

“IT BELONGS TO EVERYONE!” THE RIGHT TO PLAY AND WELL-BEING IN THE PLAYGROUND OF A KINDERGARTEN

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Resumo:

Este texto tem como objetivo descrever e analisar o processo de intervenção realizado no recreio de um Jardim de Infância (JI) da cidade de Lisboa com a finalidade de promover o direito a brincar e a equidade social entre crianças. Apresentam-se os resultados parciais de um projeto de investigação SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion, *financiado pelo* Horizonte 2020 da Comissão Europeia. A metodologia utilizada inclui observação, entrevistas e fotografias como técnicas de recolha de dados, colocando em diálogo os Estudos Sociais da Infância e as Ciências de Educação. Os resultados apresentados destacam as mudanças e melhorias implementadas no recreio do JI, com especial ênfase na garantia de bem-estar, do direito a brincar, da promoção do acesso e da frequência das crianças a um espaço exterior de qualidade.

Keywords:

Crianças; Brincar; Bem-estar; Recreio; Jardim de Infância.

Resumen:

The aim of this text is to describe and analyse the intervention process carried out in the playground of a kindergarten (JI) in the city of Lisbon, with the objective of promoting the right to play and fostering social equity among children. We present the partial results of a research project SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion, funded by the Horizon 2020 program of the European Commission. The methodology used includes observation, interviews, and photographs as data collection methods, bringing together the Social Studies of Childhood and Educational Sciences. The presented results highlight the changes and improvements implemented in the kindergarten's playground, with special emphasis on ensuring well-being, the right to play, and promoting children's access to and frequency of use of a quality outdoor space.

Keywords:

Children; Play; Well-being; Playground; Kindergarten.

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Introduction

The discourse surrounding children's well-being is deeply rooted in theoretical and methodological discussions that have evolved over time. These deliberations have engaged distributive and relational theories, reflecting an ongoing dialogue between differing perspectives on well-being (Street, 2021). The realm of Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been a significant arena for these debates, as concepts of well-being intersect with evolving social constructions of young children (Moss & Urban, 2020). This case study delves into the landscape of children's well-being within the context of ECE in Portugal. In this exploration, we will articulate an interdisciplinary and comprehensive framework built upon three key dimensions of analysis. The first dimension embraces an alternative conception of children's well-being (Ferreira & Sarmiento, 2008) that contrasts with prevailing Anglo-Saxon views, shifting the discourse from an explicit children's rights-based perspective: protection, provision, and participation. This multidimensional approach seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of children's well-being in the ECE and, consequently, materialise the social justice lens of ECE (Cooke, Press & Wong, 2020).

The study's second dimension centres on a crucial domain concerning children's experiences and interactions - the playground. This facet acknowledges the profound import of the environment and emotional bonds within the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project. These initiatives, financially supported by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 program, lay the groundwork for this paper's scrutiny of the metamorphosis of a playground situated within a Portuguese kindergarten. This analysis is predicated upon the observation and interpretation of children's verbal expressions and social actions. The impetus for the project's interventions is rooted in the conviction that play is an inherent entitlement for children, mirroring a stance in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; ONU, 1989). Within these playgrounds, children embark on journeys of exploration, socialisation, and imaginative engagement, thereby nurturing their capacity for autonomous action and their dynamic interplay with the milieu that envelops them.

The third dimension engages in an in-depth exploration of the nuanced interplay between play and the

overarching framework of the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project, scrutinising the role of play as a foundational and organisational element within this educational undertaking. Acknowledging the expansive and intricate theoretical terrain that encompasses play and its multifarious interpretations, the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project situates play as a central cornerstone for the establishment of children's self-identity and their interactions with peers. This dimension delves into the interdisciplinary framework and multiple insights into Childhood Studies and Education Sciences, accentuating the themes of children's entitlements, autonomy, and lived encounters within the sphere of play.

