens, a position that allowed her to organize a considerable number of these institutions and build most of them. In 1948, she introduced training courses for kindergarten teachers at

11 Víctor Angulo Camacho, *Escuela Nueva* (Talleres Gráficos O. P., 2000).

summer. And in 1950, he established the "Preschool Education Seminars" in Lima, which generated greater social commitment to early childhood education.

Emilia and her sister Victoria not only created kindergartens, but also, as Otero<sup>12</sup> points out, became teachers of teachers and pioneers in the specialized training of teachers in this field. In June 1957, they succeeded in persuading the government of Manuel Prado y Ugarteche to found the National Institute for Specialization in Early Childhood Education. That year, the Ministry of Education commissioned her to direct official postgraduate courses for teachers, which were held during the vacation periods of the following years.

Barcia<sup>13</sup> reports that in 1960, by supreme decree, she was entrusted with the management and organization of the first National Institute for Specialization in Early Childhood Education; in 1964, it became the Experimental Urban Normal School; in 1969, the National Institute of Preschool Education, and later, the Emilia Barcia Boniffatti Public Higher Education Institute in Metropolitan Lima, which awards bachelor's degrees and professional degrees in Early Childhood Education. In 1971, Emilia retired from official service, but, according to Melo<sup>14</sup>, she was called upon to advise the Education Reform Commission. And since 1972, early childhood education has been part of the education system. As Peñaloza notes, "The leading figure in Peru, the tireless promoter and defender of this preschool [sic], was Ms. Emilia Barcia Boniffatti. She guided the first kindergartens and also took care to prepare the teachers they needed"<sup>15</sup>.

She was also an advisor to the Inter-American Committee on Women and a member of the National Council on Women, the National Association of Writers and Artists, among other institutions.

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For her commendable educational work on behalf of children, she was awarded the Palmas Magistrales by the Ministry of Education after 50 years of continuous service.

In 1986, Emilia passed away in the city where she had spent most of her life. She lived her final days in poverty and solitude, breathing her last breath in a kindergarten. Her remains rest in El Ángel cemetery in Lima, in a mausoleum bearing the epitaph: *Everything for love, nothing by force*. Under this motto, her work will endure unscathed through time.

### **Preschool education in Peru: other notable figures**

Several figures have stood out in the protection and education of children in Peru, including Juana Alarco de Dammert, Elvira García y García, and María Negrón Ugarte, among others.

Juana Alarco de Dammert (1842-1932), a native of Lima, holds a place of honor in the care and education of vulnerable children, which is why she is remembered as the "Grandmother of Children." She is also recognized as a "Symbol of the Peruvian Mother" for her spirit.

<sup>12</sup> Otero, *Emilia's Gardens*.

<sup>13</sup> Barcia Boniffatti, *Educating is Living*.

<sup>14</sup> Marina Melo de Davey, "Testimonio," in *Educar es vivir*, ed. by Emilia Barcia Boniffatti (Centauro Editores, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Walter Peñaloza Ramella, "Early Education: The Possible Curriculum," *Revista Peruana de Educación*, 1, no. 2 (1996): 6.

dedicated to serving the community, especially women. Estremadoyro <sup>16</sup>indicates that Juana founded the "Sociedad Auxiliadora de la Infancia" (Children's Aid Society) in 1894 and established a "Maternal School" for children under the age of 7 in Lima in 1896, where numerous teachers were also trained. Attached to the school, she founded a free medical clinic to care for children from low-income families. In 1898, she published *Educación femenina. Colección de artículos pedagógicos y psicológicos (Female Education: A Collection of Pedagogical and Psychological Articles)*. This illustrious lady and intellectual maintained that "Nature provides the raw material for living beings; education must educate rational, thinking beings who are capable of individual, social, and civic good"<sup>(17)</sup>. In 1902, Mrs. Alarco de Dammert organized the first private nursery, "Los Naranjos," which was intended to care for the children of female workers in the Barrios Altos neighborhood. Millares <sup>18</sup> reports that in 1908 she created the "La Gota de Leche" (Drop of Milk) program and in 1909 she established a nursing home for children.

