


**GAMES AND PLAY: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.031-098>**Carla Cristina Zurutuza<sup>1</sup>.****ABSTRACT**

Games play a fundamental role in Early Childhood Education, favoring cognitive, social, and emotional development. This article aims to examine the significance of these practices in the educational context, highlighting their effects on cognitive, social, emotional, and motor aspects. From the teaching-learning perspective outlined in the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) (Brazil, 2017), and in the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) (Brazil, 1998), which are provided for in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) (Brazil, 1996) and related to games and play in the school environment, we will initially be guided by the historical-cultural period of Friedrich Fröbel's theoretical conceptions, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, and we will discuss the pedagogical methodologies through games and play in Early Childhood Education. The methodology used is based on an image of children playing in the classroom, as well as bibliographic research in books, articles, and internet sources. In this way, based on theorists such as: Helmut Heiland (2010), Hermann Röhrs (2010) from the educators collection; Jean Piaget (1976, 1999), Lev Vygotsky (1984), João Pedro da Fonseca (2002), Celso Antunes (2014), Tizuko Morchida Kishimoto (2016), Donald Winnicott (1975), Zilma Ramos de Oliveira (2002), among other relevant theorists, the bibliographic research was based on studies for child development. Finally, the article discusses the relevance of games and play in child development, highlighting their benefits for the cognitive, motor, emotional, and social dimensions. From theoretical studies and analyses of pedagogical practices aligned with the BNCC, it has been evidenced that playfulness is essential for promoting meaningful learning and the integral development of children.

**Keywords:** Games and play. Apprenticeship. Early Childhood Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Playing is a fundamental activity in childhood, as it is through it that the child experiments, discovers, and learns. The insertion of games and play in the school environment not only stimulates creativity but also promotes the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Through board games and puzzles, children exercise problem-solving and logical thinking. Group play, such as cooperative games and role-plays, favors cooperation, communication, and respect for rules. In addition, playful activities that involve decision-making, such as strategy games and make-believe games, encourage children's autonomy and self-confidence. According to the BNCC, playfulness is an essential element for Early Childhood Education, as it respects the specificities of this age group, ensuring quality education that combines pleasure and learning.

The theme was chosen due to its relevance in the educational context, considering the guidelines of the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), which emphasizes playing as one of the main pedagogical strategies to promote meaningful learning. In this sense, it is essential to understand how games can be integrated into pedagogical practice to stimulate the full development of children.

The research is based on a theoretical review based on authors such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Montessori, who highlight the importance of playing as a form of interaction with the environment and construction of knowledge. In addition, the inclusion of legislation and official documents, such as the BNCC and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), allows for the placement of playful practices within a normative and educational context.

Through this study, we seek to contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices, emphasizing the need to value playing in Early Childhood Education, not only as a moment of leisure but as an intentional and planned strategy for the development and learning of children.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GAMES AND PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: FOUNDATIONS, THEORIES, AND PRACTICES

Early Childhood Education is one of the most important stages in the formation of children, as it is through games and play that various aspects of their development are stimulated, such as physical, psychological, social, intellectual, linguistic, affective, and cognitive. Interaction with other children enhances this process, making learning more meaningful.

In the organization of the Brazilian State, the educational subject is conferred by Law No. 9,394, of December 20, 1996, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB). According to LDB No. 9394/96, Brazilian education is divided into two levels: Basic Education and Higher Education. Since the implementation of the LDB, in December 2017, several changes have been noted in the educational field, from the perspective of understanding the new BNCC (Brasil, 2017), and the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) (Brasil, 1998), since in each field there are specific learning objectives for child development.

Through education, school and public policies, the researcher João Pedro da Fonseca (2002, p. 199, emphasis added), concludes: "in the context of the democratization of the country, there were demands for greater attention from the public authorities to the *issue of childhood*, understood as part of the *family issue*, inserted in the *social issue*, which arose in a certain *political* and *economic* context". In this way, we emphasize the importance of LDB in education, which constitutes the individual in a certain way, as it is a process in which we become what we are before society, and it is taught and constituted from Early Childhood Education.

