




## PLAYFUL EXPLORATIONS IN THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL SPACE

## EXPLORAÇÕES BRINCANTES NO ESPAÇO ESCOLAR INFANTIL

## EXPLORACIONES LÚDICAS EN EL ESPACIO ESCOLAR INFANTIL

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/isevmjv4n4-020>

Submission date: 07/05/2025

Publication date: 08/05/2025

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### ABSTRACT

The article in question anticipates the principles present in the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) by addressing the pedagogical value of toys and games in the context of early childhood education. Such elements are highlighted as essential tools for the cognitive development of children, functioning not only as recreational activities, but as true didactic and methodological instruments. Play is understood as a natural and privileged form of learning, through which children interact with the world, experience new possibilities, express their creativity and develop critical and social skills. When playing, the child symbolically elaborates reality, observes and imitates the behavior of adults, constructs meanings and advances in different stages of their physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. Playing is no longer just a playful moment and is now understood as a fundamental educational practice for the integral formation of the child.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical. Toys. Jokes. Child.

### RESUMO

O artigo em questão antecipa os princípios presentes na Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) ao abordar o valor pedagógico dos brinquedos e das brincadeiras no contexto da educação infantil. Tais elementos são destacados como ferramentas essenciais para o desenvolvimento cognitivo das crianças, funcionando não apenas como atividades recreativas, mas como verdadeiros instrumentos didáticos e metodológicos. A brincadeira é compreendida como uma forma natural e privilegiada de aprendizagem, por meio da qual a criança interage com o mundo, experimenta novas possibilidades, expressa sua criatividade e desenvolve habilidades críticas e sociais. Ao brincar, a criança elabora simbolicamente a realidade, observa e imita o comportamento dos adultos, constrói significados e avança em diferentes etapas do seu desenvolvimento físico, emocional, intelectual e social. O brincar deixa de ser apenas um momento lúdico e passa a ser compreendido como uma prática educativa fundamental para a formação integral da criança.

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**Palavras-chave:** Pedagógico. Brinquedos. Brincadeiras. Criança.

## **RESUMEN**

Este artículo anticipa los principios presentes en la Base Curricular Común Nacional (BNCC) al abordar el valor pedagógico de los juguetes y juegos en el contexto de la educación infantil. Estos elementos se destacan como herramientas esenciales para el desarrollo cognitivo infantil, funcionando no solo como actividades recreativas, sino también como verdaderos instrumentos didácticos y metodológicos. El juego se entiende como una forma natural y privilegiada de aprendizaje, a través de la cual los niños interactúan con el mundo, experimentan nuevas posibilidades, expresan su creatividad y desarrollan habilidades críticas y sociales. A través del juego, los niños elaboran simbólicamente la realidad, observan e imitan el comportamiento de los adultos, construyen significado y avanzan por diferentes etapas de su desarrollo físico, emocional, intelectual y social. El juego deja de ser un mero momento lúdico para convertirse en una práctica educativa fundamental para el desarrollo integral del niño.

**Palabras clave:** Pedagógico. Juguetes. Juegos. Niño.





## 1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the way children have been seen and treated has undergone significant transformations. In ancient times, childhood was understood in a limited way, with an almost exclusive focus on ensuring basic care such as food and hygiene. This reductionist view did not consider the multiple dimensions of child development. It was only with the advancement of social, educational and historical reflections that a broader perception of the child as an integral subject, with cognitive, affective, physical and social needs, began to be consolidated.

The new understanding of play has gained a central role in the educational process and in child development. An important milestone in this journey was the work of Friedrich Froebel, creator of the concept of kindergarten, who recognized the value of play in stimulating children's cognitive abilities.

Educational institutions throughout history used games linked exclusively to the discipline of Physical Education, as a means of promoting body development. However, over time, educators began to see play as an essential activity, loaded with meaning, pleasure and learning, contributing not only to physical growth, but also to the emotional, social and intellectual aspects of the child.

Most children arrive at preschool and elementary school fairly well-adjusted for their age and with few real problems except those of growing up in an ever-changing world. School is often the place where children find the most consistent adults, a safe environment to spend part of the day, and plenty of playmates, resources, and playtime materials to explore themselves in relation to other children, different adults, and an environment different from home. (Moyles, Janet R. 2002, p. 143).