Employing a qualitative research methodology spanning nearly a year, this study adeptly navigates the intricate terrain of children's well-being and play in ECE. This research endeavour is situated against the backdrop of a variegated and evolving urban parish in Lisbon. Within this locale, a private kindergarten aligns itself with the precept's pedagogical paradigm of the Modern School Movement. In its engagement with a diverse spectrum of participants including children and adults (educator and educational assistant), the study aims to analyse their perspectives, examining their lived experiences throughout the process, and delving into the transformative mechanisms that manifest within the dynamic context of the playground intervention.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical and methodological discussions on well-being are not recent. In fact, they have a long history and constitute a field where arguments are debated between distributive theories and relational theories (Cf. Street, 2021), which, in turn, are influenced by social constructions of young children. The field of ECE has not been immune to these discussions (Moss, & Urban, 2020). However, the discussion on children's well-being in early childhood education continues to focus on two main aspects: i) an Anglo-Saxon conception of well-being, which involves a vision that "corresponds to the sense of biopsychological balance, through the satisfaction of basic needs for survival and equilibrium in the subject's relations with oneself and with the social and natural environment" (Ferreira & Sarmiento, 2008, p. 69); and ii) an adult-centric view, where social constructions of children as beings with deficits and as the future persist and are perpetuated. "As such, the skills and competences considered to be required in adulthood may be privileged above children's current interests and their own knowledge about their needs" (Street, 2021, p. 212).

In this paper, we intend to articulate three dimensions of analysis. The first is the adoption of a conception of children's well-being that challenges the two dominant ideas previously presented. Consequently, we opt for a definition of well-being based on children's rights - protection, provision, and participation, particularly following the proposal by Ferreira and Sarmiento (2008) in defining children's well-being based on 8 indicators:

i) Economic and social well-being; ii) Physical and psychological well-being; iii) Intimate well-being (within family relationships, peer relationships, and intergenerational interactions); iv) Institutional well-being (within schools, childcare institutions, leisure workshops, etc.); v) Well-being in symbolic domains: (enjoyment of leisure time, access and effects of television programs, effects of the cultural industry, religious tolerance); vi) Well-being in urban spaces (institutionalisation conditions, enjoyment, and mobility in urban areas; urban equipment and furniture, urban planning); vii) Environmental well-being and enjoyment of natural spaces; viii) Political well-being (listening to children's opinions in political

decision-making in areas of their interest; policies for children and their effects). (p. 73)

We move to the second dimension in the reflection by circumscribing the analysis to an important place for children and ECE, the playground. The notion of place is important to be used here to consider the children's emotional relationships with the intervention made in that space within the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project that we will describe later. Finally, the third and last analytical dimension is based on the understanding of play as a structuring dimension of the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project and the RED - Rights, Equity and Diversity sub-project.

Confronted with a vast epistemological and theoretical heritage on play and the coexistence of different ways of understanding and analysing it (Brooker, Blaise; Edwards, 2014), the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project project assumes play as a children's right (cf. Article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC; ONU, 1989; Davey & Lundy, 2011). It defends the value of play in the processes of self and heteroconstitution of children as social actors and in peer socialisation, emphasising the appropriation and reinterpretation they make of social reality through it, thus producing children's cultures and socially organised peer groups (Corsaro, 1997, 2020; Ferreira, 2004; Seymour, Hackett & Procter, 2015; Ferreira & Tomás, 2020). Playgrounds hold a special place in the lives of children, offering them an opportunity to explore, socialise, and engage in imaginative play. Beyond their recreational value, playgrounds play a vital role in promoting and safeguarding children's rights, as highlighted by the field of Childhood Studies. As Sullu (2018) argues "play that is free of charge and play as a right rather than as instrumental for other developmental goals" (p.170). This interdisciplinary approach examines childhood as a distinct social category, emphasising the rights, agency, and experiences of children. In this context, the playground serves as a microcosm of the larger social world, providing insights into the dynamics of power, agency, and social interactions among children.

Methodology and Ethics

Conducted between September 2022 and June 2023, the qualitative research undertaken with the children embodies an interpretive framework, aligning itself with the methodological tenets elucidated in research involving children (Christensen & James, 2000; Ferreira & Tomás, 2022).

During the 9 months of fieldwork, the research team, while engaging in attentive, systematic observation and active listening to the children's expressions and actions, alongside other ongoing projects, recognized the necessity for intervention in the playground. The inadequacy of poorly maintained and insufficient toys for the kindergarten children prompted the intervention. Nevertheless, the process of intervention adhered to strict regulations due to bureaucratic constraints and the historical nature of the building, thereby excluding the children's active participation. The employed methodology encompassed pre - during - post remodelling observations of the playground, interviews with the children and adults (educator and educational assistant), and photographic documentation as data collection techniques, effectively bridging the realms of Childhood Studies and Educational Sciences.

