



Playing as a mediator of social interactions in early childhood education: an analysis based on the BNCC

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Abstract:

This work aims to analyze play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, based on the guidelines of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). Using a qualitative approach, the study is based on bibliographic and documentary research, focusing on the analysis of the BNCC and authors who discuss child development, playfulness, and pedagogical practices. Play, as a right to learning, favors the child's integral development and enhances the development of affective and social bonds, in addition to promoting autonomy and the expression of feelings. The analysis highlights that social interactions mediated by play contribute significantly to the teaching-learning process, and it is essential that teachers recognize the value of play as a legitimate language of childhood. The conclusion is that valuing play should be central to Early Childhood Education pedagogical practices, in line with the principles established by the BNCC.

Keywords: Play; Social Interactions; Early Childhood Education; BNCC; Child Development.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, based on the guidelines of the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). With a qualitative approach, the research is grounded in bibliographic and documentary analysis, focusing on the BNCC and authors who address child development, playfulness, and pedagogical practices. Play, as a learning right, supports the child's holistic development and strengthens the formation of affective and social bonds, while fostering autonomy and emotional expression. The analysis reveals that social interactions mediated by play significantly contribute to the teaching and learning process. It is essential that teachers recognize the value of play as a legitimate language of childhood. It is concluded that evaluating play should be central to pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, in line with the principles established by the BNCC.

Keywords: Play; Social Interactions; Early Childhood Education; BNCC; Child Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Childhood is recognized as a unique phase of human development, marked by intense social, emotional, and cognitive experiences. In this context, play becomes a child's own language, through which children express themselves, interact, and construct meanings about the world. The value of play goes beyond entertainment: it is an essential pedagogical practice, capable of promoting children's integral development and strengthening their social interactions within the context of Early Childhood Education.

The National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), a normative document that guides educational practices throughout the country, recognizes play as one of children's learning and development rights. By establishing the six learning rights, the BNCC highlights the importance of educational environments that provide meaningful, playful, and collective experiences, fostering the development of emotional bonds and socialization.

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Therefore, this article aims to investigate the role of play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, from the perspective of the BNCC, analyzing its contributions to children's development and to the strengthening of pedagogical practices that are more sensitive to childhood.

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The problem that guides this research is: in what way does playing contribute to social interactions? cials and the integral development of the child in Early Childhood Education, as guided by the BNCC?

The overall objective is to analyze play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, based on the BNCC (Brazilian National Curricular Framework). The specific objectives include: understanding the theoretical foundations of play and its importance in child development; examining the BNCC's learning rights related to playfulness and social interactions; and reflecting on pedagogical practices that foster socialization through play.

Authors such as Vygotsky (1984), Kishimoto (2007), and Janet R. Moyles argue that play is an essential mediating element for the development of higher psychological functions, autonomy, and learning. For Vygotsky, play and interaction with others foster the internalization of cultural meanings and the expansion of zones of proximal development.

Kishimoto (2007) adds that play fosters conflict resolution, the exercise of imagination, and the experimentation of social rules. For the author, play should not be seen as opposed to learning, but rather as a powerful and necessary pedagogical tool. Moyles also emphasizes that play should have its role and status recognized in curriculum planning, as more than a spontaneous activity, but an integral part of educational practice.

This research adopts a qualitative approach, based on a literature review and document analysis of the BNCC (National BNCC). The study examines official documents and reference works on child development, playfulness, and pedagogical practices in early childhood education. The materials were selected based on their academic relevance and theoretical contribution to the proposed topic.

Content analysis shows that, by promoting playful experiences mediated by attentive educators, play fosters the establishment of social relationships, the expression of feelings, respect for differences, and cooperation among peers. Such interactions are fundamental to building a more affectionate, democratic, and inclusive early childhood education.

With this study, we hope to contribute to strengthening the understanding of play as a right and as an intentional practice within Early Childhood Education, fostering teaching practices that are more sensitive to the specificities of childhood and aligned with the BNCC guidelines.

This research provided personal and professional growth, as it deepened understanding of the social role of play and its centrality in the educational process. It is hoped that this work will also benefit educators and future teachers, encouraging pedagogical practices that respect childhood as a time for play, socializing, and learning.