The National Curriculum References for Early Childhood Education reinforce the relevance of play as a fundamental part of childhood. These guiding documents recognize that playing is a child's own language, through which he experiences, discovers, interacts and develops. Thus, playing is understood not as something secondary, but as a right and an effective pedagogical strategy to promote full development in early childhood.

[...] Play is a children's language that maintains an essential link with what non-play is. If play is an action that occurs on the plane of the imagination, this implies that the one who plays has mastery of symbolic language. (RCNEI 1998, p. 27).





The constant presence of play in children's daily lives goes far beyond a simple pastime or everyday activity. It represents an essential dimension of childhood, occupying a significant space in the process of integral formation of the child. Through play, children not only have fun, but also build affective bonds, develop their motor skills, stimulate reasoning and creativity, learn to live in a group, respect rules and deal with emotions. Thus, the act of playing becomes a powerful tool for emotional, intellectual, social and behavioral growth, contributing decisively to its overall development.

Freud saw play as the means by which the child makes his first cultural and psychological achievements and said that through play he expresses himself. He noticed how well the child expresses his feelings and thoughts through play. (Moretto, R; Mansur, Odila C., 2000, p. 135).

The National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education foresees the education professional as a subject participating in this process of playing.

[...] the adult, in the figure of the teacher, therefore, who in the children's institution, helps to structure the field of play in the children's lives. Consequently, it is the one that organizes its structural base, through the offer of certain objects, costumes, toys or games, the delimitation and arrangement of spaces and time to play. (RCNEI 1998, p. 28).

The historical context demonstrates that toys and games have played a fundamental role in children's lives, being elements present in different cultures and periods. Since ancient civilizations, children have used simple objects such as stones, rag dolls and handmade toys to have fun and learn. Over time, toys have diversified, following social, cultural and technological transformations. However, regardless of the time or the material, play has always represented much more than leisure: it is an essential practice for the child's cognitive development.

The epistemological bases of education and developmental psychology recognize play as valuable tools in the process of children's cognitive construction. Make-believe, imitation, problem-solving, and interaction with other children develop skills such as attention, memory, language, logical thinking, and creativity. Games favor autonomy, socialization and the strengthening of self-esteem.

Play is the real road to the child's interior, it is the instrument of elaboration to overcome complex psychological difficulties, past and present. Through child's





play, we can understand how they see and construct the world – what they would like it to be, what their concerns are, and what problems are besetting them. (Moretto, R; Mansur, Odila C., 2000, p. 136).

The understanding of the historical path of games and the recognition of their meanings goes beyond a simple curious look at childhood; It is about recognizing the importance of play as fundamental educational tools.

For centuries, games like chess have offered players challenges. Some authors believe that playing is in the essence of playing. Strictly, play is play with rules (Piaget, 1951) and this is the main type of play that persists into adulthood. (Moyles, Janet R. 2002, p. 80).

By analyzing how they emerged and transformed over time, it is understood that playing is not just a spontaneous or recreational activity, but an essential practice for the child's learning and integral development. Valuing games is, therefore, recognizing their pedagogical and formative potential, as it is through them that children experience, explore the world, build knowledge, develop social, emotional and cognitive skills, in addition to strengthening their identity and creativity. In this sense, playing is a brilliant way to educate.

## **2 AMPLITUDES, RELATIONSHIPS AND COGNITIONS**

The act of playing is a unique and characteristic expression of childhood, being one of the most genuine ways in which the child interacts with the world. When involved in games, children not only have fun, but live experiences that favor their integral growth. Playing promotes the stretching and expansion of cognitive, physical, emotional and social capacities, stimulating thinking, creativity, motor coordination, the development of affections and coexistence with others. Through play, they explore possibilities, face challenges, learn to deal with emotions, and build meanings about themselves and the world around them. Playing is no longer just a leisure activity and is now understood as an essential component in the formation and full development of the child. "By playing, the child learns to be human, supportive, learns to live, to dream, to imagine, to have autonomy and to build knowledge about the world around him". (Ostetto, 2010, p. 63).

Children show significant advances in aspects such as thinking, creativity, learning, and knowledge exchange. During this process, they become more sociable, reducing self-centered behavior and developing greater interest in the environment





around them. The act of playing in a light and fun way, the act of joking, becomes essential for its development.

No child plays just to pass the time. The choice of play is always motivated by internal processes, desires, problems and anxieties. Playing is its secret language, which we must respect even if we don't understand it. (Moretto, R; Mansur, Odila C., 2000, p. 136).

