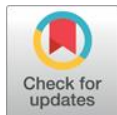



Playing in inclusive early childhood education in pedagogical practices for children with disabilities



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Abstract

The research aimed to understand the role of playing in inclusive pedagogical practices for children that are the target audience of special education (TASE). The study took place in a Municipal Early Childhood Education Institution in a small city of Pará. A teacher from Kindergarten II class was a participant in the study. The survey procedures involved semi-structured interviews and observation during the classes. Content analysis was used to process the data, organized into thematic categories: playing in the process of including children and planning and pedagogical practice: the centrality of playing and games. The results suggest that playing makes it possible to strengthen bonds between children and contributes to the process of including children with and without disabilities in Early Childhood Education. Playfulness helps the methodological strategies that make teaching practice more efficient and productive, being essential in inclusive Early Childhood Education

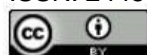
Keywords

child education; educational inclusion; to play; children with disabilities; pedagogical practices.

O brincar na educação infantil inclusiva nas práticas pedagógicas para crianças com deficiência

Resumo

A pesquisa teve por objetivo compreender o papel do brincar nas práticas pedagógicas inclusivas para crianças público-alvo da educação especial (PAEE). O estudo ocorreu em uma Instituição Municipal de Educação Infantil no interior do Pará. Foi participante do estudo uma professora da turma do Pré-II. Os procedimentos de levantamento envolveram a entrevista semiestruturada e a observação participante. Para o tratamento dos dados, foi utilizada a análise de conteúdo, organizado nas categorias temáticas: o brincar no processo de inclusão das crianças e o planejamento e prática pedagógica, a centralidade dos jogos e brincadeiras. Os resultados sugerem que o brincar viabiliza o fortalecimento de vínculos entre crianças e colabora com o processo de inclusão de crianças com e sem deficiência na Educação Infantil. A ludicidade auxilia as estratégias metodológicas que tornam a prática docente mais eficiente e produtiva, sendo indispensável na Educação Infantil inclusiva.



Palavras-chave

educação infantil; inclusão educacional; brincar; crianças com deficiência; práticas pedagógicas.

El juego en la educación infantil inclusiva en las prácticas pedagógicas para niños con discapacidades**Resumen**

El objetivo de la investigación fue comprender el papel del juego en las prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas para niños objeto de educación especial (PAEE). El estudio tuvo lugar en una Institución Municipal de Educación Infantil del interior del estado de Pará. Participó en el estudio una profesora de la clase de Pre-II. Los procedimientos del estudio incluyeron entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación participante. Se utilizó el análisis de contenido para procesar los datos, que se organizaron en categorías temáticas: el juego en el proceso de inclusión de los niños y la planificación y la práctica pedagógica: la centralidad de los juegos y el juego. Los resultados sugieren que el juego permite fortalecer los vínculos entre los niños y contribuye al proceso de inclusión de niños con y sin discapacidad en la educación infantil. La lúdica ayuda a las estrategias metodológicas que hacen la práctica pedagógica más eficiente y productiva, y es indispensable en la educación infantil inclusiva.

Palabras clave

educación infantil inclusiva; el juego; niños de educación especial; prácticas pedagógicas.

1 Introduction

Playing is an active part of children's development and learning, which stimulates their psychosocial, cognitive and motor dimensions. Through playfulness, children interpret and appropriate the world. As well as cultural objects, relationships and affections. It is an essential activity in which children discover knowledge, interact and express feelings and emotions.

In childhood, play stimulates the development of cognitive, motor, social and emotional skills, such as imagination, memory, reasoning and perception, as well as creativity, attention, interactions, affections and motor coordination. It is a practice that allows children to make decisions, demonstrate feelings and values, get to know themselves and others, as well as experience and share pleasurable actions (KISHIMOTO, 2017).

When children play, they connect with culture and modify practices according to their participation and interference in the adult universe. Play provides the appropriation of cultural and social elements, enables the creation and manifestation of the expression of being and doing; and also empowers the individual in their different interactions with the external world (FRIEDMANN, 2012).

