

Playfulness that Teaches: Playing and Learning as a Path to Early Childhood Education

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Summary

Playfulness should be understood as a component of the pedagogical process, capable of transforming learning into a meaningful experience. The study's overall objective was to analyze the importance of play in early childhood education, with an emphasis on valuing playfulness as a teaching and learning tool. The methodology used a literature review, involving the analysis of articles that address play in early childhood education. The results demonstrate that play in early childhood education is a pedagogical tool that can be adapted to different contexts and needs.

Keywords: Play, Early Childhood Education, Playfulness.

Abstract

Playfulness should be understood as a component in the pedagogical process, capable of transforming learning into a meaningful experience. The general objective of the study was to analyze the importance of play in early childhood education, with emphasis on the appreciation of playfulness as a teaching and learning tool. The methodology used a literature review, involving the analysis of articles that address play in early childhood education. The results demonstrates that playing in Early Childhood Education is a pedagogical instrument that can be adapted to different contexts and needs.

Keywords: Play, Early Childhood Education, Playfulness.

1 INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a phase marked by discoveries, imagination and intense construction of knowledge. From the first years of life, the child begins his socialization process in the family environment, where they learn behaviors, values, habits and norms essential for their coexistence in society.

Upon entering school, this universe expands: the child begins to interact with new individuals and to build shared knowledge, such as written language, mathematics, sciences and the arts (Caputo, 2023).

Social transformations in recent decades — such as the growing participation of women in the job market and the consequent demand for educational spaces for early childhood — have anticipated the start of formal schooling (Silva et al., 2025). In this scenario, the school acquires a role as a space for care, affection and integral development of child (Oliveira, 2018).

In this context, it is essential to recognize play as a language of its own. of childhood and a legitimate way of learning. Far from being a recreational moment, play promotes cognitive, emotional and social development, in addition to stimulating creativity and autonomy.

Playfulness must, therefore, be understood as an essential component in pedagogical process, appropriate for transforming learning into an experience significant (Santos & Ferreira, 2024).

In this sense, the present study has the general objective of analyzing the importance of play in early childhood education, with an emphasis on valuing playfulness as a tool for teaching and learning. As specific objectives, we seek to investigate how play



contributes to the child's performance, in addition to identifying strategies that promote a more creative and engaging learning.

To this end, a literature review will be carried out in books, articles scientific and specialized journals, with the aim of understanding the main approaches on the topic.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Early Childhood Education as the Foundation of Development

Preschool education aims to expand the educational process initiated in family environment, favoring the full development of the child and their integration into life in society. In this context, the family plays a fundamental role in providing support emotional and facilitate the child's social and cultural adaptation.

Early childhood education contributes to cognitive, motor, affective and social development of the child, considering their individual needs. In Brazil, its origin dates back to 18th century, when institutions with a welfare focus emerged, aimed at caring for young children. Over time, this view was transformed, giving way to a pedagogical approach that recognizes the child as the protagonist in the construction of his own knowledge (Silva et al., 2025).

The Early Childhood Education curriculum proposal is structured based on fundamental axes that guide the pedagogical process and respect the specificities of development children. Among these axes, the strengthening of identity, the construction of autonomy and the expansion of world knowledge (Jorge & Machado, 2025). Each of these areas contributes to the child's overall development, promoting skills cognitive, emotional, motor and social.

In this context, early childhood education favors contact with symbolic games, stimulating children's creativity and aesthetic sensitivity. Playfulness, therefore, acts as an educational and transformative tool, contributing to the development integral in childhood.

2.1.1 The Construction of Knowledge in Childhood and the Challenges of Contemporary Education

The learning process contributes to the development of behaviors, skills and knowledge throughout human life (Macedo, 2024). Whether in the environment family, in social interactions or in educational contexts, learning allows each generation benefits from accumulated experiences, promoting the advancement of knowledge and continuity of cultural practices (Silva et al., 2025).

According to Vygotsky (1997), cognitive development is rooted in relationships social. Higher mental functions originate on the interpsychological plane—that is, in interactions with others — and are internalized on the intrapsychological plane. In this process, Dalbosco (2024), mediation plays a central role, occurring through tools symbolic, such as language, which connect the individual to his culture and structure his thought.

The family plays a fundamental role in child development, acting as in a special way in the affective aspects and in the formation of the child's personality. According to Jorge & Machado (2025), the family environment is the first space for socialization and reception, where the child builds his first experiences of security, love and trust.