2. CONCEPTUAL BASIS AND DIALOGUE WITH THE BNCC

2.1. *Play as the Language of Childhood*

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Play is one of the most significant childhood activities, widely recognized as fundamental to a child's overall development. Several theorists highlight the role of play in children's social, cognitive, and emotional development, understanding it as the language of childhood. Kishimoto (2007) argues that playfulness is more than a spontaneous activity; it is a cultural, social, and pedagogical phenomenon that promotes the construction of meaning about the world. The author argues that play should be understood as a means of expression and symbolic elaboration, not simply as a moment of leisure.



Janet R. Moyles reinforces this perspective by stating that play is central to the learning process and should not be treated as an ancillary activity in the Early Childhood Education curriculum. The author emphasizes that, during play, children explore, solve problems, practice communication, and experience meaningful experiences that develop social and emotional skills. For her, play needs to be planned, mediated, and evaluated with the same rigor applied to other areas of knowledge, as it represents a legitimate way of learning and relating to the world.

From a historical-cultural perspective, Vygotsky (1984) offers one of the most solid foundations for understanding play as a developmental tool. The author considers toys an essential element for the maturation of higher psychological functions, emphasizing that "in play, the child behaves beyond his or her usual behavior" (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 117). Through symbolic play and social interactions, children internalize cultural norms, learn to deal with rules and feelings, and expand their zone of proximal development. The author understands that it is in play that

-account that the child projects social roles, anticipates behaviors and structures his identity in relation to the other.

This development process is directly related to the mediation of social interactions.

Playing is, in this sense, a collective act that encourages coexistence, empathy and the exercise of cooperation.

As Kishimoto (2007) points out, play fosters the formation of emotional bonds and strengthens cooperation among children. It is through play that children practice dialogue, resolve conflicts, learn to wait their turn, and recognize the presence of others as part of the educational process.

In the field of educational policies, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) (BRASIL, 2017) recognizes play as one of the six rights of learning and development of children in Early Childhood Education. The document establishes that pedagogical practice with young children must be based on the axes of interactions and play, and proposes five fields of experience in which these dimensions intertwine transversally. The BNCC states that "the experiences lived by children, through play, interactions, and various languages, are fundamental to their integral development."

(BRASIL, 2017, p. 37). Thus, playing is not a peripheral activity, but rather a structuring element of learning and school experiences. Therefore, pedagogical mediation is essential for playing to fulfill its formative role, an aspect discussed in more detail in the next topic.

In this sense, it is observed that the learning rights proposed by the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) are directly related to the dimensions developed through play in Early Childhood Education. The following is a table that relates these rights to the aspects of development favored by playfulness:

Table 1 – Relationship between the BNCC Learning Rights and the Aspects Developed through Play

Right to Learning (BNCC)	Supportive Development through Play
Coexist	Development of empathy and respect for others
To play	Imagination, creativity, symbolic expression
To participate	Exercise autonomy and active listening
Explore	Curiosity, experimentation, problem solving
Express	Verbal and nonverbal communication, emotions
Get to know each other	Identity construction, self-esteem, self-regulation

Source: Prepared by the author based on the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), Vygotsky (1984), Kishimoto (2007) and Moyles.



As the table shows, play plays a cross-cutting role in developing the competencies outlined in the BNCC, not limited to a single right but permeating all of them. In this context, play is both a means and an end: it constitutes a formative experience in itself and, at the same time, fosters children's cognitive, affective, and social development. By connecting learning rights with the aspects developed through play, educators broaden their perspective on the importance of playfulness and strengthen more intentional, inclusive, and humanized pedagogical practices.

2.2. *The Role of the Educator in Mediating Play*

The educator's role is central to facilitating playful experiences in Early Childhood Education. It's not just about allowing children to play freely, but also about recognizing play as a structuring axis of the curriculum and planning situations that expand their learning and socialization opportunities. According to Moyles, teaching should be guided by pedagogical intentionality, sensitivity, and active listening to ensure that play aligns with educational objectives without losing its spontaneity and authenticity.