Elvira García y García (1862-1951), a native of Lambayeque, is one of the most prominent Peruvian educators of the 20th century. Estremadoyro <sup>19</sup>recounts that in 1902 García y García established the first private kindergarten, attached to the "Liceo Fanning." García y García was a distinguished educator of girls and young women in a number of institutions, several of which she created herself. She also had a long and fruitful teaching career, from the age of 18 to 80, and was an advocate for women's rights. Her work *La educación del niño* (The Education of Children) "contains a clear reformist intention to bring schools closer to society, a key postulate in the new approach, assigning to the family, and within it to the role of the mother, the educational role that commits her"<sup>(20)</sup>. This dedicated educator believed that teachers must be required to use scientific teaching methods, be convinced of the effectiveness of their teaching methodology, and inspire

respect from their role as role models or paradigms for children. He believed that for the success of educational activities for young children, innovative methods, such as those of Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori, and the cooperation of parents should be used.

María Negrón Ugarte (1878-1935), a native of Trujillo, had a special love for children, which enhanced her vocation as an educator and writer. She devoted her efforts to educating children on the Chiclín estate in northern Trujillo, but her concern for the youngest children led her to found a "Jardín de la Infancia" (Kindergarten) in Cartavio, an estate near Chiclín, which was aimed at children aged 2 to 4. Her pedagogical thinking is reflected in the phrase: "Love children by respecting their condition and dignity, then educate their minds and hearts appropriately"<sup>21</sup>. He was greatly impressed by his visit to Juana Alarco de Dammert: "Her name, like her works, is in the hearts of all who know that she is an angel of goodness for children and mothers"<sup>22</sup>. Bazán<sup>23</sup>

16 Camila Estremadoyro Robles, *Historical Biographical Dictionary. Illustrious Peruvians* (Eureka, 1990).

17 Jorge Basadre, *Peruvians of the 20th Century* (Ediciones Rikchay Perú, 1981), 68.

18 Mario Millares Elías, *Selected Biographies. Illustrious Men and Women of Peru* (Ebisa ediciones, 2004).

19 Estremadoyro Robles, *Historical Biographical Dictionary...*

20 Aurora Marrou Roldán, "Elvira García y García and Peruvian education," *Educational Research* 17, no. 2 (2013): 21.

21 José Esquivel Grados and Reemberto Cruz Aguilar, *Famous Educators of the Region. La Libertad*, Volume 1 (Juan Gutenberg Editores Impresores, 2014), 29.

22 María Negrón Ugarte, *Stories, Memories, and Tales*, 2nd ed. (Infolectura, 2023), 21.

23 Blasco Bazán, *Literatura libertina* (El Ovalo, 1999).

refers to the effects of the tragic events of the War of the Pacific as the motivation for his deep love for children.

Although her work has not been disseminated as it deserves, Negrón Ugarte is considered more as a poet—of infinite sweetness—than as an educator of immense tenderness. She was a pioneer of education for work in Peru, as well as of women's rights movements<sup>24</sup>.

### **Early education: from the first kindergarten to the first level of education**

The president of Peru's Military Junta, Sánchez Cerro, revived the Boniffatti sisters' project, which had been launched during the administration of ousted president Augusto B. Leguía. On May 25, 1931, Kindergarten No. 1 was officially inaugurated, when David Samanez Ocampo was president of the Transitional National Junta. "She came to Lima for that purpose, and from then on she dedicated her life to promoting the creation of public kindergartens"<sup>(25)</sup>. For his part, Cormack notes: "It is incredible how the Barcia sisters, starting with Kindergarten No. 1, spread kindergartens throughout the country"<sup>(26)</sup>.

