

PlayTrain: A Research and Intervention Project for Early Childhood Teacher Education

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Abstract : The value of play is recognized worldwide and is considered a fundamental right of all children, as defined in Article 31 of the United Nations Children's Rights. It is consensual among the scientific community that play, and toys are of vital importance for children's learning and development. Play promotes the acquisition of language, enhances creativity and improves social, affective, emotional, cognitive and motor development of young children. Young children ages 0 to 6 who have had many opportunities to get involved in play show greater competence to adapt to new and unexpected situations and more easily overcome the pain and suffering caused by traumatic situations. The PlayTrain Project aims to understand the places/spaces of play in the education of children from 0 to 6 years and promoting the training of preschool teachers to become capable of developing practices that enhance children's agency, experimentation in the physical and social world and the development of imagination and creativity. This project follows the Design-Based-Research (DBR) and has two dimensions: research and intervention. The participants are 120 students from the Master in Pre-school Education of the Higher School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon enrolled in the academic year 2018/2019. The development of workshops focused on the role of play and toys for young children's learning promotes the participants reflection and the development of skills and knowledge to construct developmentally appropriated practices in early childhood education. Data was collected through an online questionnaire and focal groups. Results show that the PlayTrain Project contribute to the development of a body of knowledge about the role of play for early childhood education. It was possible to identify the needs of preschool teacher education and to enhance the discussion among the scientific and academic community about the importance of deepening the role of play and toys in the study plans of the masters in pre-school education.

Keywords : children's learning, early childhood education, play, teacher education, toys

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