Kishimoto (2007) emphasizes that teacher mediation is essential to give meaning to playful experiences and ensure that all children have opportunities to participate. The author emphasizes that the educator must observe, intervene when necessary, propose challenges, and offer materials and environments that stimulate imagination, dialogue, and collaboration. In this sense, the Early Childhood Education professional ceases to be merely a "supervisor" and becomes a formative agent, transforming play into an intentional, powerful, and inclusive educational experience.

The BNCC also assigns the teacher the role of organizer of the educational environment, ensuring time and space for play in its multiple forms: spontaneous, guided, symbolic, rule-based, collective, or individual. Based on this, mediated play gains pedagogical contours, being articulated with the competencies provided in the fields of experience and promoting meaningful learning from the earliest school years (BRASIL, 2017).

2.3. *Play and the Construction of Children's Autonomy*

Play represents a pedagogical practice capable of promoting, in addition to social interaction, the development of children's autonomy. In early childhood education, autonomy is understood as a child's progressive ability to make decisions, act on their own initiative, and actively participate in everyday situations. This construction does not occur in isolation, but is mediated by playful experiences that allow children to test hypotheses, face challenges, make decisions and deal with frustrations in symbolic contexts. Thus, playing is configured as a territory of freedom and learning, where the child exercises his or her protagonism in an active and meaningful way.

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According to Piaget (1975), the development of autonomy occurs through children's actions in the world, with play being one of the richest ways to organize this action. Through play, children create rules, modify them, and internalize values, norms, and limits, moving from heteronomy (external regulation) to moral autonomy. For the author, symbolic play fosters the development of a sense of identity, in addition to stimulating imagination and self-expression.

Wallon (2007), in turn, highlights the role of emotions and the body in the development of self-awareness and awareness of others. For him, play integrates the affective, motor, and cognitive aspects of the child,





offering a privileged space for building autonomy in an emotionally safe environment.

The alternation between individual initiatives and collective negotiations in the act of playing favors the exercise of choice, self-control and empathy, which are fundamental for the formation of an autonomous subject.

The National Common Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2017) reinforces this perspective by recognizing that autonomy must be encouraged from the earliest years of school life. The document highlights that play is one of the structuring axes of Early Childhood Education and states that pedagogical practices must guarantee “the right of children to express themselves, position themselves and act in an autonomous and participatory manner” (BRASIL, 2017, p. 39). Among the six learning rights provided for, “participating” and “knowing oneself” are directly related to the construction of autonomy and find in playfulness an essential path for their development.

It is therefore up to the educator to foster experiences in which children can make decisions, assume responsibilities, and explore different forms of expression. As Kramer (2003) points out, child autonomy is not something that is taught directly, but rather experienced through educational practices that value listening to children, freedom with responsibility, and confidence in their abilities. By providing moments of play in which children are the authors of their own actions, the teacher contributes to the development of self-aware, critical, and participatory individuals.

In this way, play transcends its recreational dimension to consolidate itself as a space for developing autonomous individuals, capable of acting in the world with responsibility and creativity. Autonomy, built through the small decisions of play, represents one of the pillars of an education that respects childhood as a time for experimentation, discovery, and self-affirmation within the community.

In short, play constitutes the language of childhood, a means of socialization, and an instrument of integral development, assuming a central role in the formation of autonomous and critical individuals. The BNCC recognizes and values this practice, but it is teaching action mediated by intentionality and listening that transforms play into a pedagogical experience. Thus, understanding play in its complexity is essential to inform educational proposals that respect the multiple dimensions of childhood.

Therefore, the theoretical frameworks analyzed converge toward the understanding that play is a child's right, a legitimate language, and a powerful tool for development. By articulating theory, educational policy, and pedagogical practice, it is understood that play, when intentionally mediated, acts as a formative axis of social interactions and contributes to a more sensitive, democratic, and transformative education.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research is characterized by a qualitative approach, based on a bibliographic and documentary review. The choice of this type of research is justified by the nature of the research object, which involves understanding social, cultural, and pedagogical phenomena related to play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, as guided by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). According to Minayo (2014), qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings attributed by subjects and documents to social processes, which proves appropriate to the topic in question.

