Pre-school Education in Portugal: some teaching methods

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1. Pre-school Education in Portugal

- The Portuguese Constitution follows the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Child, by safeguarding:
  - **balanced development** of the children
  - **right to enjoy protection** from the state and society against abandonment, abuse, discrimination and oppression.
  - **Guiding principles of the Portuguese legislation** are:
    - non-discrimination;
    - the interests of the child are paramount and safeguarded;
    - the right to life, survival and development;
    - respect for the opinion of the child (OECD, 2000).
Education Act (Law 46/86, 14th October)

Framework Law for Pre-School Education (Law 5/97, 10th February)

- “pre-school education (between 3 and 6 years) complements family education with which it works in close collaboration,
- favouring the balanced formation and development of the child,
- with a view to their integration into society as an autonomous, free and responsible being”.
General **objectives** of pre-school education (Framework Law)

- “encouraging the **personal and social development** of the child based on **experiences of democratic life**, with a view to **education for citizenship**;
- **promoting the inclusion of children in a variety of social groups**, with **respect for different cultures**, encouraging a gradual awareness of their role as members of society;
- **contributing towards equality of opportunity in gaining access to schools and towards learning success**”
General **objectives** of pre-school education (Framework Law)

- “encouraging the **global development** of each child, respecting individual characteristics, promoting behaviour to help significant, diversified learning;
- developing **expression and communication** through the use of multiple languages as a means of forming relationships, providing information, promoting aesthetic awareness and an understanding of the world;
- provoking **curiosity and critical thought**;
- providing each child with the **conditions of well-being and safety** in individual and public health”
General **objectives** of pre-school education (Framework Law)

- “**identifying inadaptability, deficiencies and gifted behaviour**, encouraging better orientation and guidance of the child;

- **encouraging families to participate** in the educational process and to form an effective relationship in collaboration with the community”

*(Framework Law, in Ministry of Education, 1997)*
Pre-school Education
(Framework Law)

- is “the first step in basic education (…)
- part of life-long education
- complementing the education provided by the family, with which it should establish close co-operation,
- fostering the education and balanced development of the child, with a view to his/her
  - full integration in society as an autonomous, free and co-operative individual” (Framework Law, Ministry of Education, 1997)
Pre-school Education
(Framework Law)

- The most common pre-school institutions (for 3-6 year old children) are called *Jardins de Infância*. They can be private or public.
- Opening hours are generally the same but they can vary according to local circumstances and needs.
- They must dedicate **five hours a day to educational activity** in accordance with the Ministry of Education’s curriculum guidelines (1998);
- some have extended periods of socio-educational activities, including provision of school meals.
- Only the public sector requires no fees from parents.
Itinerant child education service

- The minimum number of children required for the setting up of a *Jardim de infância* is fifteen.
- Where numbers of 3-6 year olds in a locality is lower than this, especially in rural areas, the Ministry of Education may establish an itinerant child education service.
- Usually, these pre-schools are open part-day and organised by one educated pre-school teacher who may travel across the area on a given day to work in several different itinerant settings.
2. Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-school Education

- Traditionally, there was a clear distinction between the activities of the education-orientated settings and the care-orientated settings, both of which are called *Jardins de infância*.
- Recently, the Portuguese Government has sought to increase the educational aspects;
- the National *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-school Education* (Order No. 5 220/97, 4th of August) are not a programme but a *set of principles* which offer a common reference point for teachers regarding their practice of leading and developing the educational process with the children.
Curriculum Guidelines

● The *Curriculum Guidelines* are a common reference for all teachers of the National Pre-School Network, for organising the educational component, guaranteeing significant learning, and the possibility to justify the different educational options, and consequently the different curricula.