Play between children promotes social involvement. Playful interactions help develop children's psychological processes and subjectivity. Playing "together" in childhood highlights the importance of building their social worlds, because through this activity, children learn to play the roles of an adult life (PEDROSA; CARVALHO, 2013).

According to Vygotsky (2003), playing is the main activity of childhood. The author, when studying symbolic games or make-believe play, stated that this activity stimulates the zone of proximal development and aids the development of the child's psyche.

In the context of early childhood education, official documents guarantee the child's right to play. The National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) guarantees play as a right. The document signals the need for school institutions to be committed to actions that aim at child development through play, in different spaces, forms and times and with different partners (BRASIL, 2017).

Playing, as a curricular axis of Inclusive Early Childhood Education, is an important dimension in the planning of pedagogical actions, aimed at the development and learning of children that are the target audience of Special Education (TASE). According to Trinca and Vianna (2014), playing enables inclusive practices with a diversity of activities, games and plays that can be put into practice. However, the teacher needs to be aware of the children's needs and levels of development and plan activities that provide participation, inclusion and the strengthening of the relationships between disabled and non-disabled students.

According to Giroto, Vitta and Araújo (2019), pedagogical work in inclusive Early Childhood Education presupposes taking into account the particularities of children, their different ways of appropriating knowledge, and a reorganization of educational systems that take into consideration the differences between the subjects.

From this initial debate, we focus on the significance of playfulness in inclusive Early Childhood Education and its cross-cutting relationship with Special Education,

understanding play as a facilitator of the development and learning process, essential in planning and pedagogical practice for TASE children.

Based on the ideas above, the general aim of this research is to understand the role of playing in inclusive teaching practices for children who are the target audience of special education (TASE).

2 Methodology

We adopted a qualitative approach in our research, since we sought to understand the meaning given by the teacher to the role of play in the process of including children with disabilities and in her teaching practice. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1994), in a qualitative approach, the researcher visits the environment in which the phenomenon to be studied naturally occurs and seeks out the meanings of the given social phenomenon.

The locus of the research was in the city of Augusto Corrêa, in the state of Pará, in a preschool and an elementary school, in a Kindergarten II class. The class consists of 16 children aged between five and six. The institution takes care of 333 students (morning and afternoon shifts); it includes six classrooms, a room where the secretariat and management work, a computer lab, a Multifunctional Resource room where Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) works, a kitchen, two bathrooms, an area for storing snacks and a sports court.

The research participant was the teacher of the Kindergarten II, who is 41 years old, has a degree in pedagogy, specialized in psycho-pedagogy and has been teaching for 15 years (in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Youth and Adult Education). In this class there were two children with disabilities, one with Down's Syndrome (DS) and the other with hearing impairment (HL). Both were six years old and male. Fictitious names have been used to protect the identity of the participants. The teacher was called Ana, the child with Down's Syndrome was called Luiz and the child with hearing loss was called Ricardo.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with a pre-established script and observation during the classes. The script involved questions about inclusive education and disability, playing in early childhood education, pedagogical planning/practice and

curricular flexibility, as well as interactions between children (with and without disabilities). For the interview, we requested the participant's authorization by filling a consent form. The observation happened in the period of six months, twice a week, lasting approximately two hours a day. During this period, the researcher took part in teaching activities in Kindergarten II in an Inclusive Early Childhood Education class. A written register, field notebook and photographs were used.

In processing the data, we organized it based on the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2011). We structured it in three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results, inference and interpretation. The data from the observations was organized, transcribed and the units of meaning or thematic axes were removed.

3 Results and Discussion

The data was structured in two thematic axes: (1) Playing in the process of including children and the work of teachers, and (2) Planning and pedagogical practice: the centrality of games and play.

3.1 Playing in the process of including children and the work of teachers

The interview and observations showed that playing was part of the routine in the Primary class. According to the teacher, this activity helped in the process of welcoming and including children with disabilities in school. The playing was also important to stimulate interactions between children and between children and adults. Educational games, free and direct plays were the most common activities seen during the kindergarten day that were led by the teacher.