The growth in the number of kindergarten teachers also motivated them to form a union, a task that Emilia Barcia Boniffatti also undertook. Lily Caballero de Cueto mentions that there was a "need to create an association of early childhood teachers, which was legally established and recognized as the 'National Association of Early Childhood Teachers,' of which I was appointed president, with Miss Emilia as the permanent honorary president."<sup>27</sup>

In 1968, on the initiative of Caritas in Puno, the first "Wawa" programs were created. Wasi (Quechua for "children's home") or Wawa Uta (Aymara for "children's home") were created to address the problem of rural families. These programs provided a space similar to a nursery, where children under five could play and receive supplementary food. In the 1970s, this initiative was extended throughout the country.

*The term "early childhood education" and its meaning were created in the work carried out by Peru's Educational Reform Commission, whose project began to be implemented in 1972 and was dismantled by a subsequent government in 1980. I had the honor of proposing, together with Carlos Castillo Ríos, this idea of Early Childhood Education within that Commission, of which we were members, and it was warmly welcomed by its members. It thus became the First Level of the Education System outlined at that time<sup>28</sup>.*

On March 21, 1972, as a result of the work of the Educational Reform Commission chaired by Dr. Emilio Barrantes Revoredo, Decree-Law No. 19326, the General Education Law, was enacted, in which "preschool," which was not an end in itself but rather a preparatory stage for a higher level, was replaced by early childhood education, dedicated to

<sup>24</sup> Elmer Robles Ortiz, "A story by María Negrón Ugarte: relationships between education, work, and female emancipation," *Revista Universitaria*, 36, no. 1 (1995).

<sup>25</sup> Elena Valdiviezo, "Interview," in *Educar es vivir*, ed. by Emilia Barcia Boniffatti (Centauro Editores, 2015), 261.

<sup>26</sup> Maribel Cormack Lynch, "Interview," in *Educar es vivir*, ed. by Emilia Barcia Boniffatti (Centauro Editores, 2015), 264.

<sup>27</sup> Lily Caballero de Cueto, "Testimony," *Educar es vivir*, ed. by Emilia Barcia Boniffatti (Centauro Editores, 2015), 252.

<sup>28</sup> Peñaloza Ramella, "Early Education: The Possible Curriculum," 5.



child in order to provide them with the necessary conditions for their normal development"<sup>29</sup> and included children from birth to five or six years of age. In other words, in 1972, early childhood education was officially created in Peru. Walter Peñaloza Ramella, commissioner of the reform, emphasizes that the purpose of early childhood education "is to put a barrier to those causes that conspire against the child's healthy mental, emotional, and affective development. In this way, protected against unfair discrimination, the child can reach primary school in truly effective conditions."

The 1970 General Report on Education Reform stated: "Early childhood education has been included in the system because it is considered important not only for ensuring the regular education of children, but also for guaranteeing, where necessary, their comprehensive development during early childhood"<sup>31</sup>It also specified: "It is intended to create the conditions necessary to ensure the development of children aged 0 to 5 and to train the population, especially families, to provide children during early childhood with the stimuli and experiences essential for the development of their potential"<sup>32</sup>. Meanwhile, Article 78 of the General Education Law stated that "The level of early childhood education is intended to create the conditions necessary for the full development of children's potential, strengthening the necessary family and community action, complementing it when it is deficient and supplementing it when it is lacking"<sup>33</sup>. In this regard, Judith Bizot states,

*The traditional divisions into pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher levels were clearly incompatible with this approach, and the revolutionary government has decided to replace them with new levels: initial, basic, and higher. The adoption of the initial level already denotes an exclusion of the idea that the state has no obligation whatsoever towards children under five. This innovation provides care for children from infancy until the age of six—during the first four years in nurseries and during the last two years in kindergartens<sup>34</sup>.*

As Bizot points out, adopting early childhood education as an educational level commits the state to its responsibility to educate children under the age of six, starting from infancy. Kindergartens, institutions with a long history, were intended to educate children for two years before they moved on to primary education, which was part of basic education and complemented by secondary education.

