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**What children say about play and playing in early childhood education: let's listen to them**

**Cosa dicono i bambini sul gioco e sul gioco nell'educazione della prima infanzia: ascoltiamoli**

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ABSTRACT

*Playing is an all-children's right, and preschool education has a fundamental role in ensuring that playing is guaranteed in its pedagogical and curricular proposal. This article addresses the* **209**

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*importance children attribute to play and do it in the school environment, also seeks to reflect on the urgency of listening to them on this topic. Their voices highlight aspects that deserve the attention of educational professionals and other societal actors regarding children's rights, including the right to play. The narratives presented in the text are part of a study with 4 and 5-year-old children attending preschool in Brazil and reveal that play is the main activity they wish to experience in their daily school lives.*

**Keywords:** play, child, preschool, listening.

#### RIASSUNTO

*Il gioco è un diritto di tutti i bambini e la scuola dell'infanzia ha un ruolo fondamentale nel garantire che il gioco sia integrato nella sua proposta pedagogica e curricolare. Questo articolo affronta l'importanza attribuita dai bambini stessi al gioco e al giocare nell'ambiente scolastico e cerca di riflettere sull'urgenza di ascoltarli su questo tema. Le loro voci evidenziano aspetti che meritano l'attenzione dei professionisti dell'educazione e di altri attori sociali per quanto riguarda i diritti dei bambini, tra cui il diritto di giocare. Le narrazioni presenti nel testo fanno parte di una ricerca condotta con bambini di 4 e 5 anni che frequentano la scuola dell'infanzia in Brasile e rivelano come il gioco sia la principale attività che desiderano sperimentare quotidianamente a scuola.*

**Parole chiave:** gioco, bambino, scuola dell'infanzia, ascolto.

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the importance of play and playtime from the perspective of Brazilian children aged 4 to 6 years, who were the subjects of a research project conducted in the Graduate Program in Curriculum, Languages, and Pedagogical Innovations, of the Professional Master's in Education course at the Federal University of Bahia – UFBA, by researchers linked to the Study and Research Group on Early Childhood Education, Children, and Childhoods – GEPEICI. The research, entitled “Listening to children and its possible echoes in the pedagogical and curricular proposal of early childhood education in a public institution in Salvador-BA” listened to 41 children attending preschool in a public Early Childhood Education institution in Brazil.

To understand how listening to children happens and produces echoes in pedagogical and curricular proposal, 41 children were invited to think about an ideal Early Childhood Education school. Through different languages, they expressed themes that reflect their experiences, curiosities, disagreements,

and points of view, both about the school and the community in which they live and society at large. In this context, playing and playing time assume centrality in children's narratives and sustain their points of view on the topics they addressed, sometimes making demands for the right to play, sometimes denouncing the insufficient time allocated to play, the inadequacy of space, and the lack of materials. The right to play is secured in national and international documents concerning education and children's rights, such as the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education – DCNEI in its Portuguese acronym (Brazil, 2009a) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989, art. 31) respectively, but in practice, as the children said, the time to play is not always assured. Other topics, such as the school's physical structure, necessary materials, learning, food, safety, and even interpersonal relationships were mentioned as important for ensuring rich and pleasurable experiences in the ideal school context they envisioned.

Thus, with this text, we aim to reflect on the importance attributed by children to play and playtime in the school space, highlighting the urgency of listening to them, as their words reveal aspects that deserve the attention of education professionals and other societal actors, especially regarding children's rights, including the right to play.

The article is organized into four sections. In the *Introduction*, we present the topic, the objective, and the organization of the text. The first section – *Play as a Right and Language of the Child* – addresses play as a right and as the language of the child from the perspective of decoloniality (Rufino, 2021, 2023) and reflects on play as one of the axes of pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 2009a; Brazil, 2009b). Discussions on the methodology are presented in the second section – *Methodological Aspects of the Research*. In the third section – *Children's Narratives about Playing and Playtime in the Daily Life of an Early Childhood Education Institution in Brazil* – we highlight children's narratives about play in daily life, showing the importance that they attribute to play and playtime at school; and finally, we present the *Conclusions*.