Before the LDB, Early Childhood Education was not considered a duty of the State, being seen as the responsibility of families or the community to which the child belonged. With the implementation of the law, Early Childhood Education began to receive greater attention from the government and society, thus ensuring its access as a fundamental right.

João Pedro da Fonseca (2002, p. 199) states that "the movement in favor of Early Childhood Education in Brazil acquired greater form in the struggle for the democratization of the country". That is, the implementation of Early Childhood Education in Basic Education, as its first stage, is the recognition that education begins in the first years of life and is essential for the fulfillment of its purpose, and stated in Article 22 of the Law: "Basic Education aims to develop the student, to ensure him the common education indispensable for the exercise of citizenship and to provide him with the means to progress in work and subsequent studies" (Brasil, 1996, p. 17). In other words, it is from the modification introduced in the LDB in 2006, which anticipated access to Elementary Education for six years of age, Early Childhood Education starts to serve the age group from zero to five years old, being the first phase of development: children from zero to three years old who are served in the daycare center, and four- and five-year-olds in preschool, so the LDB pressures the State to offer and guarantee education to all children.

In this way, discussions are initiated aimed at the best way to implement the new BNCC guidelines in Early Childhood Education throughout the country. Pedagogue Zilma Oliveira emphasizes that playing in the classroom is something productive.

The symbolic or make-believe game, in particular, is a tool for the creation of fantasy, which is necessary for unconventional readings of the world. It paves the way for autonomy, creativity, and the exploration of meanings and senses. It also acts on the child's ability to imagine and represent, articulated with other forms of expression. Games are also instruments for learning social rules (Oliveira, 2002, p. 159).

Thus, play is essential for child development, stimulating the imagination, creativity, and intellectual growth of the child. Thus, this work is structured, initially, in the delimitation of the theme, which we address about the importance of games and play in Early Childhood Education, in the theoretical foundation, in the methodology with the conceptions of theorists such as Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Zilma Ramos de Oliveira, Celso Antunes, Tizuko Morchida Kishimoto, Donald Winnicott, among other theorists who are relevant to research and, finally, the results and discussion.

From the year 2009, the theme in our contemporary society is being privileged, and education starts to have a relevant space due to changes in the economy, society, and the world of work; that is, the learning process becomes important for Basic Education and, specifically, in Early Childhood Education. The changes in the educational field are significant, as they have the purpose of learning and the integral development of children, awakening and knowing their psychological, intellectual, and physical aspects and the established exchanges of the child with the environment, that is, social interaction. The curricular organization of Early Childhood Education in the BNCC is structured in five fields of experiences, which are: 1) the self, the other and the we; 2) body, gesture and movement; 3) traces, sounds, colors and shapes; 4) listening, speaking, thinking and imagination; and, finally, 5) space, time, quantities, relations and transformations. Thus, the structuring axes through interactions and games ensure them the rights to live together, play, participate, explore, express themselves, and get to know themselves.

To understand the importance of games and play, we searched historically, and verified that they come from a long time, highlighting the proposals of Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852), Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Jean William Fritz Piaget (1896-1980), who based their studies on perspectives of the construction of the child's autonomy.

The pedagogue Helmut Heiland (2010) introduces us to Friedrich Fröbel, a German pedagogue, creator and founder of the origin "kindergarten", who studied with Pestalozzi

and was influenced by him, publishing the books entitled: *The Education of Man* (1826) and *The Mother's Book of Music* (1844). Fröbel defended an education without obligations and impositions, and that each one learns according to their interest, that is, the child goes through different stages of learning. From the perspective of Froebel's pedagogy, Early Childhood Education is not centered on the acquisition of knowledge by the child, but on the encouragement of child development and family participation in the child's learning. Fröbel's pedagogical methods are based on the interaction of children's games and toys: playing is interacting with other children, learning the rules, expressing feelings, and working on the cognitive, social, and affective for the child's development.