The 1972 education reform was gradually dismantled due to obscurantism and inadequate perceptions on the part of politicians and officials at the time. "However, something could be salvaged from the wreckage, something that constitutes a valuable contribution to Peruvian education: the creation of early childhood education to replace the so-called 'preschool,' which had no

29 Emilio Barrantes, *History of Education in Peru* (Mosca Azul Editores, 1989).

30 Walter Peñaloza Ramella, "For an educational reform appropriate to our national reality"..., 21.

31 *Reform of Peruvian Education. General Report*, Ministry of Education, 1970, 51.

32 *Ibid.*

33 General Education Law, Decree Law No. 19326 of March 21, 1972.

34 Judith Bizot, *Education Reform in Peru (with introduction by Leopoldo Chiappo). Study prepared for the International Service for Information and Studies on Educational Innovations (IERS)* (UNESCO, 1976), 21.

an end in itself, but rather preparatory for primary school"<sup>35</sup>. Thus, early childhood education was born, but it was not compulsory.

In 1973, considering the experience in Puno in 1968, the creation of the first non-school program for children aged 3 to 5 was made official, called the Experimental Project for Non-School Early Education (Propedeine), as a way to expand coverage at the early education level. This program later became the Non-School Early Education Program (Pronoei), which received support from the United Nations, through UNICEF, and the International Development Agency (AID). It should be noted that the term "non-school" did not imply distance learning, as the activities were carried out by facilitators with children in person and in a specially adapted environment.

Due to the boom in early childhood education, various versions of Pronoei were implemented, either in educational institutions, parish premises, or even outdoors. Innovative non-school-based strategies were also developed, such as the Comprehensive Care Program through Mothers' Groups (Paigruma) and the Comprehensive Family-Based Early Stimulation Program (Pietbaf).

In 1977, the Early Childhood Education Directorate of the Ministry of Education was promoted to the status of General Directorate, which allowed it to manage a larger budget for the expansion of educational services. Early childhood education was already highly valued.

The progress made in early childhood education in Peru since Barcia Boniffatti is the result of effective measures adopted by officials and individuals who recognized the importance of caring for children as early as possible. "The important thing is not just caring for the child. More important is the result obtained with the adult, who is progressively more <sup>81</sup> aware of the fact that the most valuable asset of their community is the CHILD"<sup>36</sup>.

### **Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: perceptions of her thinking and work**

Emilia Barcia was a central figure in the establishment of early childhood education in Peru. Her fifty years of contributions to childcare since 1921, and forty since the founding of the first State Kindergarten in 1931, led to early childhood education being considered part of the Peruvian education system in 1972. Various figures have left their testimonies about this distinguished educator, including Lily Caballero de Cueto, wife of the Minister of Education, Carlos Cueto Fernandini; Marina Melo de Davey, director of the Emilia Barcia Boniffatti Institute; Elena Valdiviezo, a close collaborator of Emilia's work; and Maribel Cormack Lynch, also a close collaborator of Barcia Boniffatti's work. In analyzing the data provided, the main categories associated with the teacher stand out, such as personal qualities, professional and social qualities, and legacy to new generations, which were highlighted by the interviewees, whose speeches are included in Emilia's autobiographical work, published posthumously.

35 María Isabel Paz de Velarde, "Emilio Barrantes, un auténtico educador" [Emilio Barrantes, a true educator], in *Grandes educadores peruanos* [Great Peruvian educators], ed. by the Ministry of Education (Carlos Milla Batres Edition, 2003), 97.

36 Gaby Fujimoto-Gómez, "Early Non-School Education in Latin America," *Revista Peruana de Educación* 1, no. 2 (1996): 43.

