
El educador de la primera infancia y la defensa de la cultura en edades preescolares

The Early Childhood Educator and the defense of culture in preschool ages

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Resumen: Esta investigación pretende demostrar el rol del educador de la primera infancia en la defensa y conservación de la cultura cubana. Se emplearon los métodos de análisis documental y entrevistas a tutores y especialistas para exponer las contradicciones que existen entre el perfil del egresado de la especialidad Educador de la Primera Infancia y el modo de actuación de los estudiantes. Se abordan referentes sobre la educación estética en general y la formación estético-profesional en estudiantes de la especialidad, que permiten el logro de profesionales más cultos y capaces de enfrentar expresiones negativas que atentan contra el patrimonio cultural cubano.

Palabras claves: Estética; Educación estética; Educador de la primera infancia, formación estético-profesional.

Abstract: This research aims to demonstrate the role of early childhood educators in defending and preserving Cuban culture. Documentary analysis and interviews with tutors and specialists were used to expose the contradictions that exist between the profile of graduates specializing in Early Childhood Education and the way students behave. It addresses references to aesthetic education in general and aesthetic-professional training in students specializing in this field, which enable the development of more cultured professionals who are capable of confronting negative expressions that threaten Cuban cultural heritage.

Keywords: Aesthetic; Aesthetic training; Educator of first infancy; Professional aesthetic training

Introduction

Teacher training has been considered a long-term process aimed at providing knowledge and skills that enrich the performance of education professionals, as well as encouraging reflection on their daily activities. This process of reflection promotes student learning by improving teacher performance.

Researchers such as Ramírez, Paz, and Gámez (2022), when referring to teacher training, recognize that it is inherent to the development process of education professionals; it encompasses the need for teachers to train and educate themselves, to self-train and become training agents, in order to promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills, professional values, and citizenship.

For its part, Cuban society today faces multiple negative cultural expressions, such as listening to music at very high volumes, creating micro-dumps in the streets, encouraging the consumption of inappropriate music by minors, dressing inappropriately for the place, speaking unnecessarily loudly, among others.

The objective of this research is to demonstrate the role of early childhood educators in the defense and preservation of Cuban culture and its most genuine expressions of heritage, through optimal teacher training that enable them to face the challenge.

Faced with countless manifestations that impoverish Cuban culture, the educational task is to train, from an aesthetic perspective, increasingly sensitive individuals capable of appreciating the beautiful, the tragic, the sublime, and the heroic in art, in human behavior, in nature, and in society, in order to protect local, national, and universal cultural heritage. Hence the need for aesthetics, and within it, aesthetic-professional training for students specializing in Early Childhood Education, to gain more space in the processes that take place inside and outside teacher training colleges.

We define aesthetic-professional training in students specializing in Early Childhood Education as a comprehensive process that seeks to develop in future teachers a sensitivity, understanding, and critical capacity toward the aesthetic dimensions of education, as well as the ability to integrate these dimensions into their pedagogical practice and personality. This approach is not limited solely to the visual or performing arts, but encompasses a broader vision of aesthetics as a fundamental component of human and educational experience.

Additionally, aesthetic-professional training is a multidimensional process that combines the development of sensitivity, theoretical knowledge, pedagogical practice, and critical reflection. By integrating aesthetics into their training, students in this specialization not only enrich their own pre-professional experience, but also contribute to a more holistic, creative, and meaningful education for young children. This approach reaffirms the idea that aesthetics is not a luxury, but an essential dimension of human and educational experience.

Early childhood educators are responsible for guiding children aged 0 to 6 toward aesthetic experiences and developing their critical thinking skills through a process of raising their awareness of everything around them.

Even though the goal is to produce competent and educated education professionals, there are gaps in theoretical methodology regarding the aesthetic-artistic dimension, which make it difficult to achieve a mode of action in line with the graduate profile. It was therefore necessary to analyze the training process of early childhood educators, with an emphasis on their aesthetic-professional training.

Early childhood educators are called upon to guide the artistic and literary education of preschool children and families through aesthetic activities such as singing children's songs, storytelling, and dramatization of stories, etc. They are the ones who cultivate art and the ability to appreciate it, not only in artistic expressions, but also in human behavior and in our relationship with nature and society.

On the other hand, they must defend Cuban identity and culture, its artistic, heritage, and historical wealth, through consciously organized actions and in total coherence with their own actions as Cuban citizens. Therefore, they must teach preschool children to identify with their nation through the recognition of its idiosyncrasies, the care of gardens and public spaces, rules of personal and collective hygiene, rules of civic conduct, respect for others, and the protection of monuments and places of historical or artistic value.

Such a lofty mission is impossible to fulfill without a solid aesthetic and professional education, through which future educators acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out this task.

Development

The theoretical basis for the role of early childhood educators in defending our culture focuses on the method of documentary analysis, using different materials that constitute training standards, references on aesthetic education and professional training -professional training in students specializing in Early Childhood Education, national laws for the protection and conservation of artistic expressions and national heritage, as well as interviews with teaching practice tutors and specialists from the Floro Regino Pérez Díaz Pedagogical School in the province of Santiago de Cuba.

The results obtained were discussed in workshops with experts, teachers, and students from the institution itself and from other pedagogical schools in the country, with the aim of demonstrating the role of early childhood educators in safeguarding Cuban culture.

In Cuba, there are laws that ensure aesthetic training for all citizens, which support and promote artistic and cultural education in the country. One of the pillars in the construction of the Cuban Revolution was culture, giving rise to large-scale projects such as the creation of the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) and the founding of the National Ballet of Cuba (BNC) in 1959; the literacy campaign and the creation of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) in 1961; the creation of the National System of Culture Houses in 1978; and more recently, in 2004, on the initiative of Fidel Castro, the creation of the José Martí Brigades of Art Instructors.