● The document is organised under the following headings:
  ● general principles and pedagogical objectives,
  ● foundations and organisation of Curriculum Guidelines and General Guidelines for the pre-school teacher.
Curriculum Guidelines grounds:

- development of the child and learning are elements that can’t be separated;
- recognition of the child as a subject in the education process;
- linked building of learning; giving value to children’s knowledge, as a foundation for new learning;
- co-ordinated construction of knowledge,
- which presupposes differentiated pedagogy and the demand to find a solution for every child,
- which assumes varied teaching, centred on cooperation, in which every child benefits from the educational process developed with the group.
Curriculum Guidelines
Educational environment

- The educational environment is a support for curricular work and its intentions. It covers different levels of interaction:
- the **organisation** of the group, the **space** and the **time**;
- the organisation of the educational establishment;
- the relationship with parents and with other educational partners;
- content areas which make up the general reference areas to be taken into consideration in the planning and assessment of learning situations and opportunities.
Curriculum Guidelines

Content areas

- Personal and Social training;
- **Expression/Communication** that covers three fields:
  - command of expressions of different types – physical, dramatic, artistic and musical expression.
- Command of **language and a start to writing**;
- command of **arithmetic**;
- understanding of **general knowledge**
Curriculum Guidelines

Educational environment

- Educational **continuity** - as a process that starts with what children already know and have learnt, creating the conditions for the success of later learning;

- Educational **intention** - that is the result of the reflective process of observation, planning, action and assessment developed by the educator, to adapt teaching practice to the needs of children.

- Cheerful, colourful and welcoming spaces, with different activity zones where the children build their own learning, in a way that favours their balanced education and development.
3. Intercultural education in Portugal

- For children that belong to emigrant families, ethnic minorities and gypsies there are various **intercultural education projects** underway,
- to encourage educational initiatives involving them
- and the production of pedagogic material;
- the Curriculum Innovation and Development Board produced a CD-ROM: "We and the Others",
- with the reference of curriculum guidelines, namely, the content areas Expression and Communication: musical, artistic, motor and dramatic expression, maths, oral language and approach to writing.
3. Intercultural education in Portugal

- the Board produced Activity Books, Poetry, Song, Rigmarole, Riddle and Story Books for the children of itinerant workers that have no chance of regularly attending school,
- as well as supporting the families and teachers that work with them.
- A Record Book and Identity Card was also produced that should be with the child throughout the academic year,
- keeping an up to date record of school attendance, depending on the professional path of parents.
3. Intercultural education in Portugal

- For children that belong to socially excluded families, apart from financial support programmes,
- the Ministry of Work and Social Solidarity created the "Being a Child" programme,
- and the Minors Protection Commissions, for the support and protection of children at risk (Legislation: Decree-Law n.º 190/91)
4. Curriculum models in early Childhood Education

- In Portugal, in pre-school Education there is autonomy in pedagogic activity. Within individual programmes, many pedagogical models are found, including:
  - João de Deus model
  - Modern School Movement - MEM
  - Project Pedagogy
  - Situation Pedagogy
  - High Scope model
Jardins Escola João de Deus - named after its founder, a Portuguese poet and educational reformer, is a private network for 4-7 year old children existing since 1882.

João de Deus devoted himself to developing a new method of teaching reading: his “Maternal Primer” (Cartilha Maternal) appeared in 1876.

It was officially adopted in Portugal in 1888;
Curriculum models
A. João de Deus Model

it continues being used by more than forty schools, all over the country.
This Method emphasises **reading**, **writing** and **arithmetic**, according to a previous work plan, with the objective of preparing the child for school.

The teacher takes the line of directive pedagogy, keeping in view the school performance and success of the child.

In 1997 *João de Deus* Kindergarten Association received a Literacy Honourable Mention from Unesco.
The MEM (Movimento da Escola Moderna) is a cooperative teachers’ movement founded in Portugal by Sérgio Niza during the sixties based on Freinet.

MEM has a strong political and pedagogical commitment; it has been an important partner for new policies in early and primary years education.

