

# Six Places for the Childhood Educator (on) Scene – Reflections on the Didactics of Drama Education in the Training of Early Childhood Educators

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## Abstract

The driving goal of the experience that constituted the empirical basis of the study was the design of an action script, within the scope of Higher Education, promoting relational and aesthetic experiences that would respond to the desires, needs, and narratives of early childhood educators in a nursery setting. The outcome of the experience led to the development of a holistic artistic training, mediated by theatrical resources with a strong visual and aesthetic focus that prioritized the child in relational and affective aspects, allowing them to recognize themselves as individuals with assigned social status, with a role and voice in situations and actions carried out with and for them. We examine Drama Education's curricular role delving into theoretical aspects of theatrical languages and their links to early childhood's relational dimension. The study offers a roadmap for future early childhood educators in nursery.

**Keywords:** artistic education; drama education; educators training; nursery; sensorial theatre.

## 1 Art Education in Portugal

Since the first decade of the 21st century, the tendency to place arts education on the periphery of educational policies and practices has changed. A number of international events, namely the *1st World Conference on Arts Education*, held in Lisbon in 2006, which resulted in UNESCO's *Road Map for Arts Education* (2006); the *European & International Research Symposium*, held in 2007 on the theme *Evaluating the Impact of Arts & Cultural Education on Children and Young People*; as well as an equally significant set of documents, namely the *Lupwishi Mybuyamba Report* (2006) and the *2nd Seoul Arts Education Conference* in 2010, which produced relevant critical information on the need for general arts education; and national ones, namely the *National Arts Education Conference*, held in 2007.

At the Portuguese level, the *Artistic Education Evaluation Study* (*Estudo de Avaliação do Ensino Artístico*) (Fernandes, Ó & Ferreira, 2007) is part of this movement, highlighting the

trend towards consolidation and expansion of the arts education system and its own educational offer. This fact, revealed by the comparative analysis of national and international indicators, has legitimised the discourse of arts research and higher education (master's degrees and doctorates) so that the different artistic fields, particularly theatre, can interact and respond, on the one hand, to the emergence of new “creative communities” connected to the “cultural and creative industries” (European Commission, 2010), to the needs of so-called “youth cultures” (Pais, 2003) and those arising from the phenomenon of the “global ageing of populations” (Harper, 2009); on the other and, but no less importantly, responde to the specificities conveyed by European educational, social, cultural and artistic policies (Dias & Pires-Antunes, 2017).

From that set of events, the *Seoul Agenda* (2010), due to the high level of participation and scrutiny to which it was subjected, is a benchmark for the development of the different fields of Arts Education: firstly, because the document globally supported the role of Arts Education “in the transformation of education systems struggling to meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing world characterised, on the one hand, by remarkable advances in technology and, on the other, by intractable social and cultural injustices” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2); then, because it was embodied in a set of recommendations that involved rethinking the place of the arts in basic education, namely in the curriculum guidelines for pre-school and basic education, and in the correlation of these recommendations with the training of childhood educators and basic education teachers in higher education; finally, because it reiterated the importance of the arts as a founding principle and condition for a more democratic and humanised way of being with and for children, in the educational context and in society.

However, even though the Seoul discourse received general consensus and recognition in Portugal, the implementation of the recommendations made there, particularly in policies for the training of childhood educators and teachers, has fallen short of expectations. In fact, the analysis of the legislative path of Art Education in its relationship with Early Childhood Education, carried out by Pires Antunes & Tomás (2021), revealed that it was a slow and not very robust path. In turn, as Vasconcelos (2012) points out, the drafting of Recommendation no. 3/2011 – *Education from 0 to 3 years (A Educação dos 0 aos 3 anos)* (Portugal, 2011) reveals concerns regarding the care of children aged 0 to 3, as well as the current initial training of early childhood educators, which he considers does not adequately prepare them for intervention in nursery centres nursery schools in general.

As Pires Antunes & Tomás (2021) point out, in the initial training of Childhood Educators and Primary School Teachers in Portugal, the area known as Art Education, particularly in Master's degrees in Teaching, fulfils a merely symbolic function. Subject, like all curricula, to the neoliberal rationale and the pressure of a chronos that is progressively “objectified, fragmented and manipulable” (Hoyuelos, 2007), which with it determines and controls the

organic, the school curriculum and “childhood time” (Cunha & Kuhn, 2016), Art Education has been the object of a process of concealment and curricular fragmentation with negative pedagogical implications for the quality of educational practices. Arguments such as “its problematic insertion into the general education system [...] its highly specialised nature, the requirement for appropriate resources” (DL 344/90, of 2 November 1990), the difficult articulation of Art Education in the curriculum mosaic, the lack of tradition in inter-institutional articulation (in internship contexts), while real, are irrelevant when compared to the consequences that arise from the hegemonic ambition for curricular control that plagues both knowledge with a traditional place in the core curriculum and the new emerging fields of knowledge.