## 2. PLAY AS RIGHT AND THE LANGUAGE OF CHILDREN

A child is a subject who thinks, feels, and acts in the world through their languages, actions, and relationships established among their peers: between themselves and adults; between themselves and the things of the world; and between themselves and other living beings on the planet. They are rich in initiative, have points of view, elaborate theories, express desires, and through their actions and relationships, produce culture, interpreting, updating, and recreating ways of being, living, and doing in society. According to the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education-DCNEI (Brazil, 2009a), a document that gathers principles, foundations and procedures regarding the first stage of Basic Education in Brazil, the child is a

[...] historical subject and holder of rights who, through interactions, relationships and daily practices, they experience, constructs their personal and collective identity, plays, imagines, fantasizes, desires, learns, observes, experiments, narrates, questions, and constructs meanings about nature and society, producing culture (Brazil, 2009a, p. 19).

Therefore, understanding children as historical subjects means recognizing them as a concrete person, situated geopolitically and culturally in time and space. Every child is born at a certain time, on a

given continent, inhabits a territory, lives in a family, has their own history, knowledge, experiences, ethnic belonging, gender, social class, and health condition. These markers show that the children cannot be understood from a universal perspective (Castro, 2021); on the contrary, each child is unique and should be seen in their context with all their existing strengths and inequalities. Then, each context produces ways of being, living, and existing in the world that affect the life and destiny of every child.

In that regard, children differ in their biopsychosocial aspects, and these differences reflect the living conditions and the political-economic and sociocultural contexts each child has access to from birth. The guarantee or denial of children's rights, including the right to play, strongly relates to the contexts in which they live, as the ways societies, families, and schools see them, organize, and produce their actions and relationships, create better or worse conditions for them. Although the place of children in the world is ensured by national and international laws, policies are discontinuous and unstable. While on one hand there are public policies and social movements that defend children and fight for their rights; on the other hand, there are actions and projects that do not care for their well-being and the guarantee of their rights. Thousands of children are still exposed to and living through multiple situations of violence and exploitation on all continents, which restricts or denies their right to play. Children are subjects of rights, and all their rights must be guaranteed by the family, the state, and the society where they live. According to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Brazil, 1990, p. 1), the rights refer to "[...] life, health, food, education, sport, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community living." Consequently, children have absolute priority in the realization of rights, ensuring their full protection and creating opportunities for their physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social development, in conditions of freedom and dignity.

Children's rights must be ensured

[...] without discrimination of birth, family situation, age, sex, race, ethnicity or color, religion or belief, disability, personal development and learning condition, economic condition, social environment, region and place of residence or any other condition that differentiates people, families, or the community in which they live (Brazil, 1990, p. 1).

Therefore, play is a right of children because it is a condition of their existence. Playing means existing, to resist, to live joy and laughter, to challenge colonial structures of disciplining bodies and to affirm oneself in the world, even when it is unjust, unequal, and hostile. Children play whether adults and contexts encourage playing or not. Children's play is not conditioned by adult-centric determinations; they bypass, escape, and poke holes in the rules and settings that prevent them from playing, whether at school or elsewhere. Playing is inscribed in the visceral dimension of the child person. Children play among the ruins of wars, in landscapes devastated by natural disasters and humanitarian crises, in places of child labor exploitation (at traffic lights, charcoal pits, plantations, markets, etc.) because play is their essence, it is what allows them to live, recreate, and feel life pulsing in their bodies. The moment and duration of playing belong to the child, even when they live in authoritarian and dangerous contexts.