Regarding the methodological procedure, the research consisted of the analysis of official documents, with an emphasis on the BNCC, and the review of academic works that discuss play, playfulness, children's autonomy, and social interactions in the context of Early Childhood Education. Gil (2008) emphasizes that bibliographic research allows the construction of a theoretical framework based on contributions from different authors, enabling the critical analysis of the object studied. In addition, documentary research allows the



interpretation of normative texts, such as the BNCC, relating them to pedagogical practices.

The sources used were classic books in the field, scientific articles published in academic journals, and official normative documents from the Ministry of Education. The selection criteria included the authors' theoretical relevance to understanding the topic, the current relevance of the works, when possible, and their direct connection to the defined axes of analysis: play as the language of childhood, the role of the educator in mediating play, and the development of children's autonomy.

Data analysis was performed through critical reading and interpretation of the materials, seeking to identify convergences and divergences among the authors, as well as how the BNCC guides pedagogical practice regarding play and social interactions. According to Bardin (2011), qualitative content analysis allows for the systematic organization and interpretation of information, favoring a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied.

Thus, the adopted methodology allowed us to base the discussion on playing as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, articulating pedagogical theory with the normative guidelines of the BNCC, in order to highlight the importance of playfulness in the integral formation of the child.

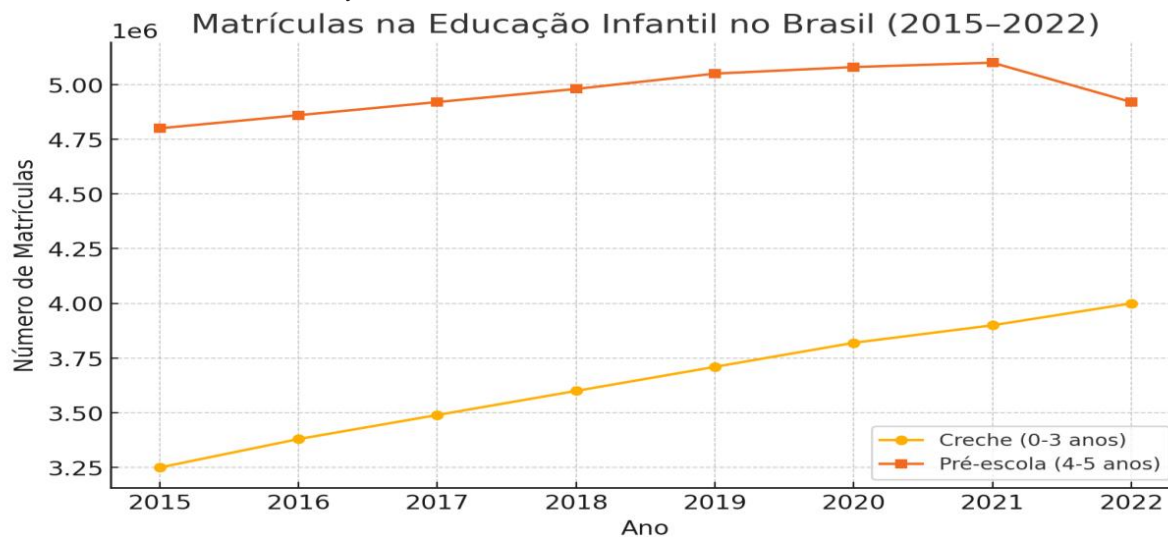
4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of Early Childhood Education and Play in Brazil

According to the Basic Education School Census (INEP, 2022), Brazil has more than 8.9 million children enrolled in Early Childhood Education, distributed between daycare centers (0 to 3 years old) and preschools (4 to 5 years old). The BNCC, approved in 2017, established parameters that aim to ensure that all these children have access to playful, interactive, and meaningful experiences, ensuring the right to play as a constitutive dimension of the educational process (BRASIL, 2017).

However, research indicates that there is still a gap between what is prescribed and what is actually done. A study by Kishimoto and colleagues (2018) found that, although teachers recognize the importance of play, many practices still focus on directive activities and anticipated school content, reducing the space for spontaneous and creative playfulness.