From an ethical standpoint, the study consistently situated the subjects and the contextual background of the qualitative case study, duly considering the materiality inherent in the structural realities affecting the children (Spyrou, 2018). It adopted an embodiment, emotion and agency spatial perspective acknowledging the non-linear nature of children's lives (Hackett, Seymour & Procter, 2015), accentuating the dynamic interplay of contextual factors and their influence on the children's experiences and seeking to minimise those hierarchical relationships, children's consent to take part was negotiated throughout the entire research process, and furthermore, an 'atypical adult' (Corsaro, 2002, p. 118) position was embraced. "The idea was to be another companion in their play, waiting for invitations, not leading but following instructions, listening more than talking, always attentive to their reactions to our presence (...). Therefore, I also co-produced those phenomena, which points to the importance of critical reflexivity in the investigation" (Motta & Ferreira, 2022, p. 391). Finally, upholding a steadfast commitment to ethical

considerations, the research diligently navigated principles of confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and informed assent throughout the entire fieldwork (Bodén, 2021; Korkiamäki & Kaukko, 2023).

Contexts and subjects

Located within a parish known for its gentrification, touristification, privatisation, and socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity, this private kindergarten (non-profit) is situated in the city of Lisbon. The educational organisation adheres to the educational and pedagogical principles of the Modern School Movement. These main objectives of the Movement imply the initiation of democratic practices, the reinstitution of values and social meanings, and the co-operative reconstruction of culture (Folque & Bettencourt, 2018).

The observed cohort is under the supervision of two individuals: a 38-year-old educator with a tenure of 12 years within the kindergarten, and a 27-year-old educational assistant, who has accumulated 3 years of professional experience. The group of 25 children, comprising 12 girls and 13 boys, all originating from nuclear family units. The prevalent nationality within the group is Portuguese (24). Regarding their institutional dynamics, the group manifests a heterogeneous span of ages, indicated in Table 1. Furthermore, pertaining to their familiarity with institutional environments, 8 children are embarking on their inaugural journey in kindergarten attendance.

Table 1 - Children by age and gender

Age	Boys	Girls	Total
3		Vitória Lorena	2
4 years old	Lourenço João Pedro Gustavo António	Margarida Heloísa Ana	8
5 years old	Rui Simão Rafael Rómulo	Valentina Amélia Iris Maria Rebeca	9

6 years old	Samuel Gonçalo Murilo Vitor	Isabela Helena	6
Total	13	12	25

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The commentary on the children's social background signifies a prevailing presence of the middle class, substantiated by the educational attainments and occupational roles of their parents. Concretely, twelve mothers hold specialised positions within intellectual and scientific domains, whereas sixteen fathers occupy technical roles encompassing intermediate-level vocations. Notably, it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of three unemployed mothers, alongside the omission of information pertaining to two families.

The process of the kindergarten playground intervention: Data presentation and discussion

The inadequacy stemming from the presence of poorly maintained and insufficient toys for the kindergarten children acted as a compelling catalyst that necessitated a timely and decisive intervention. This crucial step was taken to address and rectify the prevailing situation, ensuring children's well-being (Ferreira & Sarmiento, 2008) and promoting the right to play.

The process of intervention embarked upon a path guided by stringent regulations, dictated by the inherent bureaucratic constraints that characterised the administrative landscape. Moreover, the historical significance and architectural heritage of the building further shaped the contours of the intervention, demanding a meticulous and time-consuming approach that would preserve its legacy while accommodating the new playground. As a result, the active participation of the children, though a desirable prospect, had to be temporarily excluded from the intervention process. The intervention, however, held the promise of fostering an enriched and nurturing space.

Playground before the intervention

While the school boasts well-appointed facilities across various domains for formal education, encompassing both classroom interiors replete with diverse play-educational spaces and external amenities such as the reading club and equipped gymnasium, this commendable quality appears less conspicuous during the junctures of transitioning between formal and non-formal educational activities. This discrepancy becomes particularly conspicuous when children choose to extend their hours at the kindergarten to partake in the Family Support Component (FSC), a nationally regulated initiative since 2006, overseen by the Portuguese Ministry of Education (ME). The FSC's mandate encompasses the provision of socio-educational engagement, project

development, and leisure activities, aimed at fostering a secure and enriching milieu for children during designated periods, namely the reception hours (from 08:00 to 09:30 in the morning) and after the conclusion of the formal component (after 15:45). However, the course of the fieldwork revealed a troubling observation: the effectiveness of the FSC was compromised due to challenges arising from inadequate staffing and infrastructure to accommodate the substantial influx of children. This predicament arises from the convergence of approximately 80 to 100 children, stemming from five kindergarten groups, traversing the designated areas during FSC operational hours. The ensuing field note (FN) chronicles an instance of transitioning from the formal component's ending:

The children eat bread and yoghurt from 15:15 until 15:45 and then proceed to the playground. However, the playground lacks sufficient and well-maintained toys, with very few available. As I pass through the lower outdoor playground, I take photographs of its conditions, which appear unchanged from the previous school year, with the same abandoned wooden furniture. (FN 12.09.2022)

During both the reception periods and transitions towards exits and breaks, the children are required to descend the stairs and traverse an outdoor area that consistently remains secured with a closed door. This practice is attributed to the insufficiency of toys to cater to the entire cohort of children:

As usual in the morning, the children are gathered in the lower inner courtyard, and the playground is observed. As noted earlier, there is limited interaction among some children who appear to be still sleepy upon arrival. Meanwhile, a disagreement has arisen between some children near the trampoline, arguing over who can and cannot use it. Madalena, a girl from another kindergarten group, requests my assistance in organising the use of tricycles. A new tricycle in the courtyard has piqued curiosity and sparked disputes among the children. Additionally, it is evident that some children feel apprehensive about going to the playground and using the toilets. They rely more on adults for help compared to the previous year. (FN 16.09.2022)

During the interview, the educator mentioned that the children did not enjoy the playground space, and they did not refer to it as “going to the playground” or inquire about playing there. Instead, they only

asked if they could go “outside” to have their snack. Prior to the intervention, the playground had limited amenities, consisting of a small slide, an old, abandoned piece of furniture, and an aged plastic house, as evident in the photographs provided below.

Figure 1, 2, 3. The space before the playground intervention



Source: SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project

Setting up the playground

The day of the playground intervention saw the active presence of the research team, who engaged in the task of observing and documenting the interactions amongst the children. Especially, during breaks, and at the initiation of activities, the children exhibited *notable enthusiasm* while articulating their thoughts on their observations.

Isabela was the first one to rush down the stairs, eager to see how the playground was taking shape. “I think it’s looking nice,” she said. Other children gather around, stopping to observe. Vítor approaches closer and points to one of the pieces, saying, “It looks like there is a squirrel over there.” (FN, 21.04.2023)

Not only were the interactions of the case study group observed, but also the movement of other children in the other kindergarten groups, who *expressed curiosity and excitement*.

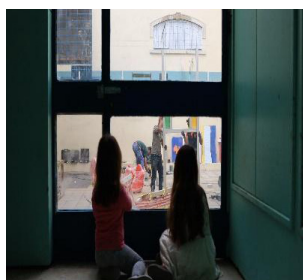
Two educational assistants pass by with a child from

another kindergarten group who exclaims loudly, “There’s going to be a new playground!” They pause to observe, and one of the assistants’ remarks, “I thought this was going to be bigger.” As we walked downstairs, the educator, upon seeing the number of materials being dumped, also commented that she had expected more items based on what she had seen in the photographs when she made the request. In contrast to the adults, Íris, while approaching the glass, expresses amazement, saying, “I didn’t know all this!” Another kindergarten group stops and watches for a few seconds, their curiosity piqued. They ask their educator, “Is it a new toy?” and “What’s going to be there?” One child exclaims, “Look, it’s a park!” The educator gently reminds them about the upcoming playground. (FN, 21.04.2023)

As the group of case study was being followed, they gathered by the door and started talking at the same time. Due to these children’s prior knowledge that the park would be set up there as part of the project, they expressed deeper insights, evidencing the dimensions of sharing and caring that are being addressed in the SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion project.

Isabela, the eldest of the group, and Lorena, the youngest, approach the door leading to the playground, displaying curiosity. They observe the workers and the ongoing construction. Lorena points to the playground and inquires, “Is it ours?” to which Isabela confidently responds, “It belongs to everyone!”

Figure 4, 5, 6 Isabela and Lorena sitting at the door watching the park being set up.



Source: SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project

Setting up the playground took an entire day. The children’s curiosity was immense as they climbed up and down the stairs, gathering around the glass and the door to observe and discuss the progress. Maria approaches and is amazed at the height of the climb.

- “This looks very high, doesn’t it? – ask her (researcher).

- It does! It’s high, but it’s nice! I think I’ll be able to play a lot with my friends... Helena, Rebeca, and Ana... – said Maria.

- What was this space like before? – I ask the children (researcher).

Gustavo mentions that there used to be a small slide, but it wasn’t functional because it was old and didn’t slide.

Vitória, one of the younger children in the group, listens to the conversation and expresses that she finds the new structure too big and feels afraid to climb up.