It is essential that adults organize and monitor these games, ensuring that they take place in a healthy, safe and respectful way, taking into account the particularities and needs of each child.

[...] The motivation of play is always individual and depends on the emotional resources of each child that are shared in situations of social interaction. Through the repetition of certain imagined actions that are based on the polarities presence/absence, good/bad, pleasure/displeasure, passivity/activity, inside/outside, big/small, ugly/beautiful. (RCNEI 1998, p. 22).

The spaces of play achieve freedom in tangible scenarios. According to Walter Benjamin: "Without a doubt, playing always means liberation. Surrounded by a world of giants, children create for themselves, by playing, their own little world." (Benjamin 1984, p. 64).

Play corroborates child development, endorsed by the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education, which presents play as a presupposition of creativity:

[...] Play favors children's self-esteem, helping them to progressively overcome their acquisitions in a creative way. Playing thus contributes to the internalization of certain models of adults, within the scope of different social groups. (RCNEI, 1998, p. 27).

The changes related to urbanization and increased violence transformed in many aspects the organizational form of the development of games, in addition to the access to technological tools of the time.

Play is a human achievement, it enhances social and cognitive relationships, expanding their perception and senses.





Spatial perception, which allows the child to develop the sense of laterality and directionality, is also built from five to ten years old. The greater the stimulus, the more the circuits that link the intention to a concrete act are reinforced. [...]The child moves with more ease and precision. (Moretto, 2000, p.66).

Play plays the role of clearing the spaces of individuals' relationships and enabling cognitive emancipation to compose the formation of the present and the conception of adult citizens.

The greatest importance of play is in the immediate pleasure of the child and it becomes a pleasure of living. Play has a face directed to the past (resolution, in a symbolic way, of unsolved problems) and a face directed to the future (a tool to prepare for the future and its tasks). (Moretto, 2000, p.137).

For a long time, play was not seen as fundamental for the integral development of children, no longer having a privileged space within early childhood education institutions, or as the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education provides:

[...]The education of young children was considered, for a long time, as little as possible, as long as they were cared for and fed. Today, the education of young children is part of the public education system. As it is part of the first stage of basic education, it is conceived as a matter of rights, citizenship and quality. (RCNEI 1998, p. 7).

Toys also have their history within the history of play. As far as is known, the first toys have their origin in domestic industries in Germany. Or according to Walter Benjamin's information:

In Berlin, its manufacture flourished late: during the eighteenth century, the marketing of products from southern Germany was the responsibility of hardware merchants. From this fact it could only be deduced that the toy merchant himself appears gradually, at the end of a period of the strictest commercial specialization. (Benjamin, 1984, p. 62).

Another contribution of Benjamin concerns the domestic aspect of the manufacture of the first toys, and the importance they have for child development and understanding:

Originally the toys of all peoples descend from domestic industry. The primitive wealth of forms of the low people, peasants and artisans, establishes to this day a secure basis for the development of children's toys. There is nothing extraordinary





about this. The spirit from which the products descend, the total process of their production and not only their result is always present to the child in the toy; It is natural that he understands much better an object produced by primitive techniques than another that originates from a complicated industrial method. (Benjamin 1998, p. 93).

Schools should leave aside the more computerized toys and value the toys of yesteryear, and those manufactured by the children themselves, thus encouraging children's creativity.

As play is of fundamental importance for the development of children, public policies seek ways to ensure, through some documents, that it has its place of importance in the scenario of early childhood education.

One of these guidelines that guarantee the practice of play in early childhood education classrooms is the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education.

Another document released in 2012 is the Pedagogical Guidance Manual that deals only with play in early childhood education, a document prepared by the Ministry of Education that in its introduction brings its relevance to the day-to-day life of young children:

[...] initiative aims to clarify that toys and play are constitutive of childhood. Play is for the child one of the main means of expression that enables research and learning about people and the world. Valuing play means offering spaces and toys that favor play as an activity that occupies the largest space of time in childhood. The acquisition of toys for use by children in Early Childhood Education is a strategy for implementing the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education. The pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education should consider that the child, the center of curriculum planning, is a historical subject with rights who, in the interactions, relationships and daily practices he experiences, builds his personal and collective identity, plays, imagines, fantasizes, desires, learns, observes, experiments, narrates, questions and constructs meanings about nature and society, producing culture. From this perspective, the pedagogical practices that make up the curricular proposal of Early Childhood Education should have interactions and games as their guiding axes .