The observations showed that the teacher used playing in her teaching practice to work on welcoming children into the school, especially the children that are TASE. The games were organized to welcome and stimulate social interactions (between children without disabilities and children that are TASE, and between children and adults); as well as for the children to explore the school spaces. This was particularly noticeable in the first

three months of the school term. Some strategies, such as playing with a ball in the school's outdoor area, conversation circles with toys brought from the child's home, playing with puppets and playing together with animal masks made by the teacher, among others, were part of the class routine in the first few months of the school year.

In the interview, the teacher revealed that at the beginning of the school year it was challenging to work on the inclusion of children, especially in the class that had children with disabilities. According to her, the children with disabilities didn't want to take part in activities or interact with the other children without disabilities, they wanted to play on their own and showed resistance to staying in the classroom (they wanted to go back to their homes). Thus, she adopted playfulness as a working strategy, using directed play and educational games in her pedagogical planning/practice.

The teacher pointed out that this was her first experience with children with disabilities, and although it was challenging, the experience was stimulating; despite the difficulties in planning and teaching actions. In her statement, Ana reflects on the inclusion of children in Early Childhood Education and the role of playfulness in this process.

We know that inclusion is a challenge; something complex on a day-to-day basis, but early childhood education is one of the best times to work on inclusion. This is the first time I've worked with two children with disabilities in a single class, and they have different disabilities. I think that playing is fundamental at this time, it contributes a lot to inclusion, as it involves everyone, strengthens bonds, works on acceptance and respect between them, helps in the process of welcoming and adapting to the preschool environment... I believe that inclusion happens through play (Teacher Ana).

Regarding the process of welcoming the children that are the TASE, the teacher reported that directed play and educational games were fundamental to her planning and teaching practice. The teacher sought to provide a welcoming, safe and enjoyable environment. According to her, the participation of children with disabilities occurred gradually, requiring her to be creative and flexible in her teaching activities.

With regard to the interaction dynamics between children, the teacher revealed that at first there was a lot of resistance from children without disabilities to interacting with children with disabilities. Some children were afraid to get close to children with DS and HL. However, she used playfulness in her pedagogical actions to mediate interaction and coexistence between the children. She said:

The first challenge, and the one that caused me a lot of distress, was to work on their inclusion within the context of the classroom and then include them with the others; I was mainly concerned about the delay in adapting the child with DS and the children's routine. The strategy I used was the constant use of games and play. The result was satisfactory and helped me a lot! A major concern was how to work on the interaction between children with and without disabilities. Relationships are good when the teacher is able to include these children without them suffering any kind of discrimination from their peers, and so carry out the activities and make them interact with each other in collective activities, and games and play were essential for this (Teacher Ana).

Children learn and develop in their relationships with the environment, in their community and culture, through the mediation of physical or symbolic instruments. Socializing with more experienced people and targeted participation promotes development and learning. Therefore, the way adults organize everyday life influences child development, varying according to the cultural context (VYGOTSKY, 2003; ROGOFF, 2005). The school must encourage social interactions and present pedagogical procedures that stimulate and provide qualitative leaps in children's development.

Observation of the class revealed that playful activities were the guiding principle of planning and pedagogical practice. These actions were present in the daily life of the class. In general, all the children took part in the planned games. The teacher interacted with the children through gestures, attitudes and vocalizations in order to socialize them and get them involved in the play activities. In these episodes, the teacher asked the children without disabilities to treat Ricardo (a child with HL) and Luiz (a child with DS) with affection and encouraged interaction between them.

The first part of the day was spent playing games with adapted educational toys, such as bingo to recognize shapes, obstacle games, memory games and puzzles, among others. In these activities, the children stayed in groups and the teacher talked and explained how to do them. In the groups with children with disabilities, she stayed longer.

In the process of including the children, the observations showed that at the start of the school year the children with disabilities interacted very little with other children and had a minimum participation in the activities. They were shy and somewhat insecure about their surroundings. Interactions between the children increased between two and three months with the teacher's interventions, and pedagogical practices focused on playfulness helped Luiz and Ricardo's participation and inclusion.