**Table 1.** Personal qualities of Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: analysis and commentary

Interviewee	Personal qualities	Analysis and commentary
Lily Caballero de Cueto	"My closeness and friendship lasted until her death, leaving me in her last letter with the responsibility of safeguarding the historical legacy of her works."	The authors of testimonials and interviews about the distinguished educator Emilia Barcia Boniffatti were close to her, so their opinions are a true reflection of who this teacher was. Certain aspects stand out, such as her sincere and enduring friendship with those she trusted beyond death; her ethics, her fighting spirit, and her courage, which did not waver in the face of any adversity. Her vocation as a teacher, her dedication, her energy, and her vision led her to more than achieve her goals: many children in many kindergartens and even early childhood education becoming an educational level.
Marina Melo de Davey	"Emilia had a strong personality and treated her staff with great humanity. She was a shining example of professional ethics for me, a fighter and a visionary when it came to the children of Peru and America."	
Elena Valdiviezo	"She had the courage to face and overcome barriers and express the truth without fear, even if others didn't like it and even if it meant losing sympathy and popularity."	
Maribel Cormack Lynch	"I remember Emilia Barcia as a very active person, with a strong character and determination to achieve her goals, with a very clear vision of what she wanted to accomplish. With a strong sense of social responsibility, she devoted her life to the education of young children, with true dedication and commitment."	

**Source:** testimonies and interviews in Barcia (2015).

**Table 2.** Professional and social qualities of Emilia Barcia Boniffatti: analysis and commentary

Interviewee	Professional and social qualities	Analysis and commentary
Lily Caballero de Cueto	Miss Emilia asked each student to make a commitment and to uphold it by taking an oath, which was used for the graduation ceremony of the first class and subsequent classes, and is still used at the Institute to this day.	<p>From the testimonies and interviews, it is clear that Emilia conceived of early childhood education from a pedagogy of tenderness, as a commitment and social responsibility, and a mystique based on a marked pedagogical eros. She was the repository of a social pedagogy in tune with the nature of young children, which simplifies and embellishes. She conceived of education as a space for forging the principle of equality among children, which implied an education free from any type of discrimination, whether gender-based, social, or otherwise.</p> <p>Emilia was also an extraordinary teacher, far ahead of her time, who established the inclusion of children with special educational needs in classrooms as the norm.</p>
Marina Melo de Davey	<p>"She had a way of making the difficult easy and the ugly beautiful, always maintaining harmony and natural beauty."</p> <p>"She had a spirit of helping those most in need, such as the leprosarium in Iquitos, where she would find work for them when they recovered, but she never revealed the illness she had. She was humane and firm."</p>	
Elena Valdiviezo	<p>"From a very young age, she understood the importance of public education for all children, without discrimination, and accessible to girls and boys from all social classes."</p> <p>"She also set an example in treating all the students [at the Institute] equally... There was never any discrimination, even when there were parent-teacher meetings, she treated everyone equally; that's how it should be in Peru. That's what Emilia taught by example..."</p>	
Maribel Cormack Lynch	<p>"In every way, Emilia was ahead of her time. I remember that at the Escuela de Aplicación, we teachers had to incorporate two children with special educational needs, showing sensitivity towards others, which even today is not understood."</p> <p>"I feel that she instilled in me a mystique and a sense of responsibility in the attention and care of the child who should be the center of attention, lessons that have lasted throughout my professional career."</p>	