In this process, it is not only the idea of a curriculum project that is being discarded, but also, and fundamentally, the vision of a holistic education that, in turn, embraces and implies the child project. In this sense, Art Education runs the risk of becoming a kind of school varnish, emblematic of institutions, all too (re)loved in the rituals, solemnities and celebrations of the academy and other institutions of “cultivated culture” (Chartier, 2001), but dispensable in the act of mapping the curricular territory when reformulating, proposing or creating new study plans.

Reducing, merging, relocating, secondaryising or simply pulverising the voices and fields of artistic reference are cosmetic operations that, by cohabiting the school space, condition the emergence of a coherent project to train professionals capable of an integrated Childhood Pedagogy from 0 to 6 years old. Ultimately, these entropies push general art education into a state of anomie and its actors into a constant identity belligerence. And yet, as Lupwishi (2006, p. 3) argues, “in a world faced with new problems on a planetary scale [...] creativity, imagination and the ability to adapt, skills that are developed through Art Education, are just as important as the technological and scientific skills needed to solve these problems”.

## 2 The Didactics of Drama Education in the training of early childhood educators

Despite the constraints pointed out, Art Education, in its different domains, remains resilient in terms of the importance of its role in the integral formation of the child. An example of this is the Curricular Unit *Didactics of Visual, Musical, Dramatic and Physical-Motor Education in Nursery Schools and Kindergartens*, consisting of a modular structure that integrates the three subdomains of Artistic Education – Visual, Musical and Drama Education – and Physical Education, included in the curricular plan of a public Higher Education institution, in Portugal.

In the ‘Didactics of Drama Education’ module, a search was made for a movement that, in terms of the training of childhood educators, has been breaking with the concept of traditional theatre performance practices since a remote stage in its history as a school subject. These practices, already in the second half of the 20th century, together with psychopedagogues (Arquimedes dos Santos; João dos Santos; Rui Grácio) and theatre education

pedagogues (Ingrid Koudela; Jean-Claude Landier & Giselle Barret; Moreno; Peter Slade), pursued narratives based on the idea of the child's creative activity and the relationships between play, symbolic play, dramatic play and symbolisation processes.

Attentive to the new theatrical languages, the 'Didactics of Drama Education' module has been building bridges and creating new synergies inside and outside the school environment, drawing from the social fields of origin (Theatre and Education) and from neighbouring fields, constructs and instruments with which it seeks to respond to the training needs of future childhood educators, confronted with children at different ages and in educational intervention contexts as diverse as the nursery, the nursery centres, the kindergarten or the leisure centre. On the other hand, at their core, theatrical languages are, in *per se*, a special *locus* for enforcing children's rights:

- The rights relating to 'development' (through the function of play, ludic, reception and theatrical aesthetics that converge and pedagogically support Drama Education);

- The rights relating to 'participation' (the right to express one's own opinion), insofar as the act of enjoying, appreciating, expressing an opinion (through the different means of expression available to the child) is intrinsic to the theatrical sign game, since it always involves an 'audience', an 'other'; in the case of the nursery centre, the peer, the significant 'other' for the child.

Therefore, and since the *ethos* of the experience was the training of childhood educators, we tried to draw from "Theatre", as a social field of origin, namely the so-called "post-dramatic theatre" (Lehmann, 2007), dimensions that we consider fundamental to the development of an action-script, namely:

- The centrality of the body in the process of human relationships and communication is experienced here through playful-theatrical strategies of an aesthetic-sensory nature;

- Dimensions relating to the problem of reception and its relationship with what Home-Cook (2015) called 'aural attention';

- Attention to the 'construction of place', understanding it as a mediator of the theatrical and aesthetic experience, which Naves (2004) called the 'scenic ambit'.

In terms of methodology, the drama-theatre process was based on a constructivist model, with an explorative and experimental character, in which knowledge is constructed "as an interpretative, repetitive and constructive process through which learners interact with the physical and social world" (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, p. 30). As O'Neil & Lambert (1982, p. 139) point out, "the particular strength of this strategy [...] lies in the quality of immediacy and spontaneity that can be generated".

### 3 Theatre languages in the training of early childhood educators

Through the exploration of specific theatrical agglutinators, such as the body, the voice, space, light, text and 'scene' indications, the aim was for the students to become involved in

the construction of the “place” (scenography). By creating and implementing an action script, known as the *Six Places of the educator (en) scene*, environments imbued with inspiration were created. These were carefully conceived aesthetic experiences that the students were expected to remember, triggering their desire to design their own atmospheres and invite the child to explore them in the near future, in a professional nursery setting.

