

Teaching and Play – Early Childhood Teachers perspectives

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MAIN GOALS

The purpose of the present on-going study is to investigate **early childhood teachers perspectives about the use of play for promoting learning and development.**

This research is a result of a study, made within a community of practice for research and curriculum development, involving teachers, cooperating teachers and students of a Portuguese School of Education. The common interest is the focus on Imagination and Play in Education.

The portuguese curriculum guidelines for early childhood education sustains that play should be valued for learning and development (OCEPE, 2016). Nevertheless many students observations of early childhood contexts relate that teaching is mainly centered in activities for the all group of children, teacher directed, so perhaps the role of play has been misunderstood.

The early childhood teacher's pedagogical role in play has been re-thought in the light of new theoretical understandings of play (Rogers & Evans, 2008; Fleer, 2010; Bruce, 2011).



Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 – Evidence of playing in practice (students' stage)

METHODOLOGY

The research questions where:

What are the early childhood conceptions about play?

- What is the relation between play and learning?
- What is the role of playing in planning and curriculum development?
- Do early childhood teachers consider learning through play in children evaluation?

The study includes early childhood teachers in different stages of professional development.

A survey through **on-line questionnaire** was made to **90 early childhood educators** ages between 22 and 62 years old according to Table 1 Personal anonymity was central to gain reliable information.

Professional Experience	Participants	Actual Place of Work	
		Crèche	Pre-School
under 5	22	13	9
6 to 15	23	9	14
16 to 25	22	4	18
over 26	23	0	23
Total	90	26	64

Table 1 – Participants

RESULTS

Early childhood teachers conceptions about play

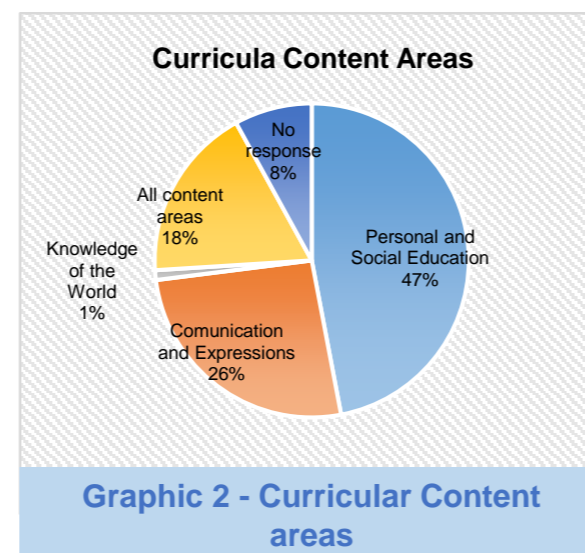
The act of play is valued by all the participants and the expression of its relation to learning and child development in different areas is clear in many statements (24%). Also the role of play is seen as the main way to explore the physical and social world (29%). Only one teacher, as a view that is some way is in contrast as she states that



“Every day children can play for 10 to 15 minutes in a free way so that they can self-motivate their guided activities or they can only play after the activities they do. I value this activity as a positive reinforcement for the commitment of the targeted activities.” (Early Childhood Educator - 2.4 JI).

Although there is an assumption that children love to play, this is seen as a reward, not the child main activity in preschool settings.

Relation between play and learning



Analyzing the graph 2 above, we notice that the references made by the participants are mainly referring to the Personal and Social Area (47%). The answers to the questionnaires were classified according to the domains and competences presented in the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-school Education (2016).

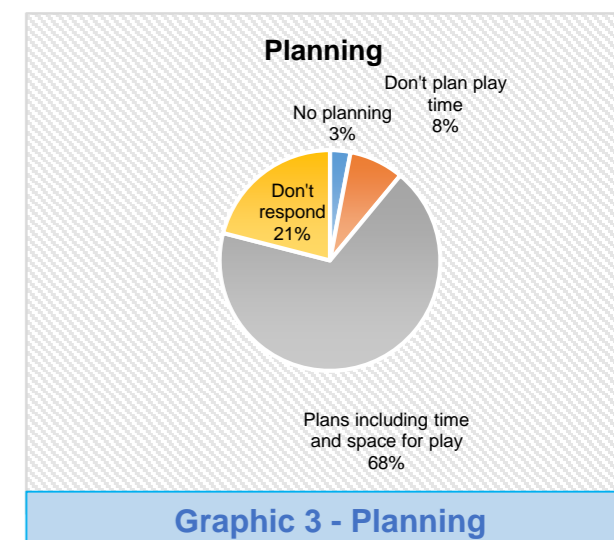
A representative part of the early childhood teachers participating in the research stated that the Personal and Social Training Area is the one that has the greatest relation between play and learning (47%) , not stating in concrete which domain or specific competence that the child acquires when playing. Other participants referred socialization as being the most acquired competency through play. But there was also a focus on problem solving, self-awareness, playing as a promoter of independence and autonomy and, although with fewer references, creativity.

The Knowledge of the World content area had very few expression (1%) which seems to contrast with the concept that play is the way children explore the world and other people presented in Graphic 1. That makes us question about the intencional role of play in curriculum development.

RESULTS (CONT.)

Role of play in planning and curriculum development

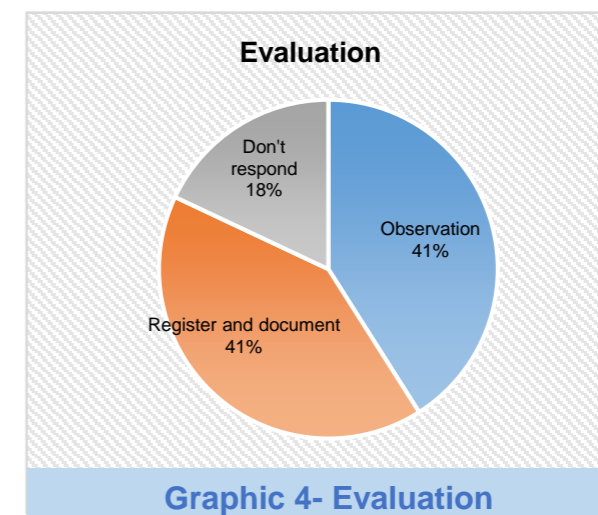
Most of the early childhood teachers state that planning includes time and space for play (68%) for instance as said by one participant “Yes, I plan, enriching the areas of the room. Thinking about activities that involve playing and discovering, always taking into account my educational goals” or as another participant says that “Time to play is a daily routine”.



Also through dramatic games, learning through play is achieved in different areas.

According to the information provided by the content analysis of the interviews about the teachers' role, most of children's teachers say they are active participants during the child play, mediating relations and conflicts, and being able to play occasionally with the children. Very few relate that they only observe. A significant part of teachers act as catalyzer of children experiences as stated by one participant “I broaden the experience and return questions without giving immediate response, making children think, providing resources that are close and can be useful at the moment.”

Evidences of child learning through play in evaluation



Observation is one of the main ways of children evaluation (41%). As said by one participant “The observation of the way children play, with what, how, with whom, they are good indicators of learning and how they already internalize concepts, attitudes, etc. I observe all this through play”.

The importance of documenting children learning is also present in many answers (41%) as this one “...when observing children accomplishment, registration (in photos, video or written) and verifying the registered evolution, and the processes that the child used to arrive at a certain result or learning we can see how children can evolve to a new competence”

CONCLUSION

Results will be discussed in the community of practice and impact on curriculum development for those involved should be expected.