**Source:** testimonies and interviews in Barcia (2015).

**Table 3.** Emilia Barcia Boniffatti's legacy to new generations: analysis and commentary

Interviewee	Legacy for future generations	Analysis and commentary
Lily Caballero de Cueto	"It is interesting to note that she gave me the task of attending these art centers as a lived experience. She asked me to bring her the presentations by Dr. Carlos Cueto Fernandini, Francisco Miro Quezada, and other specialists in childcare, as well as different works of art, music, theater, paintings, and children's literature."	<p>Emilia Barcia's legitimate concern for a genuine education for children meant not keeping the educational institution separate from society; on the contrary, their experiences should be enriched by the varied experiences and wisdom of people and figures in society who can contribute to improving children's education, which should be enriched by the diverse manifestations of art; because art provides children with a firm and creative way to express their feelings and emotions.</p> <p>One aspect worth highlighting is the fact that schools and teachers are becoming actors in their own progress, moving away from attitudes that expect change to come from the Ministry of Education or its decentralized offices. Hence, it is repeatedly consulted on how to guide the progress of early childhood education, from creating kindergartens to turning early childhood education into an educational level, not to mention the many tasks involved in implementing governing bodies for early childhood education, such as the institute for training kindergarten teachers. She urged teachers to educate children with quality and warmth, fully respecting their rights from a teaching profession nourished by mysticism and social commitment, with the ability to overcome the vicissitudes that may affect the peace and happiness of young children.</p>
Marina Melo de Davey	"In 1968... when Juan Velasco Alvarado's revolution took place... Ms. Emilia Barcia was called to join the team of advisors, which included Francisco Miro Quesada, Walter Peñaloza, and Father Romeo Luna Victoria, among others. Early childhood education was established as a national Directorate General, which focused on children under the age of 6, including nurseries and kindergartens, and working with parents and the community."	
Elena Valdiviezo	I remember that at that time [Emilia's time], it was said that preschool education (as it was then called) was the most democratic, since the children of the "boss" and her domestic worker attended together. This was the case in all preschools, including later on at Jardín 42 de la Aurora and Jardines de San Felipe. There, everyone was 'equal' in play and activities."	
Maribel Cormack Lynch	"Female students and future teachers have a wonderful task ahead of them, which is to educate young children. They will face many challenges, but I hope that Emilia Barcia Boniffatti's way of life will serve as a guiding light for their teaching, with passion and commitment, ensuring that children's rights are respected and that they can fully enjoy this stage of their childhood with well-being and happiness."	

**Source:** Testimonials and interviews in Barcia (2015).

Emilia Barcia founded kindergartens, not a school for children, as Carla Rinaldi of the Reggio Emilia project points out, because this way of conceiving it with "the" is found in "childhood declared, that is, as a public, historical subject; as a category."

social status as cultural subjects, subjects of rights"<sup>37</sup>; as understood by teacher Emilia, since one of her concerns was to respect children's rights and educate them with infinite love, as she noted: "I loved the children and the children adored me! This love that develops between the teacher and the children is wonderful..."<sup>(38)</sup>; in other words, she put into practice the *pedagogy of tenderness*, which is based on loving solidarity. However, pedagogical practice must also be nourished by scientific arguments, which is why she read the books of Montessori, Froebel, Claparède, and Decroly with avidity and passion, always with the explicit desire to offer the best to children. Such was the guiding principle that this admirable educator used to guide generations of children and teachers, based on her conviction that early education should be oriented toward the comprehensive development of children and not only the development of their intellect.

Emilia Barcia's dedication to early childhood education was reinforced by the highest levels of political power at the end of President Augusto B. Leguía's administration in 1930. In a note written by the president: "Mr. Minister: Please respond urgently to Ms. Barcia's request, which embodies a patriotic ideal worthy of the strongest support," and Supreme Resolution No. 589-1930, which created the first State Kindergarten for children under five, demonstrated clear political support for the official launch of early childhood education in Peru in 1931, at a turbulent time in the republic during the short-lived administration of Samanez Ocampo. The early childhood education project overcame the political interests of the moment. However, the greatest support for early childhood education came in 1972 with Decree-Law 19326, which conceived it as an educational level and was "provided in nurseries, crèches, and kindergartens, in addition to of family education programs"<sup>39</sup>.