The Work Strategy for the Improvement of Aesthetic Education was conceived to contribute to the formation of creative, reflective citizens who are capable of assimilating and interpreting the most general social processes. In addition, it seeks to enable citizens to insert themselves into the dynamics of society and its requirements in a transformative manner. (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 2019, Title 3, Article 32).

These guidelines guide the training of future education professionals in pedagogical schools, taking into account the profile of graduates in this specialty, who develop a habit of reading and expressing aesthetic taste in all their activities, as well as respect and love for genuine expressions of Cuban and universal art as part of their comprehensive general culture.

Preschool education in both types of educational care requires professionals with knowledge, skills, and aesthetic values who can help children discover a world of colors, flavors, smells, textures, and sounds. They must guide them toward reflection on a more tolerant and respectful world toward diversity, based on fair and critical thinking. To do this, they must rely on artistic expressions and play, which promote learning, creativity, and independence.

Early childhood educators should be distinguished by their soft voices and warm treatment of others, not only children. They should be examples of good dress, courtesy, and personal and collective hygiene. However, in the pedagogical practice of students, it is observed that they neglect many of these characteristics that should be inherent in their own training.

The tastes, preferences, and inclinations that distinguish each human being develop during early childhood; that is why it is essential to have professional role models for children, families, and communities. To this end, students must acquire a culture during their professional training that allows them to appreciate aesthetic values and adopt a proactive attitude toward antagonistic expressions.

Ignorance of our cultural and historical roots begins in early childhood. Students specializing in Early Childhood Education often do not feel prepared to successfully tackle activities related to aesthetics. They do not choreograph traditional dances, and when they do, they make many mistakes that are learned by the children. For example, they might perform basic mambo steps to a merengue song, among other things.

On the other hand, they do not put together choirs with children's songs or songs from the adult repertoire appropriate for their age, as they are unfamiliar with vocal technique and choral organization. As a result, choirs are generally sung in one voice and without instrumental accompaniment. The same is true of the formation of rhythm bands, in which future educators are unaware of the function of each percussion instrument and do not choreograph their performance.

Daycare centers should be characterized by the presence of children's music when children enter the institution and at other times or during other activities, such as cleaning, to create a pleasant atmosphere. Music cannot be played at high volumes because it would force children, families, and workers to raise their voices to greet and welcome each other, modeling inappropriate values for children related to formal education and health.

Traditional musical games are another form of cultural expression that younger early childhood educators are unfamiliar with. Educators' lack of knowledge of the most genuine Cuban cultural expressions, given their guiding role, leads to more ignorance in future generations, creating a domino effect that amplifies over time.

Let us remember that early childhood educators play a dual guiding role that extends from children to families and the community in general, which is why a role model is needed. Hence the importance of future early childhood educators knowing how to guide the aesthetic dimension, in which children begin to distinguish aesthetic values, while at the same time being able to act coherently in the society we are building.

Reflections based on the demands of the graduate profile for the Early Childhood Educator specialty and what reality shows reveal the urgent need to deploy aesthetic -professional training in students of this specialty, which will help them cultivate themselves aesthetically, identify with the profession they are going to practice, and become faithful exponents of the best of Cuban culture.

Professional aesthetic training is a consciously organized, directed, and systematic educational process that is applied to the personality and, given its interdisciplinary nature, can be carried out at any time and in any subject.

The graduate profile contemplates a training process from the cognitive, affective-volitional-motivational, and behavioral levels of the student in the teaching and extracurricular order. What is needed, then, is an integrative and interdisciplinary training process that reveals the connections and contradictions of reality, as well as the universal concatenation of processes and phenomena.

These ideas highlight the need to apply this principle of education from a Martí perspective, which constitutes another pedagogical foundation for the profile of graduates specializing in Early Childhood Education.

Aesthetic education involves workshops on the creation and appreciation of the arts. From a pedagogical perspective, aesthetics is limited to this purpose. However, it goes far beyond aesthetic and artistic values and knowledge, since as a philosophical category and viewed from a materialist conception of history, it also encompasses beauty in human acts and the sensitive relationship of human beings with nature, society, and thought.

This characteristic is closely linked to the work of early childhood educators, which is why its understanding must be guaranteed from the outset of their pedagogical training.

Research carried out by Picasso (2020), Ventura (2021), and Montano (2023), among others, highlights the importance of aesthetic education in the training of education professionals, taking into account the multiple advantages of aesthetics for personality development and the acquisition of basic knowledge for the performance of the profession.

Aesthetic-professional training for students specializing in Early Childhood Education, meanwhile, goes beyond learning about the arts for their professional work, as it is designed to integrate three aspects of teacher training for early childhood educators: the treatment of aesthetic content for personal development, the treatment of professionalizing aesthetic content, and aesthetic-pedagogical practice.

These three aspects form a mechanism that covers all areas of activity for students specializing in Early Childhood Education, enabling them to identify with their profession through ethical and aesthetic values that are essential for the defense and preservation of our cultural expressions and heritage.

Conclusions

The research carried out demonstrates the role of early childhood educators in defending and preserving Cuban culture. Despite the importance of their work, they do not always perform in line with the demands of today's Cuban society, given that the aesthetic approach is insufficiently addressed during their years of study in this field.

There are limitations when it comes to addressing aesthetic activities during teaching practice. The deficiencies manifested in students in relation to aesthetics lead to children being unaware of their artistic expressions and their culture in general, which puts our national heritage at risk by not being correctly transmitted to new generations.

Finally, it was evident that early childhood educators, drawing on their aesthetic and professional training, can represent through words and actions good behavior, appropriate dress and hairstyles, personal and collective hygiene, and general aesthetic taste that serves as a model for children, families, and communities.

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