In this regard, playing is a strategy children use to transgress the established order, face daily challenges and become free. According to Rufino (2021, p. 70), "play as an expression of the freedom of being is an act of decolonization." Decolonization is a theoretical-political movement against colonialism, based on understanding that colonization goes beyond economic and political dimensions, strongly affecting the lives of colonized peoples even after colonialism ends in their territories (Castro, 2021; Mignolo, 2017). Decolonization processes require a political-pedagogical

attitude from various societal actors who commit ethically and epistemologically to amplify silenced voices, give centrality to denied histories and cultures, recognize identities of subjects who have been mischaracterized and make other narratives visible about ways of living, feeling, thinking, and acting. For Castro (2023, p. 34), “decolonization processes, being eminently political as they intend to change power relations, are fundamental for advancing the proposal to reinvent children’s rights.”

Playing as existence and expression of freedom is a way of building other logics of life and education. Colonization, with its power structures, authoritarian dynamics, erasure of histories and cultures, and control over bodies and subjectivities created traumas and distortions that have lasted for centuries and still mark the lives of children (Rufino, 2021).

Body feints, laughter, hideouts, fantastic inventions, slingshots, water balloons, armies of dirty feet and big toes bruised on the cobblestones are always welcome to help untie the knots of bodies accustomed to remaining tense and ready for battle (Rufino, 2021, p. 71).

Children’s bodies throb with vitality and liveliness through play. Playing is no doubt a call to take children’s bodies out of tension and readiness for the battles imposed long ago by education, society, and state projects that further making them invisible, imposed standards of living and existence that conceived them as they were voiceless subjects, objects, inferior and incomplete beings. We agree with Leme Garcez and Alberton Pozzer (2022, p. 94) when they state: “(De)colonizing the idea of childhood in Latin American and Caribbean education offers new perspectives, new voices, new listening and new affections for children and education.”

Playing is life, playing is language. Through play, children connect with their emotions, frustrations, fears, and desires. Thus, play as language becomes visible through gestures, expressions, movements, sounds, silences, through actions with nature, with artifacts and manufactured materials, with musical instruments and literature. As Rufino (2023, p. 19) says, “playing as language and availability for ritualization of life is made with movements, sounds, rhythm, stones, leaves, backyards, rain, ants, flowers, forest, river, sea, and people.” Children express their language by playing and making inventions even with what is considered useless by society, that is, with what falls into the category of disposable and leftover. What comes into a child’s hands, through imagination and fantasy, becomes a toy and gains infinite functions and meanings. After all, it is impossible to predict what a child can create when encountering a stone, a leaf, an ant, a twig, a cardboard box or a piece of cloth. Then, creating, inventing, exploring, observing, questioning, narrating, playing, learning are inherent to the child, and playing is an action that allows them to experience each of these dimensions intensely. Having play as a central axis of pedagogical practice is a child’s right because they spend most of their time at school.

### 3. PLAYING AS A CENTRAL AXIS OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

Pedagogical practice is an intentional action produced in the encounter between the teacher and the child, based on knowledge and didactics that consider the specificities of children since they are babies. By conceiving the Early Childhood Education curriculum as a set of practices that should articulate children’s experiences and knowledge with the knowledge that is part of the cultural, artistic, environmental, scientific, and technological heritage, aiming for their holistic development, the DCNEI (Brazil, 2009a) recognizes that children should be the focus of curricular planning.

In that regard, the document points out that pedagogical practices forming the curricular proposals should have interactions and play as their main axes. Interaction is understood as exchanges that foster the development of various aspects, such as language, motor skills, affectivity, socialization, construction of values, recognition of rules, etc., while also enabling the production of culture. Playing, as the child's language, provides both moments of interaction with others and self-encounter. Therefore, DCNEI highlights the importance of playing as language and of the teacher who plays with the children, for by playing, the teacher expands possibilities of understanding and responding to children's initiatives, contributing to their living experiences that foster new discoveries and meaningful learning. One of the children who participated in the research, nicknamed Princess Elsa (5 years old), when asked what would make the school better, she said: "If the teachers always played with the students, it would be much better." For this child, a good school is one where teachers play with students. If she expresses this desire as a prerequisite for the school to become "much better," it is because the teachers still play little with the children. It can be inferred, therefore, that it is not enough to create playful contexts in daily life; it is also essential to play with the children.