Currently, early childhood education is the first level of regular basic education and provides non-school-based care for children aged 0 to 2 and school-based care for children aged 3 to 5. Likewise, the Peruvian State assumes responsibility for health and nutrition care when required through intersectoral work. The articulation of the first level with the next level, primary education, is achieved by ensuring curricular coherence, while preserving its particularity and administrative and managerial autonomy. The concurrent participation of families and communities in early childhood education is noteworthy, as it brings together efforts aimed at the comprehensive education of children, considering their socio-emotional, cognitive, communicative, and psychomotor development. "In short, early childhood education is geared toward the development and affirmation of the child's personality, preparing them for life and for living"<sup>40</sup>; that is, early childhood education should focus on the comprehensive development of the child.

37 Carla Rinaldi, *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Investigating, Learning* (Norma, 2011), 180.

38 Barcia Boniffatti, *Educar es vivir*, 81.

39 Enrique González Carré and Virgilio Galdo Gutiérrez, "Historia de la educación en el Perú" [*History of Education in Peru*], in *Historia del Perú: proceso e instituciones* [History of Peru: Process and Institutions], ed. by various authors, vol. X (Juan Mejía Baca, 1985), 108.

40 Alicia González Ramírez, "¿Educación inicial o educación pre-escolar?" [Early education or preschool education?], *Revista Peruana de Educación* 1, no. 2 (1995): 145.

## Conclusions

Emilia Barcia Boniffatti is one of the pioneering figures in early childhood education in Peru and Latin America. During her half-century of teaching (1921-1971), she founded and ran kindergartens based on the pedagogical and scientific guidelines of the world's leading figures in early childhood education, such as Froebel, Claparède, Decroly, and Montessori, and also following the lead of fellow Peruvian educators such as Elvira García y García, who founded the first private kindergarten in Peru in 1902, and Juana Alarco de Dammert, who founded the first nursery for children of working mothers in Lima in 1902. At all times, Barcia Boniffatti believed that the goal of early childhood education efforts is to achieve the comprehensive education of children based on the fundamentals of the pedagogy of tenderness. Dedicating the attention that children from lower-income social classes deserve led her to fight for state-run early childhood education, which she achieved through the founding of the First Kindergarten at a critical moment in the country's history, when the political, social, and economic crisis resulting from World War I was exacerbated by the Great Depression of 1929 and a coup d'état in 1930 that brought with it a turbulent period with a civil insurrection in 1932 and an assassination in 1933. But none of this daunted Emilia, the kindergarten teacher.

The founding of the first kindergarten in 1931, thanks to the efforts of Barcia Boniffatti and the support of his sister Victoria, marked the beginning in Peru of free state-run early childhood education for children under the age of six from all social strata.

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social issues, with an emphasis on those from vulnerable families. This educator, with her deep mysticism, imbued with obvious courage, tireless work, and total commitment, succeeded in democratizing public education for children in a way that few other countries in the region have achieved. This highly fruitful work reached its peak in 1972, when, thanks to the significant and decisive contribution of her advisor, Emilia Barcia Boniffatti, the commissioners of educational reform, Walter Peñaloza Ramella and Carlos Castillo Ríos, took on board the visionary teacher's idea and allowed early childhood education to be elevated to the status of a formal level in the education system, placing Peru at the forefront of Latin America.

Emilia Barcia Boniffatti is a pioneering teacher in early childhood education in Peru. Her efforts to ensure that children had—and continue to have—access to early schooling based on modern scientific guidelines acquired during her training in Spain, using a pedagogy of tenderness, made her a leading professional in preschool education in her time and beyond. As a leading teacher in early childhood education, generations of kindergarten teachers trained since 1960 at the National Institute for Specialization in Early Childhood Education incorporated the legacy of its founder into their practice.

## Final statements

### Contribution of the authors

Elmer Robles Ortiz: conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, project management, supervision, writing, review, and editing. José Esquivel Grados: data curation, research, resources, *software*, validation, visualization, writing (original draft).

### Funding

Self-funded.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. The study has not received any funding from individuals or institutions.

### Ethical implications

The authors declare that this article has no ethical implications in its development, writing, or publication.

### Open data

This article has no data published in other open access databases.

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