

ABSTRACT

The involvement of the three-year-old in mixed age groups: a study in different pedagogical contexts

Sensitivity to the questions of diversity is a slow process that requires a great deal of experience of transformation. It also involves reconceptualising fundamental issues such as the image of the child, the role of the teacher and the view of the teaching-learning process. The pedagogues of the century contributed to this through their thoughts, their action and intervention by driving a movement to reflect upon and reconstruct concepts, beliefs and pedagogical practices.

Teachers' awareness of the differences present in the activity room is fundamental in beginning the process of recreating learning environments (in their various forms) and the practice of a distinct pedagogy and an education for difference and diversity, which can contribute towards the success of all the children. In fact, working the multicultural aspect means placing each and every child at the centre of the educational activity.

Bearing in mind this perspective of multicultural education (as a comprehensive and far-reaching concept), in which we understand that age differences can also become one of the forms of exclusion, we have chosen to focus attention on the involvement of three-year-olds (the youngest age group to attend nursery), who, when integrated in mixed-age groups with older children, do not always seem to find a pedagogical answer suited to their needs.

This research thus aims to study the involvement of the three-year-old in mixed-age groups and in different educational contexts (traditional nursery schools and classrooms in which constructivist pedagogy is practised).

The aim of the study is to reflect upon a possible relation between the pedagogical perspective of the educational contexts, the involvement of the child and the mixed-age group organisation of the classes, in the case of three-year-olds. The study of the child's involvement has proved to be an excellent way of researching the educational process and helping professionals to reflect upon practices, as well as being a valuable instrument in guaranteeing the children's substantive rights to participate in their own educational process (Oliveira – Formosinho, 2002). In this research, the referential of involvement (Leavers, 1994 a) is used with the aim of understanding the question of the right of smaller children to participate in mixed-age group classes, with different pedagogical contexts.