The National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education is a guiding document, as described in its presentation, in other words, it is an orientation guide that serves as a basis for the elaboration of pedagogical projects and that aims to contribute to the planning, development and evaluation of educational practices in early childhood education. It is a document that is easily accessible to teachers who are in the classroom





and that guides the practice of working in the classroom with children in early childhood education in a clear and objective way.

According to this document, play can be observed, evaluated and worked on in the most diverse axes that support early childhood education:

[...]Playing is presented through several categories of experiences that are differentiated by the use of the material or resources predominantly implicated. These categories include: movement and changes in perception resulting essentially from children's physical mobility, the relationship with objects and their physical properties as well as the combination and association between them; oral and gestural language that offer various levels of organization to be used to play; social contents, such as roles, situations, values and attitudes that refer to the way the social universe is constructed; and, finally, the limits defined by the rules, constituting a fundamental resource for playing. (RCNEI 1998, p. 28).

Another important factor listed by the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education is the fact that: "To play, children need to have a certain independence to choose their companions and the roles they will assume within a certain theme and plot, whose developments depend solely on the will of those who play". (RCNEI 1998, p. 28).

This document, as well as the Pedagogical Guidance Manual, outline the new paths that early childhood education must trace to include play in the children's learning process.

The Pedagogical Guidance Manual consists of five modules created by the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF: Module I: Play and interactions in the Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education; Module II: Toys, games and materials for babies (0 to 18 months); Module III: Toys, games and materials for young children (1 year and a half to 3 years and 11 months); Module IV: Organization of the physical space, toys and materials for babies and young children; Module V: Criteria for the purchase and use of toys and materials for Early Childhood Education institutions. According to the presentation of this material:

[...]technical document with the purpose of guiding teachers, counselors and managers in the selection, organization and use of toys, materials and games for daycare centers, pointing out ways to organize space, types of activities, contents, diversity of materials that together build values for a quality early childhood education. (...). This initiative aims to clarify that toys and play are constitutive of childhood. (Brazil 2012, p. 3).





The main objective of these volumes is to meet the specificities of the education of younger children who, historically, have been excluded from the public education system. One of the main points pointed out in the five volumes is the involvement of teachers during the children's playtime: "[...] It is necessary to have a pedagogical team with a playful profile, which programs spaces, materials and time so that, through games and interactions, children can understand the world around them". (Brazil 2012, module I, p. 51). Another issue addressed by this document concerns the selection of materials:

To educate children, people (parents, teachers, staff) need to know how to translate this knowledge into an educational environment, also composed of materials and toys. It is from this information that the educational proposal must be defined. First, be clear that babies are beings who already have the will, are aware of what they want, know how to decide and say what they want. They enter the world of culture through interactions with people and objects and use their decision-making power, their body and the channels of knowledge, which are their sensory organs (touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight) to explore this world. They amplify their experiences through the intentional use of their bodies, hands, feet, and movements, and use their voluntary act to investigate this world. (Brazil 2012, module 3, p. 12).

This is another advance in search of quality early childhood education concerned with the development of children, the creation of materials that delimit the pedagogical practices to be exercised in the classroom and that allow all children more equal access to education.

Early childhood education has already had numerous advances with regard to giving the status of importance to play as a means of learning for children, but there is still much to be accomplished, and one of the main advances to be achieved concerns the misconception that playing depends only on the child, it does not demand support from the adult, observation, registration, or planning. Such a view needs to be deconstructed, since the child is not born knowing how to play.

Playing is a construction that demands attention from teachers as well as any other activity in the classroom, since significant contexts enable rich experiences for children in the knowledge of the social, mathematical, artistic world, etc. In early childhood education, these experiences occur in play. And therefore, there is a need for commitment on the part of teachers, or as the document would bring us: Pedagogical Guidance Manual (Module 3) of the Ministry of Education:





Childhood, the child and the toy are important themes for our reflections. The baby enters the daycare, grows up and leaves, his childhood is fleeting. If we do not guarantee the quality of each child's experience in their short time spent in the daycare, we will fail to fulfill our ethical, social and educational role. (Brazil, 2012, p. 44).