Maria, standing nearby, offers to help her climb...

Amélia states, “I prefer climbing; I really enjoy it.

“Íris comes closer and asks, “Why is there only one thing in this park?” gesturing with her hands to indicate the toy’s shape. The researcher explains, “It’s a combination of many elements within one toy.”

Rebeca and Ana, who always stick together, walk down. As soon as Rebeca notices the tic-tac-toe game on the toy, she excitedly shakes Ana’s arm, saying,

“Look, Ana, there’s going to be a tic-tac-toe game!” (FN, 21.04.2023)

Figure 7 - Vítor and Ana playing the tic-tac-toe game.



Source: SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project

When leaving kindergarten, at the end of the day, a boy from our case study observes the crew organising the tools to leave, with the park already set up. Then he goes to the door, opens it, and expresses his gratitude to one of the men who was finishing setting up the playground by saying: “Thank you so much for setting up this park for us!”

The park installation was executed on a day marked by heavy rainfall, encompassing the entirety of a Friday for its completion, as previously indicated. Subsequently, on Monday witnessed our return to the kindergarten for the formal inauguration ceremony, with the specific particulars elaborated upon in the succeeding sections.

Inaugural day

At the event held on the 24th of April, a red ribbon was affixed to the park's entrance, symbolising a ceremonial cutting akin to construction inaugurations. Vibrant celebratory balloons adorned the surroundings, while both adults and children congregated on the stairs, providing a vantage point to survey the park. Here, they engaged in discussions that centred around the significance and essence of an inauguration event.

Figure 8 and 9. First time children play in the park.



Source: SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project

The inaugural day was designated for the exclusive exploration of the park by the children. This exploration phase was further extended using photographic documentation and observations capturing the initial interactions of the children within the newly introduced space. The research team opted to initiate semi-structured interviews approximately a month after the park's inauguration. This decision is rooted in a confluence of pedagogical

and methodological considerations that collectively contribute to fostering a deeper and more precise comprehension of the park's influence on the children's activities and interactions.

Reflection and expression also assume a role in this context. As the month-long period passes, children are afforded increased opportunities to introspect on their experiences and vocalise their viewpoints. This extended timeframe fosters a more profound comprehension of how the park has resonated with their emotions, their disposition towards play, and their interactions with their peers. Furthermore, it facilitates the identification of nascent trends and recurring patterns. As children gradually engage with the park, new modes of play, interactions, and group dynamics begin to unfold.

Project end milestone/farewell party in the playground

On the day of the project closure and simultaneous interviews, five children (Isabela, Gustavo, Rui, João, and Vítor) were absent. At 2 pm, fifteen children returned to the classroom, while five were at nap time. The interviews were conducted in the playground, following the educator's suggestion, creating an informal setting for the researchers to interact with the children. As the researchers prepared a farewell snack, they aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere for conversation. When asked about the playground intervention, the children's responses were unanimous in expressing appreciation and happiness:

Íris: «Happy! happy, happy because we got something new.

Simão: “Curious. We played a lot. I really liked it when it arrived. And I've finished it.”

Rafael: “I liked it a lot, I was very happy with this park, and that's all.”

Researcher: “Who else?”

Amélia: “I loved it (...). I felt happy.”

Valentina: “I really liked the park and playing in the park (...).”

Samuel: “I liked climbing.

Maria: “I liked it a lot, I felt happy, and I liked the tic-tac-toe game the most...?”

Gonçalo: “I really liked the park because it has a climb and a slide, and that squirrel that is there in the picture.”

Íris: «I liked it when Ana [the educator] ordered this park... I liked it a lot, and I was happy.» (FN, 05.06.2023)

Based on the data analysis conducted, it can be confidently asserted that the intervention in the playground has yielded a significant impact on various aspects of the children's experiences. Firstly, there is a discernible transformation in the way children engage in play, as evidenced in their explanations: "it changed the fun, I don't play so much with the pieces anymore, I play more with the park, and I like those stairs because I also play with them and then I like to slide on the slide – as mentioned by Simão." Secondly, noticeable changes have occurred in the dynamics of peer interactions. Rebeca articulated her sentiments, saying, "I really liked it when the slide is there and those stairs too, and I play more with my friends." Lastly, a shift in the temporal aspect of play has emerged, with children mentioning that they now engage in play for extended durations. As Íris expressed, "it changed... Because before there were many things spoiled, and now it is not. This has become much nicer." The educator shared a parallel viewpoint, affirming "I believe the acquisition was pivotal in fostering interaction among them... now they express a desire to come here more frequently, engaging in heightened interaction and seeking out more challenging activities."