Furthermore, the family contributes to the child's cognitive growth by offering stimuli, models and opportunities that enrich the learning process (Santos et al., 2024). Therefore, recognizing the importance of the family's role is essential for practices educational institutions can establish effective partnerships, valuing and complementing this environment of early development.

Given this panorama, the importance of investing in training becomes evident continued training of early childhood education teachers, based on solid theoretical frameworks. This training should enable teachers to understand child development, in order to support effective pedagogical practices (Santos et al., 2025).

2.2 Cognitive Development in Childhood

Jean Piaget's (1896–1980) theory offers essential contributions to the understanding of the process by which the individual architects knowledge throughout the development, from active interaction with the environment (Dalbosco, 2024). One of the main foundations of his work is the formulation of the Stages of Development

Cognitive, which present, in sequence, how the mind organizes itself and transforms itself over time. of time (Macedo, 2024).

In the first two years of life, sensorimotor actions predominate, which are fundamental for the child's early development (Desmurget, 2021). During this period, the development of essential notions occurs, such as the permanence of the object — the understanding that objects continue to exist even when they are not visible —, the causality, which allows us to understand cause and effect relationships, beyond the first perceptions about space and time.

According to Santos et al. (2025), these aspects are categorical for the organization of thought and for the child's exchange with the environment, preparing them for stages later cognitive development and for the deepening of more advanced skills complex.

As age advances, the pre-operational stage begins, marked by emergence of symbolic thinking and make-believe, although they are still evident characteristics such as egocentrism and irreversibility of thought (Torquato Junior et al., 2025).

Around the age of six or seven to eleven, the child enters the stage of operations. palpable, when the reversibility of thought begins to develop, the knowledge of conservation and the ability to perform mental operations applied to concrete situations. From the age of eleven, the stage of formal operations begins, in which the individual develops the ability to deal with abstractions, in addition to solving more intricate problems (Caputo, 2023).

While Piaget highlights the active role of the subject in the construction of knowledge by through action on the physical world, Lev Vygotsky (1978) presents a perspective complementary by emphasizing that human learning is mediated by symbolic instruments — language — and occurs in social interactions before being internalized by the individual, process he calls mediation.

Both theorists adopt a constructivist approach, but with different emphases: Piaget prioritizes the individual construction of knowledge based on action on the environment, while Vygotsky values the role of social and cultural interactions as the basis of development. Despite the differences, their contributions complement each other by recognizing that the knowledge is constructed in the active relationship between the subject and the world.



2.3 The Teacher-Student Relationship and the Role of Play in Early Childhood Education

The act of playing plays a fundamental role in psychological and emotional development, cognitive and social development of the child. Play, to fulfill this formative role, must occur within a structure with shared rules, offering an organized experience in which the child learns to live with norms and limits.

When playing, the child moves away from immediate reality and takes on the leading role in a own symbolic universe. In early childhood education, this process favors the development of various cognitive and emotional skills (Pinto et al., 2021).

The active presence of educators in games helps to strengthen emotional bonds and expands learning possibilities. To achieve this, it is necessary that recreational activities are well planned, with pedagogical intentionality, taking into account consideration of children's interests and needs (Santos et al., 2025). In this way, the playing becomes a tool to stimulate concentration, creative capacity, logical reasoning, emotional expression and sociability (Silva et al., 2025).

The interaction between teacher and student is configured as a dynamic process of exchanges of experiences and joint construction of knowledge (Macedo, 2024). By observing their students during activities, the teacher is able to identify their potential, difficulties and needs, which enables the adoption of pedagogical strategies personalized, respecting the rhythms and singularities of each child (Jorge & Machado, 2025).

In Early Childhood Education, the teacher assumes the role of both an affective and a cognitive. This link is essential for the development of cognitive dimensions, emotional and social aspects of the child (Santos & Souza, 2023).

In this context, playing becomes an indispensable tool, because through it, children develop socio-emotional and cognitive skills, in addition to establishing meaningful connections with the world around them (Dalbosco, 2024).

According to Silva et al. (2025), playful approaches complement teaching traditional by providing more creative, contextualized and meaningful. By playing, children experiment, formulate hypotheses, resolve conflicts, express emotions and expands your repertoire of knowledge.