Early Childhood Education institutions have as their main objective promoting the holistic development of children, being attentive and welcoming to diversity, ensuring them access to knowledge constructed by humanity and the building of learning through different languages, among them, playing. Playing is an action that allows the child to imitate what is known, construct the new, and in this movement, approach or distance themselves from lived reality, recreating it. For the Brazilian researcher Maria Carmen Barbosa (2009, p. 70), playing is

[...] one of the most important functions of early childhood education, not only because it is during childhood that this social practice appears most intensely, but precisely because it is the inaugural experience of feeling the world and experiencing oneself, of learning to create and invent languages through the playful exercise of freedom of expression.

Playing as a central axis of pedagogical practice considers the specificities of the child and makes their development and learning processes more respectful and lighter, as it considers the way they live, communicate, interact, learn, produce culture, and position themselves in the world. Ensuring the act of playing in the Early Childhood Education school is an ethical commitment to children and to the process of decolonizing life and education.

#### 4. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Research with children is based on the principle that the child is a historical subject with rights, active, capable, curious, creative, and belonging to the context under investigation. Furthermore, such research seeks to understand what children reveal about their experiences, perspectives, and relationships with the world. Methodology used was carefully considered, requiring a sensitive and attentive approach to specificities of the subjects. These specificities relate to ethical issues and to the ways of being and living of children who inhabit a sociopolitical territory rich in history, resistance, artistic-cultural manifestations, also contradictions and inequalities.

Authorization to conduct the research was initially granted by the Municipal Department of Education of Salvador, Bahia, the body responsible for municipal education. After this stage, the early childhood education institution, where one of the researchers works professionally, was also consulted about

the possibility of conducting the scientific investigation. This consultation took place at a meeting intended for school staff, community members, and parents/guardians of the children. The researcher used slides and a video about the research proposal and objectives, which contributed to a better understanding of the investigation's intent. School community, including the institution's management, teachers and families, considered the research relevant and consented to its execution. To formalize this authorization, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) was sent to the families of children in group 5, morning and afternoon shifts, to be signed and returned to the researcher.

With the research authorized by the school and the informed consent forms signed by all families, the children were also invited to a meeting with the researcher, who created a history book entitled "CMEI<sup>1</sup> Tertuliano de Góes: for an education that listens to children", telling her academic and professional trajectory, explaining what research is, how children could participate in the investigation, and inviting them to join the investigative process. Of the 46 children in the two classes, only one did not express a desire to participate, a decision accepted by the researcher, even though the family had given their permission. During the research, 4 children did not attend school, leaving 41 children as research subjects.

For their ICF, the children created a self-portrait, which was transformed into a sticker for a sticker album titled "Sticker Album: Daily Assent." At each research session, the children confirmed their agreement by gluing their self-portrait into the sticker album. This procedure was adopted in all meetings with the children, respecting their wishes to participate or not in the research activities.

From this perspective, methodology design was inspired by the Afro-Brazilian civilizational values proposed by the Brazilian researcher Azoilda Trindade (2005): circularity, orality, playfulness, cooperation/community, memory, and ancestry. These values supported both the relationships established between the researcher (who was in the field) and the children and their families, as well as the chosen data generation instruments: the conversation circle and drawing. These are tools commonly used in early childhood education, which respect the power and multiple languages of children, enable rich communication, and allow for understanding their points of view, ideas, interests, and opinions on different topics.

In this setting, the conversation circle (Alessi, 2014; Warschauer, 2017) expresses the Afro-Brazilian principle of circularity (Trindade, 2005) and constitutes a device that brings people together, provokes dynamic communication, and favors a dialogical space. In this way, the conversation circle enables closer contact between participants, using eye contact and touch, creating respectful communication where listening to multiple voices occurs democratically and participatively, strengthening dialogues and allowing exchanges from various children's perspectives without hierarchy or judgment. The conversation circle was chosen as a methodological research tool because it not only makes children's voices visible and is part of the daily routine in early childhood education, but it also aligns with Afro-Brazilian civilizational values and carries ancestral meanings from African and Indigenous peoples. In addition to the children's voices heard in the conversation circle, we used drawing so they could also express their viewpoints through this language.