The pedagogue Hermann Röhrs (2010) talks about Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor and, later, educator, who founded the children's house (Casa dei Bambini). He dedicated himself to children with educational and pedagogical problems, children who were denied by Italian public schools and who were unable to learn. His works were several: *Scientific Pedagogy* (1909) is his magnum opus, *The Child* (1936), *The Absorbent Mind* (1949), among others. Montessori argued that the child needed a clean and adequate environment to live and learn and that this space is fundamental and influences the child's productivity and development process.

From the perspective of the Montessori theory, the sense of the gaze is important, that is, to highlight observation, thought, and construction, because the child is at the center of the teaching and learning process. In Montessori pedagogy, the role of the teacher is to encourage the child to perform his tasks alone for the construction of his independence and autonomy in a natural way, therefore, the teacher should not impose learning on the child.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1984), a psychologist, developed the theory of play and argues that playing allows learning, and it is necessary for the teacher to develop a differentiated methodology in the classroom, including games and games that should be part of the literacy process and, through this methodology, we have a perspective of the participation of all children.

Vygotsky (1984) describes the three levels of child development: *real developmental level* is all the activities that the child can already do on his own without needing anyone's help; *The potential developmental level* is what the child can do only with help, the action is influenced by other people; and, finally, the *zone of proximal development* is the activity that the child today can do with the help of another, tomorrow he will be able to do alone, that is, he needs stimuli until he reaches the real developmental level (emphasis added).

For Vygotsky (1984), it is during the game that the child acts within the Zone of Proximal Development, and the interaction with the environment is what leads to the action and the creation of real intentions; that is, it develops the internal process in the child,

[...] The toy creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play, the child always behaves beyond the usual behavior of his age, beyond his daily behavior; with the toy, it is as if it were bigger than it is in reality. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, the toy contains all the tendencies of development in condensed form, being itself a great source of development (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 69).

Thus, Vygotsky (1984) states that playing is the way of learning; that is, play is related to play, which is an educational proposal to face difficulties in the teaching-learning process. Vygotsky emphasizes social interaction as a basis for learning, while Piaget (1976) highlights the importance of the game in the construction of logical thinking.

Jean William Fritz Piaget (1976), psychologist, biologist, and educator, elaborated his theory of the construction of knowledge and cognitive development of the child; that is, he perfected himself in *Genetic Epistemology*. For him, the development of the child begins in the mother's womb and goes until adolescence, and we have phases or periods for the development of the child. For Piaget (1999), in his book entitled: *Six studies of psychology*, he describes the phases/periods of the proposed development, such as: 1) the sensory-motor period starts from 0 and goes up to 2 years of age; 2) the preoperative period begins at 2 years of age and lasts until 7 years of age, 3) the operative-concrete period begins at 7 years of age and lasts until 11 years of age; and, finally, 4) the abstract-operative period begins at 11 years of age onwards. In this way, the Piagetian theory exposes four factors that help the child's development, which are maturation, experience, social interaction, and balance. These factors are what the child uses for practical or sensory-motor intelligence, as it involves perceptions and movements for their cognitive development.

According to Piaget (1976, p. 10-11), "the game, or playful activity, as equally leading from action to representation, insofar as it evolves from its initial form of sensory-motor exercise to its second form of symbolic game or game of imagination". Thus, Piaget (1976), in his studies on development and learning, highlights the importance of the constructive character of the game in the child's cognitive development. The author indicates three types of games: exercise games, symbolic games, and rule games.

Regarding games, Celso Antunes (2014) states,

From an educational point of view, the word game moves away from the meaning of competition and approaches its Latin etymological origin, with the meaning of *joke*, or, more specifically, *amusement*, *play*, *pastime*. In this way, children's games may even exceptionally include one or another competition, but essentially they aim to *stimulate growth and learning* and would be better defined if we stated that they



represent *an interpersonal relationship between two or more subjects carried out within certain rules* (Antunes, 2014, p. 9, emphasis added).