To better understand the scope of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, we examine the evolution of enrollments in daycare centers and preschools from 2015 to 2022. Data from the Basic Education School Census (INEP) allow us to visualize the growth in supply and highlight the need for this expansion to be accompanied by pedagogical practices based on play, as recommended by the BNCC (National Framework for Child Development). This evolution can be seen in Graph 1, which shows the number of enrollments in daycare centers and preschools in Brazil between 2015 and 2022.

Chart 1 – Enrollment in Early Childhood Education in Brazil

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the Basic Education School Census (INEP, 2015–2022).

The data presented in the graph show that the expansion of enrollment in daycare centers and preschools needs to be accompanied by pedagogical practices based on playfulness to ensure the realization of the learning rights provided for in the BNCC. In this sense, as already discussed in Table 1, the six rights to coexist, play, participate, explore, express, and know oneself find their primary basis for fulfillment in play.

An analysis of the concepts of Vygotsky, Piaget, Wallon, Kishimoto, and Moyles demonstrates that theory and curricular guidelines intersect. Table 2 summarizes these connections, reinforcing the centrality of play in early childhood education.

Table 2 – Convergences between Theory and BNCC

Author	Theoretical contribution on play	Correspondence with the BNCC
Vygotsky (1984)	Playing creates a zone of proximal development and promotes the internalization of social rules.	Fields of Experience: “The self, the other and the us” / “Listening, speaking, thinking and imagination”.
Kishimoto (2007)	Playing is a pedagogical practice that promotes bonds, co-participation. Rights: Coexist, Play, Park, operation and creativity.	
Moyles (2002, trans.)	Play is central to the curriculum, and should be planned and evaluated.	interactions.
Piaget (1975)	Playing favors the construction of moral autonomy.	Rights: To Participate and Know-se.
Wallon (2007)	Emotions and body integrated into play develop self-control and empathy.	Fields of Experience: Body, gestures and movements.

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Source: Prepared by the author based on BRASIL (2017), Vygotsky (1984), Kishimoto (2007), Moyles (2002, trans.), Piaget (1975) and Wallon (2007).

4.3 Challenges in Implementing Play as a Pedagogical Axis

Although there has been progress in valuing play, studies point to challenges for its effective implementation. Oliveira (2020) observes that the pressure for measurable results and the anticipation of schooling



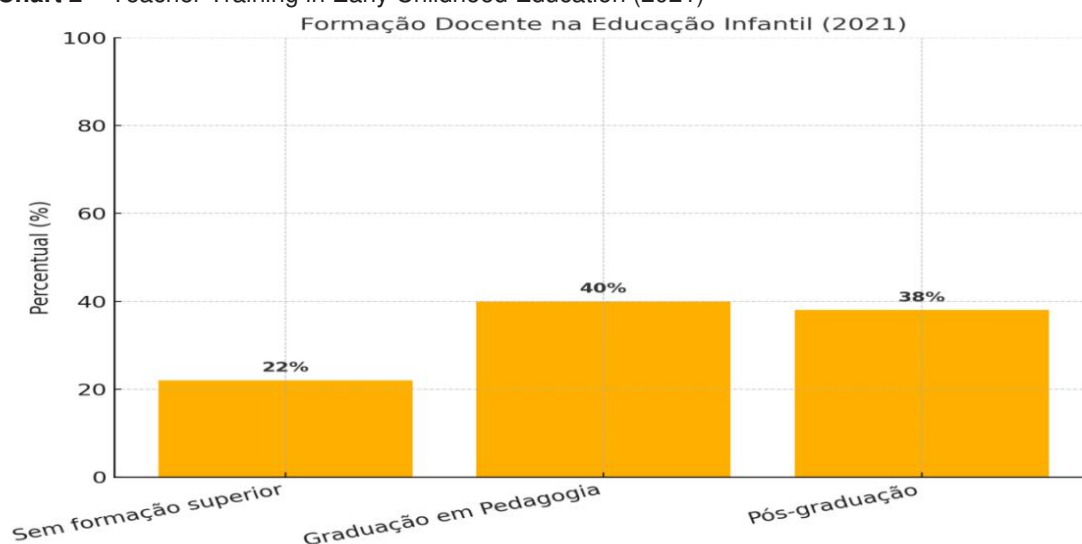
lead many schools to reduce play time and space in favor of more content-based activities.