### 3.1 THE BODY

In the experience proposed in the ‘Didactics of Drama Education’ module, presented here, were prioritised the centrality of the body in relational and communicational construction and what this implies in the ways of looking at it, reading it, listening to it and its languages. This is a way of looking at the school subject, in general, but in particular the “inhabitants of the nursery schools” (Fabbretti, 2011), since they are the first to make the body the primitive space for communication: with themselves, with others and with the world.

The assumption of the body as a reference point for theatrical languages in the childcare centre context implied both the rejection of the traditional separation between discourse and movement and the untying of theatrical languages from the literary text to which, for too long, the discipline has been anchored and seems to want to return. The word, now dethroned from its supremacy as the main form of (scenic) communication, gave way to the body and the readings that emanate from it, thus opening up space to, as Pier Paolo Pasolini would say (in Martins, 2008), “throw the body into the fight”.

As Gil (1997, p. 8) argues, “there is no uninhabited body” and all bodies are speakers. They say, listen and are listened to in the different times and ways of each age of childhood, from birth, when early communication processes are essentially mediated by tonic-emotional communication processes, impregnated with affections, desires and emotions (Ajuriaguerra, 1974), until later, when, after the appearance of the first signs orientated towards the world, the child gains gestural and motor mastery and becomes aware of the symbolic, and then begins to admire, love and “give himself in spectacle to his entourage” as Ajuariaguerra says (1974, p. 34, evoking Wallon, 1973).

For the educator in the nursery or nursery center it is essential to understand the variation in the child’s tonic-emotional processes, since experimenting with and understanding them is the precondition for the positive relational establishment that precedes the more complex forms of human communication.

Tone is responsible for initiating all actions, as it is where information from inside the body and from the external environment intersects. Tone, or rather its signs, should be for the educator like the signposts of a road never travelled before, warning of a change in direction or the manoeuvres to be carried out, because in tone lies the guarantee of attitudes, postures and mimicry, given that “it plays an important role in becoming aware of oneself and in building

the world and the other” (Fonseca, 2009, p. 192). The initial tonal game is, therefore, this plot about and with which the child tells itself. In this process of building a relationship with themselves, the essential thing is to assert themselves as an autonomous individual. And if all means are good for the child, play, which in the early years is fully translated into body narrative, is par excellence the time and place where it can and should happen best, because it runs through all the child’s ages, merging and almost blending, in the first few months, with the response to stimulation.

Research into sensory deprivation shows that the constant influx of external stimuli into the nervous system is an indispensable condition for the organisation of metabolism, which in turn is fundamental for all activities, from the most basic to those which, like problem-solving, involve creativity. The ecological conditions that surround the child are differentiating factors in their development process. To a large extent, the child is formed by the quality of the intensities of the stimuli that they are able to select from the surrounding ecological conditions. This stimulation includes internal and external stimuli that go beyond basic sensory stimulation. And stimuli means physical contact provoked by another person, sustaining a process of social relationships.

For Dias (1999, p. 204), “To touch is always to exchange, to unfold, to redouble, to densify”. For touch to unfold the touch, for the relationship to happen, it is important to consciously take care of the regulation that is produced and emanates from the body(ies) in relation to each other, to objects and to places.

Martins (2015) emphasises that the modalities of postural opening and closing are established from birth through variations in hypotonia and hypertonia. The installation of an extreme hypertonic or hypotonic profile alters the relationship and puts the other at a distance. In an educational context, feeling and encouraging the child to enjoy this ‘tonic melody’ also involves the educator, who is seen as a privileged reference point for attracting the child’s attention. At the root of the child’s attention is their desire to relate to others, through bodily manifestations such as their gaze, facial expressions, voice, body attitude and expressive gestures. Attention and the discovery of signs are progressively organised into a basic gestural alphabet that the child builds, learns and makes sense of through interaction, particularly with significant others.

“Since the body is not an object, nor is it ever fully constituted, because it is an indefinite open structure just like the world with which it is correlated” (Dias, 1999, p. 41), knowing how to wait for things to happen in the theatre game is the condition of the educator who walks with the child to open up to unpredictability and non-determinism. So, it is essential that educators value in children everything that, although it may be innate, has already been created, bringing it to the fore. But it’s also about the educator allowing themselves, in the shared time of play with the child, to recognise and listen to themselves in the playful relationship – active and complex listening, involving attention to the unspoken, the invisible, the evoked. In contact with

the child, the educator, when seeking a balance between telling and listening, must, as Frabbetti (2011, p. 40) says, “prioritise the latter”.