In view of this, it becomes essential that pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education is supported by a solid emotional relationship between teacher and student, as it is through this bond

that builds an environment of trust, listening and emotional security, essential to learning process.

As Caputo (2023) highlights, affectivity should not be treated as an element secondary, but as an essential part of pedagogical mediation in the first years of schooling. Thus, the teacher ceases to be a transmitter of knowledge and becomes a learning facilitator, someone who welcomes, guides and proposes meaningful experiences that favor the integral growth of the student.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted the literature review methodology as the main procedure. According to Gil (2021), this method consists of a rational and systematic path aimed at achieving certain objectives, becoming an essential scientific strategy for the construction of a consistent theoretical basis.

The bibliographic research was carried out based on published materials, such as books, scientific articles, dissertations, theses and documents available from reliable sources. The investigative process began with the delimitation of the problem and the objectives of the study, followed by the search and selection of updated and relevant references to the themes of playfulness, of play and child development.

The literature review therefore constituted the theoretical foundation of the present research, guiding both the organization of ideas and critical reflection. The focus of the investigation focused on the analysis of play as a pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education, with highlighting playfulness as a tool that promotes cognitive development, emotional, social and motor.

In this sense, the adopted methodology made it possible to understand how the playing and playfulness can be meaningfully connected to the educational process, contributing to a more humanizing learning process aligned with the needs of the child development.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For this study, articles were selected that contributed to the identification of learnings and concepts aligned with the research objectives. Caputo (2023) explored the pedagogy of affection in teaching practice in Early Childhood Education, emphasizing the affective bond between

teacher and child through play, which favors learning in an environment significant.

Authors Santos and Souza (2023) dispute the challenges faced by pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, highlighting the importance of playing as an element fundamental in the process of children's literacy and literacy. By integrating playfulness to language practices, the educator enables the child to develop skills essential, such as attentive listening, speaking, interpretation and recognition of symbols graphics, in a contextualized manner and consistent with their development phase.

Santos and Souza (2023) therefore argue that playfulness should not be dissociated from pedagogical proposals focused on literacy, as it promotes learning in a integrated, respecting the child's rhythm and interests, and contributing to an experience more humanized and effective educational system.

The work of Pinto et al. (2021) investigated the role of toys and play in Early Childhood Education, with an emphasis on teaching. The authors emphasize that educators, holders of specific knowledge for this stage, must promote recreational activities developed with children.

While Jorge & Machado (2025) analyzed the relevance of the articulation between the education and care for child development in Early Childhood Education, pointing out the partnership between family and school as fundamental for the improvement of children in this process.

The study by Santos et al. (2025) addressed inclusion strategies applied by parents and family members to promote the integral development of children with Spectrum Disorder Autistic (ASD), recognizing the family as the primary nucleus for the first steps of the cognitive development of these children.

Silva et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of playfulness in Early Childhood Education, highlighting that play is essential for the child's learning and development, being necessary for schools and educators to understand the student in their affective and cognitive.

Finally, Santos and Ferreira (2024) discussed the relevance of playing in a set of technological improvement, reflecting on the impacts of early exposure to screens on child development. The authors advocate the importance of playful learning traditional as a configuration to preserve both creativity and social interaction of children.

From the analysis of these studies, it is observed that playing in Early Childhood Education is configured as a flexible pedagogical instrument, suitable for adapting to different needs of children. All selected articles enrich the understanding of the role of playfulness in the teaching and learning process, corroborating the objectives of this search.

For a better understanding, below, a table will be presented containing the main data of the analyzed articles, including author(s), title, year of publication, type and source.