Drawing helped produce narratives, reflections, and served to document how children understood and thought about the topics discussed, thus functioning both as a research technique and as a recording

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: CMEI is the Portuguese acronym for *Centro Municipal de Educação Infantil* (Municipal Center for Early Childhood Education).

source. For this reason, we evaluated that drawing combined with conversation circle was a powerful composition for producing data. As Gobbi (2022, p. 45) states:

When drawing, we represent things that already exist, but it is also possible to think and produce thoughts based on what was drawn. There is a dynamic relationship, full of complex information and imagination, between the drawing object, the person drawing, the places where they are produced, and the historical, economic, and social conditions for their production.

A total of 46 conversation circles with children were conducted, divided as follows: 2 large circles with all the children; 25 conversation circles with groups of 2 to 4 children; and 19 duets (meetings between the researcher and one child at a time). In the large circles and those held with small groups, children spoke about different topics brought up by themselves or the researcher, aligned with the research objectives. In the duets, they delved deeper into topics discussed in the circles, such as what an ideal school for children should have, and drew what they considered important. The conversations were recorded using a cell phone voice recorder and later transcribed, organized, analyzed, and interpreted, seeking dialogue with the theoretical framework of the research. For data analysis and interpretation, the core meanings were used (Aguiar, Ozella, 2006, 2013) because they engage in the nature of the study and the objectives of the research. The steps taken to construct the analysis and interpretation were as follows: 1) floating reading and organization of material produced in the empirical field; 2) reading the material to find thematic content, considering characteristics of similarity, complementarity, or contrast; 3) elaboration and analysis of the core meanings; and 4) analysis of the core meanings selected from the children's narratives and drawings. From children's narratives emerged the core themes of meaning: the right to play, infrastructure, material resources, food, safety, human resources, relationships/interactions, learning, among others. Children's names were chosen by themselves based on their cultural references and repertoire. In this text, we selected narratives related to play and playtime at school, but the drawings will not be included.

##### 5. CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES ABOUT PLAYING AND PLAYTIME IN DAILY LIFE OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN BRAZIL

During the investigation, as they reflected on the ideal school in the context of the proposed pedagogical and curricular approach to Early Childhood Education, the children discussed a variety of topics. In their narratives, they spoke about infrastructure, access, operation, materials, food, safety, human resources, relationships/interactions, learning, etc., highlighting what should be present in the school environment, how it should be (regarding physical and material infrastructure as well as the institutional atmosphere), and how they would like to experience new and meaningful moments in this space. Along this path, it was interesting to observe that, among the themes that emerged in the conversation circles, play stood out and intersected with most of the other topics (except when they spoke about the importance of food in the school environment), emphasizing the importance attributed of playing, which in the children's voices, is the main pillar of the school they envision. When discussing aspects related to materials and the infrastructure of the school they wish for, children said, among other things, that it was necessary to have more toys in greater quantity, quality, and variety, and to have ample, natural spaces with structural conditions capable of providing a safe, playful, welcoming environment, rich in stimuli, and also promoting interaction, exploration, and