It is through games and play that the child stimulates cognitive development, and we realize that the stimuli are related to the four factors of the Piagetian theory: maturation, experience, social interaction, and balance, which are added to the child development process and the child's learning process.

According to psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Woods Winnicott (1975),

In other words, *it is play that is universal* and that is proper to health: play facilitates growth and, therefore, health; play leads to group relationships; play can be a form of communication in psychotherapy; finally, psychoanalysis was developed as a highly specialized form of play, in the service of communication with oneself and with others. The natural thing is to play [...] (Winnicott, 1975, p. 63, emphasis added).

In Winnicott's (1975) perspective, playing is a sign of health, it is pleasurable, and it facilitates and develops the child's growth; that is, it is in creativity that the individual will get to know his self and will be able to share, externally, through social life.

The National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) (Brazil, 1998) addresses play and games in Early Childhood Education,

In the act of playing, the signs, gestures, objects, and spaces signify something other than what they appear to be. When playing, children recreate and rethink the events that gave rise to them, knowing that they are playing. [...] Play favors children's self-esteem, helping them to progressively overcome their acquisitions creatively. Playing thus contributes to the internalization of certain models of adulthood within the scope of different social groups. These meanings attributed to play transform it into a singular space of child constitution. In play, children transform the knowledge they already had previously into general concepts with which to play. For example, to assume a certain role in a game, the child must know some of its characteristics. Their knowledge comes from the imitation of someone or something they know, from an experience lived in the family or other environments, from the report of a colleague or an adult, from scenes watched on television, in the cinema, or narrated in books, etc. The source of their knowledge is multiple, but it is still fragmented (Brasil, 1998, p. 27, v. 1).

As we can see, every child has the need and the right to play, that is, a characteristic of childhood guaranteed by law. In this way, play plays a very important role in the areas of stimulation of the preschool phase and is one of the most natural ways for the child to get in touch with reality, because it is in play that they interact with other children, express feelings, learn to respect the rules, stimulate the imagination, and it is essential for the teacher to observe this process of child development.

Finally, about games and play, we seek the theoretical foundation of Professor Kishimoto (2016, p. 1), who defines that the game is not an easy task to establish. The word game can be interpreted in several different ways and may refer to children's games,

animal games, symbolic, verbal, adult or even make-believe, rules, nursery rhymes, chess and several other games.

Thus, despite the embarrassment in defining it, the game must be understood and comprehended in its nature, as each game has its specificity and unifies the dimensions of the child's development, which we emphasize: cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor. Play is essential because it gives the child a sense of well-being, enabling freedom of choice to play, becoming pleasurable and stimulating child development.

## GAMES AND PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

The research aimed to address the importance of games and play in Early Childhood Education. For a more specific analysis of the research, we will use Figure 1 – Children Playing in the classroom and the theoretical methodology applied in the bibliographic research base, through research in books, articles and based on the conceptions of theorists: Fröbel, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Celso Antunes, Tizuko Morchida Kishimoto, the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, Zilma Ramos de Oliveira, theorists who are relevant to bibliographic research and based their studies on child development, through games and play.

As already indicated, every child has the need and the right to play; that is, a characteristic of childhood guaranteed by law. From birth, play is fundamental in the motor, cognitive, social, and affective development of a child. In the school environment, playing helps in the learning process, promoting interaction and socialization among children. There is no doubt that children's games were created in the history of humanity by culture and remain extremely interesting cultural practices for children.

**Figure 1** – Children playing in the classroom



**Source:** Personal Archive (2024).



Figure 1 depicts an educational scene in a classroom in which two children are engaged in a playful activity with wooden blocks and interlocking pieces. The layout of the space shows the typical organization of a school environment, with tables and chairs in the background, while the floor is used as the main place for play.

Children demonstrate concentration and creativity, building structures that encourage the development of skills such as motor coordination, logical thinking, and collaborative work. This practice reflects the importance of games and play as essential pedagogical tools for integral development, aligned with contemporary approaches to active learning.