Table 1: Selected articles

Author(s)	Title	Type	Source	Year
CAPUTO, Mariana Lopes	Pedagogy of affection: the affective dimension of the construction of teaching practice	Work of Conclusion of Course	Faculty of Education, University Federal of Rio de Janeiro	2023
SANTOS, Dayana Silva Almeida Moraes dos; SOUZA, Tatiana Aguiar	The challenges of pedagogical practices in the face of literacy and literacy in early childhood education.	Article Scientific	RCMOS-Magazine Scientific Multidisciplinary To know	2023
TORQUATO JUNIOR, Emiliano et al.	Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development and its Implications for Teaching.	Article Scientific	Rebena-Magazine Brazilian Teaching and Learning Association	2025
PINTO, Dasny Pestana de et al.	Toys and play in early childhood education	Article Scientific	Ibero-Magazine American of Humanities, Science and Education	2021
JORGE, Michelle Gomide; AX, Michele Varotto	The binomial care and education in early childhood education and its interfaces with teaching practice.	Article Scientific	Notebooks of Pedagogy	2025
SANTOS, Antonio Nacilio Sousa dos et al.	From distress and acceptance to webs of affection – ASD and family ties in building bridges for inclusion and child development	Article Scientific	Aracê	2025
SILVA, Doraci Creuza da et al.	The importance of playfulness in the early childhood education: contributions to teaching and learning:	Article Scientific	RCMOS-Magazine Scientific Multidisciplinary To know	2025
SANTOS, Laura Torquetti Dias; FERREIRA, Stephani Cristini	The importance of play in early childhood education: impacts of technology	Monograph	University Federal Gold Black, Mariana	2024

Source: Research data

The articles analyzed in this research convergently highlight the relevance of play as a fundamental element in Early Childhood Education. Among the contributions, the most notable Caputo (2023), who understands play as a unique opportunity for people to children express their feelings, desires and emotions through a spontaneous attitude and safe.

For Caputo (2023) playfulness creates a symbolic space in which the child can externalize what you often cannot verbalize, favoring development emotional and strengthening their identity. This perspective strengthens the understanding of that playing should not be accepted as a pastime, but as an educational practice intentional, which promotes well-being, emotional health and integral growth of small.

The authors Pinto et al. (2021), as well as Jorge & Machado (2025) emphasize the importance of toys and play, highlighting the teacher's performance in balance between caring and educating during playful activities. In this process, the mediation of educator works as a facilitator, encouraging children to develop their skills social and emotional.

Torquato Junior et al. (2025) addressed the stages of cognitive development proposed by Jean Piaget, detailing the specific characteristics of each phase and their implications for childhood learning. For the authors, the role of the teacher goes beyond simple transmission of content: he must act as a mediator of knowledge, planning activities that stimulate the active construction of knowledge through exploration, experimentation and dialogue.

By integrating the contributions of Santos and Souza (2023) and Santos et al. (2025), we notice if there is compliance regarding the need for pedagogical practices that value play and affective relationships. Furthermore, Silva et al. (2025) and Santos and Ferreira (2024) observe the role of playfulness as a facilitating element during the learning process in Education Childish.

Thus, it is observed that the authors converge in the understanding that the practice Educational support in Early Childhood Education must be based on the construction of human bonds meaningful, guided by affection, respect for singularities and sensitive listening of the child. In this context, playfulness is valued as an instrument for comprehensive development of the child, encouraging the expression of emotions, creativity, imagination and social interaction.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research revealed that the desire to learn manifests itself from the first months of life. life, showing that the drive for discovery and understanding of the world is inherent to human nature. In addition, the toys, peers, and social environment in which the child is inserted function as fundamental stimuli for their curiosity and exploration. This early learning process encompasses emotional, sensory and relational aspects, forming the basis for integral development.

It is in this continuous process of discoveries and experiences that knowledge is architect in a meaningful way, through the child's active interaction with the environment, with others and with themselves. The child learns to express feelings, to deal with frustrations, to collaborate, respect rules and build interpersonal relationships. Thus, the process of learning involves the construction of meaning, identity, connections and ways of being in world.

Through play, learning transcends the limits of academic content traditional, revealing itself as an integrated educational practice. From this perspective, playing becomes a powerful means of learning that articulates reason and emotion, thought and action, individuality and collectivity. Such experiences are fundamental to the formation of individuals autonomous, critical and creative, capable of thinking for themselves, making decisions and interacting with empathy and responsibility in different contexts.

Therefore, the responsibility of the school and educators to understand the student as a whole, valuing playfulness as a pedagogical tool capable of harmonize cognitive and emotional development. The quality of interactions and educational environment is fundamental for play to fulfill its formative role and transformer in childhood.

Finally, this study achieved its objective by showing that playing, when based on the playfulness that teaches, it establishes an essential and reliable path for the Early Childhood Education. In this context, playfulness assumes the language performance of childhood, through which the child can explore, discover, experiment, communicate and learn.

Thus, the importance of pedagogical practices that value play as a structuring axis of early childhood education, contributing to the formation of reflective subjects and involved in its development process.

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