The significance of the playground intervention lies in its comprehensive capability to address diverse facets of child well-being, as discussed above. These encompass physical and psychological dimensions, as evidenced by children's reported increase in happiness. Furthermore, intimate aspects of peer relationships are impacted, with observations and input from adults revealing a reduction in conflicts among peers and the emergence of heightened internal openness. Specifically, children who had not previously engaged in joint play activities were observed initiating such interactions. On an institutional level, the intervention extends its influence on the evaluation of caregiving quality and supervision, fostering a supportive milieu for leisure exploration, and scrutinising how these spaces facilitate creativity, learning, and social engagements. Additionally, the intervention underscores the significance of cultivating a safe and inclusive environment that fosters holistic child development. In a symbolic context, the intervention offers an avenue for children to derive enjoyment from leisure time spent in a high-quality outdoor setting. Moreover, from an environmental perspective, there is an observable increase in children's engagement with the playground and outdoor spaces. The political

dimensions also come into play, as the choice of the playground intervention is grounded in active listening to the children's voices throughout the nine months of fieldwork. Additionally, the intervention effectively upholds children's right to play, rendering it a notable component of their social and cultural existence. This aspect "it is also important for the political recognition of the expression of children's multiple and different voices as particular forms of social participation" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 79).

Final remarks

In conclusion, this paper highlights a comprehensive theoretical framework and a methodological approach that delve into the intricate realm of children's well-being and their experiences within the context of ECE, namely the playground. We have long witnessed multiple debates on playgrounds from diverse fields, such as Sport/Physical Activity Sciences (Pawlowski, Andersen & Schipperijn, 2019), Geography (Tranter & Malone, 2004; Sullu, 2018), Psychology (Bento & Portugal, 2019), Sociology (Motta & Ferreira, 2022), or Architecture (Stavrides, 2015). Each of these fields brings its unique perspectives and methodologies to understand the significance and impact of playgrounds on children's development, well-being, and social interactions. The interdisciplinary nature of these debates enriches our understanding of playgrounds as complex and multifaceted spaces that hold great importance in the lives of children and society.

We try to navigate through the intricate landscape of ECE, where the playground intervention emerges as a pivotal site for children's emotional connections and social interactions. The intervention in the playground made in SMOOTH - Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion Project, despite bypassing direct children's active participation due to constraints, exemplifies a tangible effort to enhance children's well-being, leading to transformed play experiences, altered peer interactions, and extended playtime.

In concise summation, the intervention and its subsequent analysis facilitate the exploration of multiple analytical dimensions, including:

- (i) The playground as a Rightful Space: The UNCRC

acknowledges the inherent entitlement of every child to engage in play, relaxation, and recreational activities, thus establishing the pivotal role of playgrounds in the lives of children. The project effectively validates this assertion, as supported by the insights gleaned from interviews with both children and adults.

- (ii) Empowering children's agency through quality spaces: in the realm of Childhood Studies, the recognition of children as active agents within their own lives is paramount. Playgrounds, in this context, serve as spaces where children can wield their agency, negotiate their roles within the social fabric, and articulate their ideas and preferences through play. The unstructured and imaginative nature of their interactions fosters the cultivation of problem-solving skills, creativity, and social competencies. This dynamic process contributes to the formation of their identities and the establishment of meaningful connections with their peers.
- (iii) Playground's impact on children's: beyond the initial novelty, unveiling sustained changes and deep-rooted transformations. The children's expressions, reflections, and interactions stand as testimonies to the intervention's success in fostering a more enriched, inclusive, and meaningful play environment.

Embedded within our well-being perspective lie the foundational principles of children's rights - protection, provision, and participation. The execution of this project, in addition to its core objectives, has unveiled a significant revelation: the pronounced influence of adults, often hindered by bureaucratic complexities. These intricacies consequently curtail the comprehensive and active involvement of children throughout the entirety of the process. Nonetheless, the unwavering commitment to implement this intervention has yielded promising outcomes. It has facilitated the mitigation of external constraints by means of essential negotiations and requisite periods of patience. It is important to note that these temporal delays, stemming from bureaucratic intricacies, may not always harmonise seamlessly with the dynamic nature of educational institutions, particularly within the school context. Despite this, the effort has effectively propelled the promotion of the right to play and the promotion of social equity among children. These accomplishments resound harmoniously with the fundamental underpinnings that initially propelled the conception of this intervention within the kindergarten setting.

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