For the child to play with quality, he needs to have a rich repertoire already learned, to provide meaning to the various situations present in the moments of play. Playing is always the recreation of what the child has already mastered, so having a vast cultural support that includes dances, music, etc.; It is fundamental for quality play. Or as Module 1 of the Pedagogical Guidance Manual document recalls:

Playing or playing – considered with the same meaning in this text – is the child's main activity. Its importance lies in the fact that it is a free action, initiated and conducted by the child with the purpose of making decisions, expressing feelings and values, getting to know himself, other people and the world in which he lives. Playing is repeating and recreating pleasurable actions, expressing imaginary, creative situations, sharing games with other people, expressing one's individuality and identity, exploring nature, objects, communicating and participating in playful culture to understand one's universe. Although playing can be considered an act inherent to the child, it requires knowledge, a repertoire that he needs to learn. (Brazil 2012, p. 7).

Games are nothing more than the updating of previous knowledge, expanding and transforming them through the creation of a new imaginary situation. Therefore, play is based on the development of imagination and interpretation of reality. Or as the RCNEI - National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education would bring us: "In this sense, playing must constitute a permanent activity and its constancy will depend on the interests that children have in different age groups". (RCNEI 1998, p. 50).

The importance of play for child development is known, but this play needs to be properly planned by the teacher, taking into account even the physical aspects that play requires, as shown in the Pedagogical Guidance Manual:

To implement this main pedagogical axis – interactions and play – it is necessary to identify what physical spaces the daycare center has, plan its use, select and organize toys and materials, and have teams that plan activities within consistent programs for children, together with parents and the community. (Brazil, 2012, p. 11).





The issue of organization is another point that must be taken into consideration, since it is essential for children to acquire from an early age the habit of taking responsibility for the organization of their environment and their materials, or as the same document mentioned above reminds us:

Valuing the organization of the room after the game contributes to the construction of self-esteem and the identity of the child and the group. From a year and a half on, children begin to enjoy organizing their toys. Creating organization systems with them is part of the game, picking up, playing and then putting away the toys. (Brasil, 2012, p. 32).

Thinking about games as a source of learning requires the teacher to know the games and plan how, where, why and how they will happen, this requires a professional committed to what they do.

The first step for quality play is for the teacher to recognize the importance of play and know how to use it at the right time and in the appropriate way, as the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education brings when emphasizing that:

It is necessary for the teacher to be aware that in play children recreate and stabilize what they know about the most diverse spheres of knowledge, in a spontaneous and imaginative activity. From this perspective, one should not confuse situations in which certain learning related to concepts, procedures or attitudes, explicit, is objectified with those in which knowledge is experienced in a spontaneous way and devoid of immediate objectives by the children. However, games can be used, especially those that have rules, as didactic activities. It is necessary, however, for the teacher to be aware that children will not be playing freely in these situations, as there are didactic objectives in question. Brasil, 1998, p. 29).

The role of the adult in playing with objects and in the reorganization of toys plays a fundamental role in the choice, organization and availability of toys and materials, in addition to planning, the role of the teacher is also to intervene in the environment, in the organization of the physical space, in the arrangement of furniture, in the selection and organization of toys and materials and in the interactions with children, with the community and families.

The teacher needs to identify with the games or as the Pedagogical Guidance Manual of the Ministry of Education says: "A curriculum that adopts play as its axis needs to value the teacher's playful and playful dimension as an important condition. This





attitude of the teacher is essential to create bonds with the child and to organize situations in the curricular programs, in which interactions and play are present". (Brazil, 2012, p. 50).

### 3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The playful activities offered to children favor the expression of their potentialities and the expansion of their perception of themselves in relation to the world, as well as the presence of the world in their own subjective construction. Play allows children to shape their understanding of immediate reality by interacting with it in an active and meaningful way. The manipulation of objects during these experiences promotes the development of communication with other children and adults, strengthening skills such as language, logical reasoning, understanding of rules and limits, creativity, the ability to lead and make decisions.

These conceptions about the value of play are essential to guide the teaching work, especially in the elaboration of pedagogical plans coherent with the curricular and cognitive bases that guide the educational practice.

The article addresses relevant cognitive dimensions of its historical context, prior to the formulation of the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), evidencing the central role of play in early childhood education. Playing is recognized as a fundamental resource for the mediation of knowledge, being supported by theoretical foundations of a cognitive, epistemological and social nature, which reinforce praxis in the school environment and in contemporary society.

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