discovery through bodily, investigative, and imaginative experiences. Here are some of the things the children said: “My school would have more toys, more playgrounds, more space, a big building with a place to run [...] having toys is important for the school to be fun” (Batman, 2024); “The school should have more costumes” (Princess Aurora, 2024); “To make the school better, it should improve the toys” (Leonardo, 2024); “The school could have more Lego. With Lego, we can build pieces and make them big, just the way we want” (Happy, 2024); “To make it better, I would add more toys and books” (Barbie, 2024); “My school would have a big room with lots of toys” (Tooth Fairy, 2024); “Our school doesn’t have much space for us, it could be a little bigger so there’s room to run” (Princess Julia, 2024); “[...] my school would be bigger than the world, it would have two elephants, animals, toys, a park [...]” (Thor, 2024); “[...] my school would be nicer if it were bigger, because we could have more space to play” (Ladybug, 2024); “[...] I wish there was a treehouse” (Hulk, 2024); “I like trees so we can climb them...” (Ter, 2024); “I don’t like it when it rains, because sometimes we can’t play” (Hulk, 2024); “I don’t like it when it rains because the rain ruins it when someone is playing. There should be a place that doesn’t get wet in the rain so it doesn’t spoil playtime” (Thor 2, 2024); “To improve the school, we could play more” (Cat Noir, 2024); “I want to learn to paint, to play...” (Barbie, 2024); “I’d like to learn other games” (Naruto, 2024).

Children’s statements reveal that, from their point of view, the quality and functionality of the school are directly linked to the experiences related to play. They do not see play in the school environment as “just” an activity, but as a central element for the school to be “cooler” or “better,” which aligns with documents that underpin Early Childhood Education in Brazil.

Regarding materials and their relationship to play, it is interesting to note that children evaluate the quantity and attributes of toys and seem to associate these variations with the quality of experiences they have while playing. Their comments suggest that aspects such as quantity, durability, variety, and suitability of resources intended for play are relevant and should be considered by educational spaces and education systems. These perceptions align with the National Operational Guidelines for Quality and Equity in Early Childhood Education (Resolution CNE/CEB No. 1, October 17, 2024), which state that Early Childhood Education institutions must provide appropriate conditions for the development of infants and young children, considering, among other factors, the quality, cleanliness, diversity, and conservation of toys offered.

Some narratives also provoke reflection about the relationships and meaning of material resources and their potential, based on their ability to provide experiences for those who interact with them, making them important elements of educational spaces. Gandini (2016, p. 335) states that “everything surrounding and used in the school is seen not as passive elements, but as elements that condition and are conditioned by the actions of children and adults who are active in them.” This reflection is important, as it shows that materials have explicit intentionality, from how they are selected, provided, and used in daily practice by children, also implicit intentionality, sometimes loaded with intentions that aim to empty meaning, minimizing the potential inherent in play. If play is intimately linked to dreams, is a craftsman of hope, and expresses itself as the ultimate mark of non-utilitarian life, what is the point of valuing, encouraging, and stimulating it in a capitalist world dictated by a colonizing logic that insists on dominating bodies and homogenizing them, denying diversity, life, and consequently play as an experience of expression, freedom, creation, resistance? (Rufino, 2023). When talking about play and playtime at school they envision, in addition to materials, children spoke about infrastructure and the need for ample spaces with natural elements that allow them to experience the sense of freedom that running or climbing a tree can provide. This desire seems to denounce the

confinement to which their bodies have been subjected, in verticalized school structures, built in concrete, without space and no natural resources. Such structures, following an adult-centric and colonial logic, regulate their bodies, silence them, and in the attempt to discipline them, reduce the possibility for play and the expression of the freedom of being (Rufino, 2021).

The child should have the possibility to move and make broad movements in internal and external spaces of the classrooms and the institution, to engage in explorations and play with diverse objects and materials that take into account particularities of different ages, specific conditions of children with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high abilities/giftedness, as well as the social, cultural, ethnic-racial, and linguistic diversities of children, families, and the regional community (Brazil, 2009b, p. 14).

When addressing the need for broad spaces, from a perspective that values play, the body, and its movements, children seem to reveal an understanding of the relationship between the physical environment, the body, and the quality of play experiences. Playing and moving are indispensable needs for children's development, as essential as sleep and nutrition, as Barbosa (2009) highlights. And the body, according to Rufino (2023), must assume a leading role in education insofar as it is knowledge, opportunity, memory, enchantment, weapon, and toy, especially when education is considered a practice of freedom.