As Hoyuelos (2007, p.1) argues, “Without listening, we lose the indispensable tools of our work: awe, wonder, reflection and the joy of being with children and nannies”.

### 3.2 THE VOICE

In establishing the relationship between the educator and the child or between the ‘actor’ and the ‘spectator’, the voice is, first and foremost, gesture and atmosphere, that which involves, captivates, invites closeness, surrender, openness, intimacy or, conversely, withdrawal, refusal, contraction, closure.

For the child in nursery centre, the reception of the quality of the “ambience” offered, or simply shared, is signalled and translated into body language. Signs and codes of a language that the educator needs to know in order to read and know how to ‘talk to’ the child and what they are talking about. As an educational act, empathy for the vocal sounds emitted by the child, or those produced in the “sound dialogue” between child and adult, and attention to their listening, establish the relational basis and the climate of trust that precede the child’s desire for words: first spoken and later written.

In the field of theatre, Artaud, a 20th century director, was the first to talk about the need for language to satisfy the senses. He said that when the word is pronounced, the materiality of the voice imprints sound qualities of a non-verbal nature, giving it other layers of meaning that are superimposed on the verbal content and that affect the senses. Post-dramatic theatre, in which sensory theatre is rooted, largely integrates Artaud’s proposal by shifting the focus from the verbal aspect of actor-spectator communication, the canon of modern theatre, to non-verbal aspects. Sonorities, resonances, breaths, sound fragments, atmospheres, multiplicities of voices and silences now entangle the spectacular text. Linguistic blockages or vocal imperfections, unusual and banned in the modernist tradition, are not only allowed, but desired and used with aesthetic intent.

As Lehman (2007, p. 246) points out, “In post-dramatic theatre, breathing, rhythm and the now of the body’s presence take precedence over the *lógos*”. And the voice is also the body.

In a speaking situation there is the body speaking, there is the voice, the face of the person speaking and the body of the listener. The voice vibrates through the whole body. We are used to thinking that the voice “enters” only through the ear, which is only a privileged conduit, since the voice vibrates throughout the body of speakers and listeners. This orality also includes gestures, colour, smells, everything that can be seen and perceived (Almeida, 1994, p. 10).

It is the layers of meaning that the voice carries in its materiality, to which Artaud (2006) alludes, that we consider fundamental for educators, particularly in day care centre context, to

experience, know and integrate into the pedagogical reference and tools that they build and organise throughout their training. “To change the purpose of the word [...] is to use it in a concrete and spatial sense, [...] it is to manipulate it as a solid object, capable of shaking things initially in the air, and then in a more mysterious and more secret domain” (Artaud, quoted by Willer, n.d., p. 1). Being at ease in this pedagogical reference and toolbox is a condition for the educator to enter into the child’s sound game and get involved in the web of pre-linguistic forms that the child experiences in their relationship with the other.

For Stiegler (2007, p.152), “Knowledge is not a tool placed at the disposal of a user: it is what individuates an individual, it is what transforms that individual, not simply to individualise or identify him, but, much more subtly, to singularise him”. If the educator is also “a psychologically nourishing caregiver” (Portugal, 2009), emotionally intelligent and literate in the handling of languages (bodily, visual, sound), he will be able to make the bodily experience pleasurable. In this context, movement becomes a gesture-language with meaning and intentionality, as Martins (2015) points out, and through the experience of their own movement, children acquire an awareness of space. The action of each of the senses contributes to this awareness, and through their combination with the spatialising faculties of sight and touch, the awareness of visual space is broadened and enriched. Sound, in particular, increases this awareness by including the areas behind our heads and, more importantly, “sound dramatises personal experience” (Tuan, 1983, p. 18) and, in doing so, transmutes simple sensory experience into a temporal record which, in turn, feeds the wellspring of memory.

Waiting and letting the sound, the heartbeat, the variation in breathing, the breath and the gaze become signs of encounter and discovery is the role of the educator in the educational scene, just like in the theatre, where the actor on stage waits for the other to happen so that they can happen with them too.

### 3.3 THE ORALISPHERE

The relative “impotence of words” in so-called post-dramatic theatre has already been mentioned. However, both their dismissal and the importance of the literary text do not detract from the research into orality in the contemporary scene. The emergence of the figure of the actor-storyteller reflects, in itself, this search for the reinvention of orality in the theatrical scene.

In the context of childhood educators training, orality is understood as all communication in which the individual uses vocal and bodily support, whether in the exercise of their own or in a spontaneous oral manifestation.

For Bortolin (2010), orality is a way of transmitting thoughts, feelings and knowledge through the voice, which is often seen as a disembodied entity.