This reflects the persistence of a fragmented view of childhood, which disregards playfulness as a legitimate means of learning.

Another challenge concerns teacher training. According to the Continuous PNAD (IBGE, 2021), most Early Childhood Education teachers have completed higher education, primarily in Pedagogy. However, the number of teachers with continuing education or specific postgraduate degrees in the field is still low, which can directly impact the understanding and appreciation of play as a pedagogical practice.

Without adequate training, there's a risk of play being treated as mere recreation rather than an intentional educational space. This data can be seen more clearly in the percentage distribution of early childhood education teachers in Brazil, as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2 – Teacher Training in Early Childhood Education (2021)



Source: Prepared by the author based on data from PNAD Contínua – Education (IBGE, 2021).

The data reveal that, despite advances in teacher education, a significant proportion still lacks adequate training. This situation directly impacts the appreciation of play, as less-prepared teachers tend to reproduce traditionalist practices, treating play as recreation rather than as intentional pedagogical practice.

In this sense, a paradox emerges: while the BNCC establishes play as a fundamental axis of Early Childhood Education, school practices still tend to minimize its centrality. This demonstrates that the challenge is not only normative, but also cultural and formative. The effective realization of play as a right depends on three factors:

- political and institutional commitment to valuing the BNCC not only as a formal document, but as a real guide to pedagogical practice;
- continuing teacher training, which expands the theoretical and methodological repertoire of teachers;
- change in social and educational paradigm, recognizing childhood as its own time, and play as a legitimate learning and life experience.

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Given the above, it is clear that play occupies a central place in the child development process, both theoretically and normatively, and is widely supported by the BNCC (National Curricular Framework) and specialized literature. However, its effective implementation still faces obstacles related to school culture and teacher training. Overcoming these challenges requires not only investment in professional qualifications but also a paradigm shift that recognizes childhood as a time of



legitimate way to play, socialize, and learn. This understanding is fundamental to guiding more democratic, inclusive, and humanizing pedagogical practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to analyze play as a mediator of social interactions in Early Childhood Education, based on the guidelines of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). To this end, three specific objectives were established: to understand the theoretical foundations of play and its importance in child development; to examine the learning rights provided for in the BNCC that relate to playfulness and social interactions; and to reflect on pedagogical practices that promote socialization through play.

The theoretical and documentary analysis demonstrated that play is recognized as a legitimate language of childhood and constitutes one of the main instruments for a child's comprehensive development. Authors such as Vygotsky, Kishimoto, Moyles, Piaget, and Wallon emphasize that, through play, children develop cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills, internalize cultural norms, and build their identity. Play is not limited to recreational activities but rather represents a formative axis of childhood, essential for learning and socialization.

From the point of view of educational policies, the BNCC attributes a central role to play, recognizing it as one of the six learning rights and as a structuring axis of the Early Childhood Education curriculum. This perspective reinforces the need for intentional pedagogical practices that ensure meaningful and inclusive experiences capable of fostering emotional bonds, cooperation, and child autonomy. The data analyzed also highlighted challenges in the effective implementation of play in institutions, highlighting the need to expand teacher training, overcome early schooling practices, and value childhood in its uniqueness.

It is concluded that play must be understood and valued as a child's right and as an essential pedagogical practice that articulates theory, policy, and educational action. It is up to the educator to assume the role of mediator, planning and organizing playful situations that foster expression, interaction, and the development of autonomy. In this sense, the consolidation of a democratic, humanizing Early Childhood Education that is sensitive to the specificities of childhood depends on recognizing play as a central axis of learning and development.

Finally, this study contributes to the reflection on the importance of play in Early Childhood Education and can support teachers, administrators, and future educators in developing pedagogical practices more consistent with the principles of the BNCC. Future research, based on empirical data, is recommended to investigate how play has been effectively implemented in Brazilian schools, in order to broaden understanding of the progress and challenges still facing Early Childhood Education in the country.

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