The statements by Hulk and Thor 2 express the desire for spaces that do not get wet on rainy days and guarantee that playtime can take place. In addition to representing the relationship between infrastructure and play, these narratives make public a demand regarding the guarantee of the right to play, since without adequate infrastructure and good weather conditions, this right can be affected. When analyzing the architectural design of schools, emphasizing that they should have covered patios to ensure playtime on rainy days, children are demanding the fulfillment of a premise from the Basic Infrastructure Parameters for Early Childhood Education Institutions (2006). In that regard, the Parameters, when referring to recreational and living areas, state: "in the organization and sectorization of living and recreation areas, it is necessary to provide for covered spaces that can offer the opportunity for use on rainy days or the flexibility for differentiated activities" (Brazil, 2006, p. 28).

In this sense, Resolution CNE/CEB n. 1, October 17, 2024, which establishes the National Operational Guidelines for Quality and Equity in Early Childhood Education, seems to reaffirm the premise mentioned above, as it states in Article 30 that the facilities of Early Childhood Education institutions must ensure "outdoor areas for socializing, with shaded and sunny spaces that encourage the daily use by infants and children, with an appropriate proportion of area in relation to the total land area" (Brazil, 2024, p. 58).

Cat Noir, in turn, refers to the time allocated for playing. Even acknowledging the presence of play, he seems to question the amount of time dedicated to playtime in the routine proposed by the institution and demands a greater amount of time for this purpose. By saying that the school would improve if there were more time for play, the child is implicitly denouncing that the school does not offer enough time for this activity and reveals a perception that the right to play is not only about having space, infrastructure, toys, and materials, but also about having the possibility and freedom to exercise it.

Playing and playtime also appeared as learning experiences desired by the children, as expressed by Barbie and Naruto. Their statements demonstrate a desire to learn new ways of playing, highlighting

play as a language capable of leading them to new and important discoveries. After all, playing and playtime contribute to creating bonds, to the development of creativity and imagination, and contain teachings about feelings, rules, values, memories, and forms of organization that are part of the cultural and social heritage passed down from generation to generation. These are statements that lead us to reflect on the devaluation of playing and playtime in curricular programs that establish rigid learning goals, with inflexible, predefined content and knowledge, which often silence children's cultures.

Curricular proposals of Early Childhood Education must ensure that children have varied experiences with different languages, recognizing that the world they are part of, by its very culture, is widely marked by images, sounds, speech, and writing. In this process, it is necessary to value playfulness, playful activities, and children's cultures (Brazil, 2009b, p. 15).

Children's narratives show the importance they give to play and reveal that this right could be better ensured. Their statements lead us to two important reflections: Why is the right to play not fully guaranteed? And if children are denouncing and demanding play, why are they not being listened to?

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Playing is right and a language of child, as playtime is vital for them. Children play because it is their way to feel alive, to establish connections with themselves, the world, and everything within it; to communicate, learn, create and recreate culture, and to be happy. Children's statements reveal an explicit perception of the relationship between play and the pedagogical and curricular proposal of Education in its various dimensions. Additionally, they demonstrate, sometimes in a tone of validation and longing, sometimes as a complaint or demand, that they perceive the connection between materials, infrastructure, the organization of spaces and times in pedagogical practices, and the right to play within Early Childhood Education.

What children have to say about the importance of play for them and why it should be ensured as one of the axes of pedagogical practice must be listened to. It is vital to consider their questions about the place of play in the curriculum, about the inadequacy of the physical spaces of Early Childhood Education institutions for play, and about the insufficiency of materials. After all, they point the way toward decolonizing the curriculum and pedagogical practices, as well as toward a shift in the way society sees play. Playing is a serious and powerful action, as it means existing, resisting, and producing life. A child who plays is more creative, more autonomous in solving problems, more self-confident, better able to articulate ideas, organize thoughts, and live with pleasure.

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