To designate the atmosphere that surrounds orality, we coined the concept “Oralisphere”: *Oralis*, from the Latin *oris* meaning mouth, and *sfera*, from the Greek *shaira*, which can be



translated as layer, space, envelope, environment. With this creation, Bortolin highlights the urgency for storytellers to realise how necessary and fundamental it is to build an ambience with the collective participation of the reader-narrator, the reader-listener and the other elements that make up the act of orality: voice / body – sonorities (breathing, gesture, movement, view – noise, whisper, pause, silence). Elements that, taken together, are the bodily and textual presence creating an ideal ambience for the performance. In oral storytelling, there is nothing passive between the reader-narrator and the reader-listener. As Dolz and Schneuwly (2010, pp.127-128) point out, “both interfere in the action of the other and often do so unconsciously through gestures, glances, smiles, whispers, words, etc.”

Incorporating, experiencing, creating stimulating sound environments for children and, in the contexts they inhabit and that inhabit them, attempting the didactic transposition of this principle is the proposal of becoming left to the student.

Listening to yourself say something, discovering the existence of your own vocal identity, knowing how to draw from it what can singularise you as a subject in your relationship with the child, is what is proposed to the trainee educator.

### 3.4 THE SCENE

Like the actor, the child expects, ‘in’ and ‘through’ their actions, to meet the gaze of the other, to be seen and, in this seeing, to feel like the protagonist in the construction of their own identity, to receive and feel the testimony of attention from those who watch them and mediate this process. The educator’s response to this need for attention is as much about balancing the listening-orality dyad as it is about the aesthetic and artistic quality they place in the ‘places’/scenographies they create and propose to the child so that they can be seen, being.

For Tuan (1983), ‘places’ are spaces to which we give meaning, seeking to satisfy biological, affective and emotional needs, as we get to know them better and endow them with value and memory.

Norberg-Schulz (2006), speaking of the field of architecture and evoking the Greek idea that each place was governed by a god, uses the expression *Genius Loci* – ‘spirit of the place’. For this architect, talking about ‘place’ also meant talking about the ability to set up environments that, while physical, could also be aesthetic and psychological, planned for human interactions.

For Artaud (2006), the stage, as a ‘place’, is par excellence the space of theatrical poetics:

I say that the stage is a concrete physical place that must be filled and given its own concrete language.

I affirm that this concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech, must first satisfy the senses; I affirm that there is a poetry of the senses and another of the poetry of language and that this concrete physical language to which I refer is only truly theatrical insofar as the thoughts it expresses are beyond spoken language (Artaud, 2006, p. 42).

Vecchi (1998) also talks about the relationship between space and the child's right to the satisfaction of their senses, in relation to the symbolic-play spaces he created in Reggio Emilia:

Children have the right to grow up in pleasurable places and education cannot exclude itself from these tasks. Attention to the aesthetic dimension is a pedagogical method that yields excellent results, since the search for beauty belongs to the child's autonomous thought processes (Vecchi, 1998, p. 133).

Transposed to the nursery centres, the construction of these "pleasant places" can take on, among other things, the theatrical form, the scenographic form created to be filled, to give meaning to the senses that are awakened and organised 'by' and 'in' the child's action. Scenographies created so that children can exercise and show themselves in the full exercise of their languages. As Artaud (2006, p. 17) would say, "the theatre that is not in anything, but makes use of all languages – gestures, sounds, words, fire – discovers itself exactly at the point where the spirit needs a language to produce its manifestations". He considers that it is a language intended for the senses and for this reason must, first and foremost, try to satisfy them, which allows the 'poetry of language to be replaced by the poetry of space', which will materialise precisely in a domain that does not strictly belong to words.

This intensely difficult and complex [spatial] poetry appears in many guises, and in particular in all the means of expression that are viable on stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mime, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, scenery (Artaud, 2006, p. 43).

The educational space is understood in another way – as a meeting place and physical support. For Tuan (1983, p. 14) the 'place' can be understood as "a special class of object. It is a concretion of value, although it is not a valuable thing that can be easily manipulated or taken from one place to another; it is an object in which one can live". If biological imperatives are involved in living, affective and emotional dimensions are also involved; we inhabit spaces and, at the same time, spaces inhabit us, inscribe themselves, organize and feed the memory of the lived experience. In the attention given to scenic constructions, such as scenography, the aim was to ensure that the educator experienced theatrical languages and gained mastery over them, allowing them to act on the space, so that, in the future, "their children may come to feel the nursery as a second "home", another significant place since the mother is, at this stage of childhood and discovery of reality, "the child's first place" (Tuan, 1983).

To speak of 'place' as a relationship is to speak of reciprocity, intentionality and the conditions that assist its construction – a construction that requires time and direct experience. Experience includes the different ways in which the subject constructs and knows reality. These ways vary according to the senses involved: from the most primitive, such as taste, smell and touch, to active visual perception and indirect symbolization.

