

To be an Educator in a Day Care setting: conceptions and educational practices



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SUMMARY

The “Day Care Project” is a group of professionals linked to the childhood education field that aims to reflect and investigate early childhood in the day care context. This group develops its activity at the Superior School of Education and Social Sciences of the Leiria Polytechnic Institute, Portugal, as an integrating part of the Center for Research and Development in Education.

The data we now present concern the conceptions of two female childhood educators, of this group, on their developed practices in the day care context.

INTRODUCTION

An individual’s early years of life are assumed as rather important stage because it is here that “the foundations of development in its diverse physical, motor, social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, communicational aspects, etc.” are released (Portugal, 2009, p.7).

The day care as an institution devoted to early childhood presents itself, aside from family and other environments, as a development/learning context for the child by the challenges it places. The work of the childhood educators on an organization and fulfillment level becomes essential in this setting.

According to Post and Hohman (2003, p. 12), the authentic interactions with the children “provide the emotional “fuel” that babies and children need to unravel the mysteries they face in their social and physical world”. The quality of the relationship that the educator is able to establish with the child influences the quality of the child’s development (Portugal, 1998).

It becomes important to define a period of daily time where the childhood educator pays attention to the group of children listening to each one of them, organizing times and spaces of interaction, proposing challenging educational experiences and, at the same time, involving families in the development of their children (Formosinho, 2011; Portugal, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

▪ Participants

Two childhood educators with the longest membership time in the Day Care Project were a part of it. Both have distinctive professional experiences.

▪ Instruments and procedures

Interviews were conducted on the two childhood educators, between January and February 2011 and their transcripts made up a total of 100 pages.

Before the interview data analysis, a copy of the transcripts and audio recording was facilitated so the subjects might account for its accuracy.

The data collected were subject to a content analysis by a 3 judge panel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data that is being analyzed points to a great incidence on the interpersonal relationships established, ascertaining an appreciation of interactions with children, day care assistants, other colleagues and families (Formosinho, 2011; Portugal, 2011)

“I appreciate the adult/child, child/adult interaction, I appreciate it a lot, and specially having the day care the affection part, is very important (...)” (EB)

“It all comes by our affectionate relationship with the child, because it forms if we create an emotional relationship.” (EA)

The relationship with the families, as well as the educational team, is recognized as important to the development and learning of the children, however sometimes, it presents its difficulties.

“The meetings between the team were made once a month, or whenever there was a need. But once a month, there is always a meeting between educators and assistants.” (EB)

“Throughout my educational practice it has been the hardest task I have (...) to involve the parents and make them feel like the day care is a place where they are appreciated and themselves value day care.” (EB)

The participants point out also the involvement of children and the educational intentionality focusing on the well-being and development of the child as roles essentials of the childhood educator in a day care setting (Post & Hohman, 2003; Portugal, 1998):

“To do diversified activities, having in consideration the individual child and stimulating it from beyond what she knows to, respecting individual differences, developing self-esteem.” (EA)

“To be an educator in day care is being there (...) they know well that I’m there, trying to steer them. But through their own way” (EB)

“To be a childhood educator implies knowing the child very well.” (EA)

The data reveal the importance of a responsive, supportive educator that questions but doesn’t dominate the child’s thought neither interferes in its freedom of choice (Portugal, 2009). The respect for the learning rhythm and individual characteristics of each child emerges as important aspects in day care work.

IMPLICATIONS

The data bring to light the understanding of the educator’s role in a day care setting, contributing to the acknowledgement of their educational action with children up to 3 years of age.