It is a constructivist model created in 1966, based on the works of Freinet and Vygotsky and on a cooperative organisation of the class:

- children organise themselves based on their interests, working individually or in groups.
- The teacher encourages free individual expression, within a spirit of helpfulness and cooperation.
C. Project Pedagogy

- Project Pedagogy is also frequently used:
- associated with social reality, presupposes an action plan constructed by the children with the teacher, who coordinates.
- It has a flexible and open programme, and the objectives are:
  - development of sensitivity,
  - of creative imagination,
  - of autonomy
  - and the child’s socialisation.
- A project is an in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about.
C. Project Pedagogy

- The investigation is usually undertaken by a small group of children within a class, sometimes by a whole class, and occasionally by an individual child.
- The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions about a topic posed either by the children, the teacher, or the teacher working with the children.
- The goal of a project is to learn more about the topic rather than to seek right answers to questions posed by the teacher (Katz, 1994).
D. Situation Pedagogy

- It is inspired by non-directive pedagogy.
- The teacher follows non-differentiated practices, not identified with any specific method.
- The teacher should also build knowledge, in a coordinated way, which means that the different areas that are being taught should not be seen in isolation, but in a holistic and integrated way.
- Children learn to learn, by relating to each other and being part of a group, formulating their own opinions and accepting those of others, developing a democratic spirit, in a climate of participation and sharing.
In Portugal, the High Scope model has been introduced and adapted from the United States in the early 1980s, by Schools of Education.

This model has been expanded in the last few years through the work of the University of Minho at Braga (OECD, 2000).

It is used in various schools, especially in early childhood Education (for example, “Raíz” and “Meninos Rabinos” Schools in Lisbon).

This approach is called active participatory learning, a process in which teachers and children are partners.
The goal of promoting active learning is reflected in every aspect of the curriculum.

Ingredients of active learning are five:

1. Materials;
2. Manipulation;
3. Choice;
4. Child language and thought;
5. Adult scaffolding;
Curriculum models
E. High Scope model

1. **Materials**: they are appealing to all the senses and they lend themselves to being used in a variety of ways to expand children’s experiences and stimulate their thought.

2. **Manipulation**: Children handle, examine, combine, and transform materials and ideas. They make discoveries through direct hands-on and “minds-on” contact with these resources.

3. **Choice**: Children choose materials and play partners, change and build on their play ideas, and plan activities according to their interests and needs.
Curriculum models
E. High Scope model

4. **Child language and thought**: children describe what they are doing and understanding. They communicate verbally and nonverbally as they think about their actions and modify their thinking to take new learning into account.

5. **Adult scaffolding**: “Scaffolding” means adults both support children’s current level of thinking and challenge them. Adults encourage children’s efforts and help them extend or build on their work by talking with them about what they are doing, by joining in their play, and by helping to solve problems that arise.
The pre-school component of the High Scope Curriculum includes a set of teaching practices for *adult-child interaction*, arranging the classroom and materials, and planning the daily routine.

It has curriculum *content areas* for 3- to 5-year-olds, *assessment tools* to measure teaching behaviours and child progress, a training model to help teachers implement the curriculum; *classroom arrangement, materials, and equipment*.

The space and materials are carefully arranged to promote *active learning*.
Curriculum models
E. High Scope model: space

- The space is divided into **interest areas organized around specific kinds of play**; for example, block area, house area, small toy area, book area, art area.
E. High Scope model: daily routine

- In the **High Scope daily routine**, teachers give children a sense of control over the events of the day by a consistent daily routine.

- Central elements of the pre-school daily routine include the plan-do-review sequence, small- and large-group times, greeting time, and outside time.

- The most important segment of the daily routine is the **plan-do-review sequence**, in which children make choices about what they will do, carry out their ideas, and reflect upon their activities with adults and other children.
The **Cognitive Orientation Curriculum** is founded on Piaget’s development theories and fits in with active pedagogy.

- The **child learns by doing**.
- The activities develop in an atmosphere organised into areas, where children can make their choice.
- The teacher takes on the role of someone who stimulates and encourages action (Epstein, 2001).


- Curriculum guidelines and some different teaching methods used in Portugal,
- educational environment and interaction
- are described and shown through a presentation with films and photos.