With the proposed symbolic spaces, the aim was for students to experience material, spatial and aesthetic resources for planning, elaborating and managing theatrical praxis in the early stages of childhood. These spaces were aimed, above all, at participation and celebration as a way of “being together”.

In the script of the proposed scenographic experiences, the body was not only what acted, grabbed, threw away, or allowed itself to be rocked; the body was the means by which each student translated and ‘conveyed’ their sense of place/scene, insofar as it was created for them to act, to be seen – which comes close to Casey’s (2005) concept of *body-mapping*. For this philosopher, whose research focuses on space and place in the work of art, every map reflects some particular bodily engagement and it is this bodily engagement that is called upon here, with the aim of awakening in each educator, as Nakahodo (2014) would say, “the desire to create places that are simultaneously qualitative spaces and places that contain programs”.

### 3.5 EXPERIENCING

In the encounter between future kindergarten teachers and theatrical languages, the deconstruction of social representations, as a common terminology within academia, of what “Theatre” is for each one, is an additional effort to be faced in training. The “petrified idea of theatre” (Artaud, 2006), as a practice of representation specific to the actor confined to literary text and dialogic representation, constitutes the hard core of the social representations shared by successive groups of candidates for initial training.

The deconstruction of this social representation largely provides the childhood educator with the opportunity to understand the connection between broader cultural productions, the different forms of artistic languages, the specificities of each of them and their connection with the processes of development of the child’s creative expression. Leading the educator to the assumption that “the desire for theatre” is inherent to humans (Costa, 2003) is believed to be the first step towards a theatrical praxis in different educational contexts.

In fact, and as Fabbretti (2011, p.48) rightly says, “there is no such thing as ‘theatre’, that is, there is no single artistic form with defined and precise canons of which we can say this is ‘theatre’”. What exists is a vast and diverse theatrical cartography, where, over time, artistic practices and conceptions, sometimes very distinct from each other, coexist simultaneously.

Knowing and being able to extract from this vast theatrical repository what to propose to the childhood educator, in order for him/her to respond to the child, in nursery contexts, is what the student is expected to master at the end of the initial training. And this path is urgent to enter, since the research carried out (Ferreira and Rocha, 2008; Portugal, 1998, 2009; Tomás, 2017; Vasconcelos, 2009, 2012) highlights the weakness of education in nursery contexts; mentions the enormous invisibility of the child in these first years of life; warns of the welfare rationale that

contaminates the right to education in nursery and accounts for the work preference of Early Childhood Educators for the Preschool context to the detriment of the nursery valences.

This preference from the early childhood educators may be due to profound mismatches in the curricular plans for the initial training of early childhood educators. A similar opinion is shared by the partners involved in the preparation of “Recomendação n.º 3/2011” – *A Educação dos 0 aos 3 anos*” (Recommendation No. 3/2011 – *Education for children aged 0 to 3*) (Vasconcelos, 2012), when they revealed concerns regarding the care provided to children aged 0 to 3, as well as in relation to the current initial training of early childhood educators which, they say, does not adequately prepare them for working in nursery.

Through empirical experience, the idea has taken shape that the inadequacy felt by childhood educators in relation to work in a nursery context comes from the identity-based welfare vision of nursery services and that it translates into common sense in terms of “taking care of” or “caring for”.

In the close-up work that is pedagogical supervision, one also perceives the difficulty that childhood educators have in dealing with embryonic forms of meaning or with pre-symbolic formations inherent to the development phase of children at these early ages. The expression ‘they still don’t do anything good!’, which is often heard in nursery rooms, seems to illustrate this common sense. In terms of training, the expression itself constitutes a Pandora’s box that urgently needs to be opened and ‘rearranged’. This includes the deconstruction of functionalist ideas about education and educational practices; the dismantling of the idea of the arts and the myth of the artist traditionally based on the ‘theory of gifts’; the lack of depth study of developmental psychology and child sociology; and, last but not least, the urgency and assumption of “a place for pedagogical-didactic knowledge in higher education” (Leite & Ramos, 2012, p. 8).

It is within this framework of constraints that the ‘Didactics of Drama Education’ Module emerges in the current Study Cycle Leading to the Master’s Degree in Preschool Education and, in an attempt to respond to some of these aspects, the experience that will be presented here was developed.

The Study Cycle Leading to the Master’s Degree in Preschool Education, created within the scope of the implementation of the Bologna process, formally continues the training obtained in the Degree in Basic Education and confers professional qualifications for teaching in various domains. It aims to train professionals to perform teaching duties in Nursery and Kindergarten and also prepares them for the performance of educational duties in ATL (Atividades de Tempo Livre / Free Time Activities) and other educational and care contexts that have historically been contexts of activity for early childhood educators.