The teacher had a little more difficulty with Luiz (a child with DS), as he didn't like taking part in activities and interacting with other children. Playfulness played an essential role in welcoming him, just like the interaction and participation in classroom activities. With Ricardo (a child with HL), the teacher took less time to work on welcoming and participation. By the second month he was already interacting with other children and the teacher, as well as taking part in activities. She always included the children with disabilities in the play groups and monitored the children's actions.

When entering a new environment, such as school, there is a possibility that the child will display a new set of behaviors, with different feelings and attitudes; for example, they may regress in some behaviors, change their appetite and display shy behavior. In this situation, the teacher has to be attentive to welcoming the child and planning teaching activities that meet the child's needs, especially in terms of affectivity.

We agree with Cenci and Santos (2018) when they state that interactions and bonds with the groups help in the phase of welcoming and adapting the child to school. According to the authors, interactions and bonds can facilitate the child's learning, development and autonomy. Therefore, when welcoming children, it is necessary to plan collaborative strategies and involve everyone: child, family and school staff.

In the data observed, the teacher welcomed the children with greetings and affectionate attitudes. In some situations the non-disabled children didn't want to play with the disabled children, and her intervention was to talk to everyone, take their hands and form groups, as well as taking part in games with them. The survey also revealed that both guided and free activities were supported by playfulness. After break time, the games were free; on this occasion, the teacher made sure that the whole group of children took part. We noticed a lack of specialized pedagogical support.

In the daily records, we noticed that the teacher was in constant conversation with the mothers of the children with disabilities. She asked them about their personalities, their characteristics and their routines at home. For the teacher, the conversations with the mothers were a way of getting to know the children.

The data suggests the importance of the family-school relationship, specifically between parents and teachers, for the inclusion, reception and learning of children with

disabilities. By providing information about the children's characteristics, parents contribute to the teacher's planning of specific actions, as well as acting as stimulators of child development. We agree with Veiga (2008) when he states that parents are important players in school inclusion, as they provide information about the child's development and help to recognize the child's potential, so that the reception and preparation of adapted teaching resources can be well planned.

In her practice, teacher Ana used affective and collaborative strategies, such as noticing Luiz and Ricardo's shyness, holding their hands, including them in activities (playful or not), showing affection, helping with activities, which led to more frequent interactions between the children (with and without disabilities), with more collaborative attitudes between them. In this context, it is suggestive to say that the teacher's welcome and the planning of playful and cooperative activities helped to build positive interactions between the children, proving to be an effective resource for stimulating coexistence between the children, as well as providing them with security and autonomy to explore the environment.

The data is in line with Silva's research (2018), which highlights the role of the teacher as fundamental in stimulating interactions between children with and without disabilities, considering that children with disabilities tend to have fewer interactions with their peers. The teacher also needs to establish specific strategies for children with disabilities so that they can participate in games with other children.

Official documents such as the National Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) of 2010 and the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) of 2017 ensure that interactions and play are structuring axes in the Early Childhood Education curriculum. These should facilitate behaviors, skills and knowledge in the various experiences that promote learning and development (BRASIL, 2010, 2017).

Playing in early childhood education institutions is essential for the construction of children's knowledge. In this activity, the child constructs meanings, is able to express themselves and be creative. Play stimulates imagination, autonomy, social interaction and the construction of values (KISHIMOTO, 2017; PUERARI, DRESCH, GRAUPE, 2020).

Interactions between children are an important dimension in child development and learning; this interrelationship facilitates the construction of the child's subjectivity and

psychological processes. Duarte, Alves and Sommerhalder (2017) in a study carried out in an Early Childhood Education institution concluded that the relationship between children in playing contexts is essential for the development of personal identity and for learning, since in play activity they create rules, exchange subjectivities, teach and learn.

3.2 Planning and teaching practice: the centrality of games and play.

Regarding planning and teaching practice, the participant revealed in her narrative that she sought to introduce methods that included all the children in the pedagogical organization. She reported that the playing represents a central role in her teaching activities with the children. One issue brought by the teacher was her difficulty in implementing an inclusive teaching practice, especially when it came to flexible planning. The heterogeneous class required different practices from her, which took a lot of effort. She tried to carry out activities aimed at meeting the specific needs of the children. The use of playfulness in the proposed activities was a strategy, because as well as being a support for learning, it facilitated interaction between the children and between the teacher and the class.