Thus, the environment also favors freedom of movement, allowing students to explore the space and interact with the materials autonomously. The image reinforces the relevance of integrating playful activities into the educational process, promoting both learning and the pleasure of discovering and creating.

**Figure 2** – Children playing with colored blocks in the classroom.



**Source:** Personal Archive (2024).

Figure 2, analyzed again, portrays a school environment where children explore with colored fitting blocks. These blocks are of different shapes and colors (red, blue, yellow, green, and white) and are being used to create various structures. The arrangement of the materials and the interaction of the participants were observed to identify patterns of learning and creativity.

There are a large number of pieces scattered on the tables, some already connected, forming three-dimensional figures, while others are loose. In the lower left part of the image, there is a child holding one of the blocks while assembling a structure. In the background, there are more constructions made with the blocks, suggesting creativity and exploration.

Thus, the playful learning moment is observed, possibly related to the development of motor coordination, spatial reasoning, and creativity of children. In addition, the presence of multiple colors and shapes suggests a visual and tactile stimulus relevant to learning. This activity is aligned with the principles of constructivism, as proposed by Piaget (1976), who highlights the importance of the concrete manipulation of objects for the construction of knowledge.

In this way, both Figure 1 and Figure 2 are relating collaborative work. Although some children are building individually, there is an interaction in the sharing of the pieces, which suggests the development of socio-emotional skills, such as cooperation and communication. The use of interlocking blocks in the school environment proves to be an effective tool for child development, favoring active and meaningful learning. The Figures portrayed strengthen the idea that playing is essential for the cognitive and social development of children, reinforcing the need for pedagogical methodologies that integrate playful elements into formal education.

Kishimoto's (2016) studies report that, in Antiquity, games were considered recreational games. In the Middle Ages, they were not taken "seriously", and in the Renaissance, they were considered as playful and educational games, aiming at the development of intelligence. Thus, in contemporary times, educators can plan their actions based on the multiple languages and guiding axes of Early Childhood Education, as the moments of play and socialization are an opportunity for the teacher to observe the child and note the moments of child development. Therefore, the school environment needs to be organized and clean while seeking to ensure that the child has contact with elements of his culture so that the experiences and stimuli are more meaningful.

In the conception of theorists Fröbel, Montessori, Vygotsky, and Piaget, their theoretical perspectives were reformulated and were revolutionary for Early Childhood Education. In Brazil, many schools have developed methodologies of theoretical assumptions, and some are applied. Another important issue is that these theorists broke with the idea that the child is a miniature adult.

Fröbel and Montessori follow some ideas proposed by Pestalozzi, from the inside out, that is, the child develops in a natural way, that is, he expresses himself, reveals and

discovers his talents and gifts. The contributions of games and play are linked to the serious activities that mainly make up the child's oral or motor language, so the child externalizes, expresses the world around him, and gets involved in interpersonal relationships.

### THE PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF FRIEDRICH FRÖBEL, MARIA MONTESSORI, LEV VYGOTSKY, AND JEAN PIAGET, ABOUT GAMES AND PLAY

In Fröbel's perspective, the pedagogical toy is the center of games; referred to the Kindergarten in which children are plants in a garden, and the teacher is the gardener, the one who fertilizes, waters, and cares, that is, he stimulated the child for his development. The child should be protected by the parents due to dependence on motor activities and senses. Fröbel was inspired by the love of children and nature, as he observed the way children acted and came to the conclusion that they used symbols when playing.

According to Fröbel, the child inside brings some things that need to be externalized, and this happens through the manipulation of objects. The child's interior is changed; it occurs from his self-knowledge, and the teacher must observe and enhance child development. For him, the process is natural, the child has gifts, these offered by God so that children's needs could be developed, and the manipulation of toys with characteristics of geometric shapes: balls, cubes and cylinders of different sizes; In addition to the use of some specific materials: building blocks are creative activities. The author used other materials such as cardboard, paper, clay, sawdust, collage, and handicrafts because handicrafts are actions that develop thought.