Unlike other Masters in Education, where the Curricular Unit “Didactics of Visual, Musical, Drama and Physical-Motor Education” brought together, under a modular configuration, Visual, Musical, Drama and Physical-Motor Education, in this Masters the Drama Education module had

been ignored. With this omission, the Masters not only introduced discontinuities in relation to the Degree in Basic Education, but also generated entropy by making a 'clean slate' of the provisions of the 'Decree-Law on Artistic Education' that defined the scope of generic artistic education – "artistic education is carried out generically at all levels of education as a component of the general education of students" (Portugal – Decree-Law 344/90, art.º 3º) – and ignored the research findings relating to pre-school, which states that in the context of nursery, and after the care offered to the child, play appears as the main activity (Portugal, 1998).

The correction of the measure was, finally, introduced in the latest reformulation of the Master's Degree in Preschool Education. With it, the module on 'Didactics of Drama Education' became part of the Curricular Unit "Didactics of Visual, Musical, Drama and Physical-Motor Education in Nursery and Kindergarten", which was assigned a total workload of 45 hours, equivalent to 7 sessions of 1:30h for each of the four modules that comprise it.

Having developed, in the Bachelor's Degree, the contents related to symbolic play (formation of the symbol, evolution of symbolic play and its importance in the cognitive, affective and social development of the child), it was important to define a guide for what precedes and prepares symbolic play, that is, the immense curiosity that guides the child in the discovery of himself and of what, beyond himself, expands in the search for 'the other' and the world, in its symbolization. To this end, it was important, above all, to find ways of transposing these concerns to the subjects in training and making them detach themselves, both from the welfare-based vision of the nursery and from a standardized, repetitive and schematically closed planning concept, in which the sense of the child as an agency is commonly absent.

Aware of the characteristics and differences of the children who attend the nursery; aware, also, that the merely didactic concern in developing their cognitive skills can harm some of these skills, if emotional needs are neglected; aware, also, of the child's "emerging sense of power", that is, the ability to influence events and situations ('agency') (UNESCO, 2006), it was considered to propose to the students a set of cutting-edge theatrical experiences, open to other languages and organised around what we call 'places of the educator (on) scene'.

#### **4 Places of the educator (on) scene**

The notion of 'place' as 'stage' was the thread that ran through all the proposed scenographies. Deconstructing the petrified idea of 'The Theatre'; designing stages for early childhood, conceiving them from the encounter of Childhood Pedagogy with a proposal of contemporary theatrical praxis; symbolically enriching these places so that the desire for theatre that inhabits the human being is satisfied in the child; instilling in educators the sense of right of that child to be the protagonist in the construction of his/her own identity; encouraging the child's pre-symbolic play in a quality relational context, were the objectives that also linked the 'places' invented with early childhood educators in mind. Pay attention to the following tables.

Table 1: *I. Scenography – Of the body and how it speaks*

<b>I. Scenography – Of the body and how it expresses itself</b>	
Space	Polychromatic mandala (parachute and Pilates balls)
Light	Central focus (yellow) Peripheral focuses (blue darkness)
Indications for Action	Work in pairs with and without points of body contact Communication between pairs with the ball as the inductor Rotation between the roles of conductor and led Attention to bodies (mine and the other's) in movement and to what they say Focus on non-verbal communication Absence of verbal communication
Indications for Exploration	Sensory discovery games (weight, balance, equilibrium, vertigo, height, time, safety, kinesthetic recognition) Body dialogues (tension, traction, cooperation, relaxation, transporter/transport, like/dislike, physical and emotional safety, trust, resistance, denial, identification.) Trust games Pre-symbolic games (discover, hide, show, run away, surprise, find, do with; 'imitate'; communicate).
Attitudes	Attention, listening, responsibility, respect, empathy, complicity

Table 2: *II. Scenography – You and Me Between Light and Shadow*

<b>II. Scenography – You and Me Between Light and Shadow</b>	
Space	Chromatic labyrinth defined by long curtains fringed with cellophane paper in various colors, leading to an illuminated projection screen
Light	1st moment – Spotlights on the labyrinth 2nd moment – Dark room 3rd moment – Manual spotlights moving in a dark room 4th moment – Spotlights projected on moving bodies 5th moment – Dark room, fluorescent glow fragments applied to moving bodies 6th moment – Human shadows in movement
Indications of Action	Free exploration and in pairs with and without points of body contact Rotation between the role of the lighted and the lighting designer; between the one who sees and the one who makes himself seen Focus on listening to the other Focus on vocalizations/sounds
Indications of Exploration	Visual games Pre-symbolic games (discover, show, escape, catch; "imitate"; communicate)
Attitudes	Attention, listening, joy, physical safety, empathy, complicity.