It's a big challenge to achieve inclusion on a daily basis, it's not easy to make a flexible plan that caters for the whole class, it takes more effort to look for and prepare adapted resources with play as the main focus in order to cater for children with disabilities. I used games a lot to make it easier for the children to get along (Teacher Ana).

The adversities encountered and the challenges of working with the inclusion of children with disabilities were aspects that emerged from the participant's narrative, and playful activities were essential in her planning. Teacher Ana emphasized the difficulty she had in planning and inserting games and plays adapted for children with disabilities, especially the child with HL, since she didn't master sign language; but she saw it as something challenging, which made her search for new knowledge. She also revealed that she missed the specialized support teacher, the pedagogical coordinator and an assistant teacher.

In the beginning, I had a lot of trouble coming up with educational games and adapted games that would suit the whole class, including children with disabilities. I also didn't know sign language and that made me feel insecure. I would have liked more support from the pedagogical coordination and I would have liked an assistant

teacher or caregiver. I also miss the synchronized work with the special education teacher in the multipurpose resource room (Teacher Ana).

The data suggests that the reality of Early Childhood Education does not always converge with the official documents, signaling an inclusive educational policy with problems. This is due to a number of issues that go beyond teaching, such as poor training, a lack of collaborative practices between management/coordination, a teacher for the multifunctional resource room and the teacher from the regular classroom for planning and discussion of class problems. There are also few resources at the institution and a lack of methodologies adapted to children with disabilities. These issues and others hinder the success of inclusive practices. From this perspective, an assertive inclusive policy is essential, with a set of actions, including the support of the coordinator and the Multipurpose Resource Room teacher, as well as direct contact with the children's families for planning and inclusive pedagogical practice. Another essential aspect for inclusive practices is in-service training in the area of special education.

Bruno and Nozu (2019) point out that although normative inclusion policies have advanced in Early Childhood Education, there are still major challenges in operationalizing them. This implies analyzing spaces, times, professionals and methodological resources aiming at the access, permanence and development of children with disabilities. Collaborative practices between the specialized teacher in the multipurpose resource room and the regular classroom teacher and encouraging interactions between children with disabilities and children without disabilities are relevant actions. This requires a change in the school structure, in order to modify a culture of isolated work; with the construction of a new culture in which knowledge is shared to encourage the learning and development of all children.

Reflecting on inclusive practices takes us back to public education policies. There is a discrepancy between what is recommended in official documents and the reality of early childhood education institutions, which influences successful inclusive practices. Campos (2013) states that social policies that have made quality of life possible should be given more prominence and a greater role in education; the author also suggests that few resources

and conditions are offered for quality education, which can lead to a low potential for integral development and possibilities for exclusion.

We believe that actions are needed from institutions responsible for educational policies (whether at federal, state or municipal level) that effectively lead to successful inclusion practices. Changes in the pedagogical project, in supplementary and complementary resources, in teacher training, in collaborative practices (between teachers in the multifunctional resource room and the regular classroom, between management and teachers and between institutions) are some of the actions that need to be implemented if there are to be successful inclusive practices.

According to Vitta, Silva and Zaniolo (2016), the difficulties of including children with disabilities in early childhood education, specifically in nursery schools, are related to a number of factors, including institutional aspects related to objectives, funding for the pedagogical project, teacher development and material resources.

The professional development of teachers is an important aspect of inclusive teaching practices. According to Jardimino and Sampaio (2019) there is a contradictory position in the policies of municipal and state education networks regarding the teacher training, because although official discourses encourage teacher qualification, in practice they limit the training process, since they offer few conditions for such training.

In her teaching actions and in the planning process, teacher Ana says that playing was fundamental in the welcoming process and in the course of daily activities. The most common types of free play were rubber bands, hide-and-seek and make-believe. In guided play activities, the teacher organized games, educational games and adapted objects and/or toys so that all the children could take part. Some of these games were made from scrap metal. During the school day, free play took place at break time and every Friday.