In Maria Montessori's perspective, the child is at the center of the teaching and learning process, and it is necessary to work on the construction of independence and autonomy in the child. Their methods were a clean, organized, and prepared environment and teachers working on self-education; that is, the child chooses what to do, how to do it, and in which learning is focused on the child's curiosity, stimulating the process of child development as something natural. For Montessori, motivation must be internal, the essential thing is to motivate children to explore the contents, as they are capable of self-discipline. The coexistence between teachers and children is aligned with mutual respect, not shouting, not raising the tone of voice, in addition to working with groups of different ages, as it teaches, educates and contributes to social relationships.

In this way, the teacher is the prepared adult, he does not centralize learning, he gives the way, guides, organizes and accompanies the child's action, the teacher does not determine what the child will do. In the evaluation of the Montessori methodology, there are

no wrong actions, praise, and awards, however, the teacher must show the way for the child to execute and carry out his activity always to get it right.

According to Montessori, we seek to understand the child to ensure child development and learning, and we must look at the child through the psychological theory that is divided into phases: acts and feels. For Montessori, it is important for the teacher to be at the child's level (crouch to talk), and we should also enter the child's world. The child works on carpets and the floor, so everything must be within reach, clean, and organized. The materials and utensils used are from everyday life (cutlery, broom, pan) and literacy material, as these are the elements and the pedagogical techniques that favor the child's learning and development.

From the perspective of Vygotsky and Piaget, games are considered one of the activities most performed by children, and it is an important cognition activity for the stimulation of child development. Play, therefore, is the development of the child, and the authors emphasize the playful and learning (educational) game.

Consequently, in the Piagetian perspective, the game is symbolic, it values the contribution to the cognitive and affective development of the child: "the symbolic game is also based, not infrequently, on unconscious conflicts: sexual interests, defense against anguish, phobias, aggressiveness or identification with aggressors, retreats for fear of risk or competition, etc." (Piaget; Inhelder, 2002, p. 56). Thus, the child is capable of representing using symbols, that is, imitation by drawing: "drawing is a form of semiotic function that is inscribed halfway between the symbolic game, whose same functional pleasure and the same autotelia presents, and the mental image, with which it shares the effort of real imitation" (Piaget; Inhelder, 2002, p. 57). For him, the child builds his knowledge through experiences and experiences and highlights the construction of knowledge, especially in the sensory-motor and preoperative periods.

In the Vygotskian perspective, the toy represents reality since the child is faced with the reproduction of his daily life. In this way, the child deals with conflicts and socialization, valuing imagination in games and play. For Vygotsky (1984), children's imagination is placed in the representations that children make of the world in which they are inserted; that is, games provide the development of language, thought, and concentration. Thus, in his studies, Vygotsky emphasizes the environment as an influence on social and cultural interactions for child development.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We conclude that humanity is still going through the development process, and the perspective is that education is the solution for a better future. In this way, we emphasize the objective of the social function of the school to work and ensure quality education, guaranteeing access, permanence, appropriation of knowledge, and the formation of citizenship.

This study reaffirms the importance of games and play in Early Childhood Education as fundamental elements for the integral development of children. Throughout the work, we highlight how these practices contribute to cognitive, emotional, motor, and social progress, offering a basis for meaningful and lasting learning.

The results show that playing goes beyond a moment of leisure, configuring itself as an indispensable pedagogical strategy to promote social interaction and the development of essential skills in childhood. The theoretical foundation, anchored in authors such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Montessori, as well as in the BNCC guidelines, demonstrated that games and play can be planned intentionally to enhance the integral formation of children, respecting their singularities and promoting inclusion and equity.

In addition, this study reinforces the need for teacher training so that teachers understand the relevance of play and can integrate these practices into the curriculum in a meaningful way. The role of educators is fundamental to create a playful environment that stimulates creativity, autonomy, and children's curiosity.

Finally, it is hoped that this research will inspire reflections and contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, promoting an education that values play as an essential path for human development and for the formation of more creative, reflective citizens prepared for the challenges of the contemporary world.

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