Table 3: *III. Scenography – Mirror, Mirror! From voice to word*

<b>III. Scenography – Mirror, Mirror! From voice to word</b>	
Space	Itinerary defined by a curtain of hanging bells leading to cushions placed in front of the large mirror in the room.
Light	1st moment – Atmosphere of greenish light 2nd moment – Natural light
Text	<i>Lengalengas</i> <sup>1</sup> , lullabies
Indications for Action	Free exploration of the itinerary Role rotation: who says, who listens. Attention to listening to oneself and to others;
Indications for Exploration	Sound games with bells (ringing, shaking/producing sounds and silences) Listening games Sound improvisation games in front of the mirror (hitting the body, clapping, emitting/producing vocal sounds, saying words, singing, rhyming)
Attitudes	Attention, emission/listening, joy, empathy, complicity

Influenced by the conditions and characteristics of the ‘places’, the students, upon entering the ‘scenographic’ spaces, explored them by playing, playing and improvising. Attitudes were expressed through a variety of forms of communication, from “silent expression”, as Morris (2018) refers to it, which occurs through movements and gestures, as a means of communication, and is a form of non-verbal language expressed through body movement, facial expressions and interaction with objects (Aristizabal et al., 2013), to visual contact and touch, bringing the participants closer together and leading to what Taube (2009) calls ‘reciprocal perception’, in which no part is dominant. Physical contact, as the author highlights, has communicative aspects, so the way each individual reacts to touch conveys information about themselves. Through touch, the students transmitted information to each other.

The elements ‘Space’ and ‘Light’ allowed for the creation of itineraries, labyrinths and illusory paths, through the exploration of diverse objects and materials, plays with light and shadow, colours, sounds and movement, which aroused sensations and emotions in the three scenographic ‘places’, instigating a natural, spontaneous and experimental game.

In the third ‘place’, “Scenography – Mirror, Mirror! From voice to word”, the ‘text’ element was also included, through the spoken word in the form of *Lengalengas* and lullabies.

The ‘Indications for Action’ and ‘Indications for Exploration’ influenced, in turn, the students’ ‘Attitudes’, such as attention to listening to themselves and others, joy, empathy, and complicity.

<sup>1</sup> “Lengalenga” is a portuguese word. It’s attributed to a text passed down from generation to generation, consisting of words that usually rhyme and are often repeated, giving it a musical character that makes it easier to memorize quickly. It is similar to a tongue twister.

The students' involvement was also a topic of analysis and evaluation in relation to their own participation and peer relationships, which resulted in a reflective capacity regarding the lived process.

## 5 Final considerations

For each of the experiences, we designed a different 'place' (scenography), organized around specific theatrical agglutinators (the body, the voice, the space, the light, the text, the 'scene' indications) and conducive to the emergence and deepening of narratives triggered by the relationship of the subjects with the proposed spaces.

In outlining the scenography proposals, we encouraged sharing by provoking, agitating, calming and supporting. The resulting diversity enhanced communication and contributed to the students' freedom of expression, making them available to embrace ambiguity, complexity and paradox.

When entering the aforementioned scenography, the students were encouraged to enjoy and respond to the sensory provocations that their atmospheres contained, to accept waiting for the other to co-produce and celebrate the encounter with them. The aim was for them to emerge stronger in terms of the sensitive and aesthetic and, at the same time, more aware and stimulated, in order to allow the child to be the true protagonist of the educational environment and to give themselves the right to participate in the adventure that is the construction of the rights of others, namely, the right to create.

The aim was to create places with spirit and to propose safe, caring and pleasurable aesthetic experiences, which the students would remember and desire to create their own atmospheres in the near future and invite the child to walk in them. As Vecchi (1998) considered, paying attention to the aesthetic dimension is a pedagogical method capable of training early childhood educators who, particularly in the context of nursery and in their relationship with babies, are "psychologically nourishing caregivers". Thus, ways were found to overcome any possible limitations inherent to the process, countering the possible idea of inadequacy felt by the students regarding work in a nursery context.

As a limitation, the impossibility of knowing what other atmospheres, triggered by the experience, will be woven by the students in this near future is highlighted.

Fostering interest in and recognition of Artistic Education as a field of knowledge implies investment in the initial and ongoing training of childhood educators. In this sense, creating foundations for the production of research related to themes on the Pedagogy of Childhood in the encounter with contemporary theatrical praxis, in its relationship with play or the deconstruction of functionalist ideas about education and educational practices, will strengthen the construction of pedagogical-didactic knowledge in higher education.



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