In the interview, the teacher said that educational games and play are part of the class's daily activities; she uses them as a didactic strategy, guiding content in a playful and enjoyable way. She says that by intentionally introducing play, children are able to assimilate the subject more easily. She sees play as an important activity for stimulating children's development in different skills. She also pointed out that she has moments of free play, such as make-believe, tag, ring-around-the-rosie, etc. in her daily routine. She tells us:

Before introducing a new subject, I bring something different, a game, a dynamic, music, a video... something that precedes and immediately prepares the student to assimilate the content [...]. They can also learn by playing! more slowly, with a little more difficulty, but they learn like the others! (Teacher Ana).

The teacher's planning makes it possible to organize activities in terms of strategies, spaces, materials, resources, time, etc. This stage of the teaching process is basic to developing playful and inclusive activities that take into account the differences and diversity of the class and produce more efficient results. Planning playful activities enables progress in school performance and allows for greater interaction and total development of the children (OLIVEIRA, 2003; SILVA, 2014).

School planning based on inclusion is a challenge, with considerable barriers, such as poor school infrastructure, scarce materials, limited resources, little awareness of the role of playing in childhood, a large number of children and a lack of complementary training (CORDAZZO; VIEIRA, 2007; OLIVEIRA, 2009).

According to Carneiro (2012), the union between the knowledge acquired by the teacher in their professional career and the possibility of looking for new procedures and ways of teaching, taking into account the diversity and heterogeneity of the class and the individual differences of the students is what should characterize inclusive teaching practice.

We therefore believe that teaching practice in early childhood education should be based on an analysis of children's needs. Initially, this practice must provide a welcoming atmosphere, then plan activities so that it is possible to offer playful scenarios and actions that stimulate the child's cognitive, emotional, physical and social abilities. The teacher must be creative and flexible. They must also foster the child's autonomy and self-esteem, encourage interactions and enable the building of skills.

Therefore, welcoming children when they enter the school and planning playful activities make it easier for them to live in early childhood education. Playing and games help to build socio-affective relationships and the children's subjectivity. It is therefore up to the school in its curriculum organization process to propose playful activities to facilitate the child's learning and development. In the process of planning the teaching practice, it is necessary to create resources and strategies based on playfulness to encourage the development of socio-affective, cognitive and motor skills, and the individuality of each child.

4 Final considerations

This article proposed to investigate the role of playing in inclusive pedagogical practices for children with disabilities in early childhood education; seeking to understand the significance attributed to play in the inclusion process.

The teacher perceives inclusion as an earned right; She understands that she is one of those responsible for including children. However, the school scenario and its “fragility” have made it difficult to implement inclusive pedagogical practices. The data also indicate that playfulness played a central role in pedagogical planning and practice, especially in the process of welcoming children with disabilities. Playing contributed to positive coexistence between children and helped in the development of activities, taking into account their specificities.

The pedagogical practice based on playing allowed differentiated actions, in which children with or without disabilities learned and developed in different dimensions and skills.

Playing provides different advantages, among them, collaborating with the process of welcoming children with and without disabilities, providing the strengthening of emotional bonds (with positive social exchanges and understanding of others). Furthermore, the use of playing and games is an efficient strategy for building relationships; Thus, the teacher, when assuming the role of mediator, stimulates children's relationships and learning. In conclusion, playing is essential in inclusive education; it enables children with and without disabilities to adapt to the school context and overcome their resistance. And it makes the classroom environment a pleasant and stimulating place.

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Responsible publisher: Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho

Ad hoc experts: Munique Massaro e Valdete Côco

Translator: Juliana Souza Nascimento

How to cite this article (ABNT):

NASCIMENTO, Deisiane Aviz do; SOUSA, Neide Maria Fernandes Rodrigues de. O brincar na educação infantil inclusiva nas práticas pedagógicas para crianças com deficiência. *Educação & Formação*, Fortaleza, v. 8, e11284, 2023. Available at:

<https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/11850>



Received on August 22, 2023.

Accepted on November 1st, 2023.

Published on December 28, 2023.

