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# “My backyard is bigger than the world...”: play as experienced by early childhood education teachers

*“Meu quintal é maior do que o mundo...”: o brincar vivenciado por professoras da Educação Infantil*

*“Mi patio es más grande que el mundo...”: el juego vivido por las docentes de Educación Infantil*

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## Abstract

This article, derived from doctoral research, aims to understand the ways in which early childhood education teachers perceive and experience play. It is based on the conception that being a Playful Teacher is a construction shaped by the Professional Development of Teachers in Early Childhood Education. The research adopts a qualitative approach, with data produced through three instruments: a questionnaire, the Caderno de Memórias Brincantes (Playful Memory Notebook), and oral narratives generated through the Narrative Interview, mobilizing playful experiences of three teachers working at a public daycare center in Rio Real (BA),

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Brazil. The comprehensive-interpretative analysis of the narratives enabled the emergence of meanings and characteristics that helped us understand the ways of Being a Teacher in Early Childhood Education, related to the repertoire of play transmitted throughout life, play in school, play outside school as freedom, the challenges of adult perceptions of play, and its influence on teaching practice. The results indicate that reviving each teacher's relationship with play is a challenge to be faced, particularly when understood as a specificity of this profession. We conclude that play needs to be recognized as teaching knowledge, running through the entire professional journey of early childhood teachers.

**Keywords:** Play. Early Childhood Education. Teacher Professional Development.

## **Resumo**

*O presente artigo, derivado de uma pesquisa de doutorado, tem como objetivo conhecer os modos de ver e vivenciar o brincar por professoras da Educação Infantil. Parte-se da concepção de que Ser-Professora-Brincante é uma construção atravessada pelo Desenvolvimento Profissional Docente na Educação Infantil. A pesquisa segue uma abordagem qualitativa com narrativas produzidas a partir de três dispositivos: um questionário, o Caderno de Memórias Brincantes e as narrativas orais geradas por meio da Entrevista Narrativa, mobilizando experiências brincantes de três docentes que atuavam em uma creche da rede pública de Rio Real (BA). A análise compreensiva-interpretativa das narrativas nos possibilitou emergir significados e características que nos ajudaram a conhecer os modos de Ser Professora na Educação Infantil, relacionados ao repertório de brincadeiras transmitidas ao longo da vida, ao brincar na escola, ao brincar fora da escola como liberdade, aos desafios da percepção adulta do brincar e sua influência na prática docente. Os resultados apontam que o brincar das professoras está muito associado às memórias da infância fora da escola e que estas relacionam-se ao desenvolvimento profissional docente. Assim, entendemos que reavivar o brincar de cada professora é um desafio a ser enfrentado, quando se entende que esta é uma especificidade desta profissão. Concluímos que o brincar precisa ser reconhecido como saber docente, devendo atravessar todo o percurso profissional de professoras das infâncias.*

**Palavras-chave:** Brincar. Educação Infantil. Desenvolvimento Profissional Docente.

## **Resumen**

*Este artículo, derivado de una investigación doctoral, tiene como objetivo conocer las formas en que las profesoras de Educación Infantil perciben y vivencian el juego. Se parte de la concepción de que ser Maestra-Jugante es una construcción atravesada por el Desarrollo Profesional Docente en la Educación Infantil. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo, con datos producidos a partir de tres dispositivos: un cuestionario, el Cuaderno de Memorias Jugantes y las narrativas orales generadas mediante la Entrevista Narrativa, movilizando experiencias lúdicas de tres docentes que trabajan en una guardería pública en Rio Real (BA), Brasil. El análisis comprensivo-interpretativo de las narrativas permitió que emergieran significados y características que nos ayudaron a comprender los modos de Ser Maestra en la Educación Infantil, relacionados con el repertorio de juegos transmitidos a lo largo de la vida, el juego en la escuela, el juego fuera de la escuela como libertad, los desafíos de la percepción adulta del juego y su influencia en la práctica docente. Los resultados indican que reavivar el juego en cada profesora es un desafío a ser enfrentado, especialmente cuando se comprende como una especificidad de esta profesión. Concluimos que el juego necesita ser reconocido como saber docente, atravesando todo el recorrido profesional de las maestras de la infancia.*

**Palabras clave:** Juego. Educación Infantil. Desarrollo Profesional Docente.

## First places: arriving in the backyards...

*I think the yard where we played is bigger than the city. You only discover that once you've grown up. You discover that the size of things has to be measured by the intimacy you have with them. There's to be like love. So the pebbles in our backyard are always bigger than the other pebbles in the world. Just because of the intimacy.*

(Manuel de Barros)

The expression chosen to begin this study leads us to reflect on the perspective of childhood in contrast to adult life. By telling us that the "yard you played in is bigger than the city" (Barros, 2015, p. 124), the poet suggests that childhood memories and experiences have a grandeur that we often only fully understand when we become adults.

From backyard childhoods, we remember Paulo Freire (2012, p.25) when he introduces himself as a "boy born in Recife, from a generation that grew up in backyards, in close contact with trees". And he adds: "my memory could not fail to be filled with experiences of shadows". In the backyards evoked by Barros (2015) and Freire (2012), the two reveal that the adult we are is the one intertwined with emotions and memories, and the "backyard" is the inaugural universe that underlines the importance of our existences, the link that unites us, woven by the fabrics of our childhood.

The backyard, the territory of childhood, symbolizes the place where playful memories are kept and we "always have a backyard, a street, a corner, a smell of the ground, a cold that cuts, a heat that suffocates, a value that is fought for, a lack felt, a leftover that mistreats the lack, a language that is spoken in different intonations". (Freire, 2012, p. 41). And what can we find in the "backyard" of memories? The answers to this question will be unveiled as we delve deeper into our theoretical intimacy (Play, Early Childhood Education and Teacher Professional Development) and interpretive intimacy through the narratives of the teachers taking part in this research.

However, living these memories to the full requires crossing the barriers imposed by the society of tiredness (Han, 2015) which, with its incessant demands for productivity, has taken us away from these memories of playful backyards. Transformed into entrepreneurs of ourselves, we have lost the moments of pause, idleness, leisure and pleasure that marked our childhood. Play has been silenced in us, as if it were something dispensable. And by burying play, we also buried our ability to transform, imagine and give new meaning to the world. However, by embracing the profession of Teacher-being in Early Childhood Education, we are challenged to rescue the backyards of childhood in order to invent practices, actions, purposes and relationships with our subjects: the children.

In this context, teaching is configured as a field in constant transformation, shaped by experiences, spaces, people and contexts, multiple dimensions that forge the professional we become throughout our careers. Addressing Teacher Professional Development in Early Childhood Education (DPDEI) is, therefore, recognizing teaching as a field in permanent movement, in which teachers move through different periods and face different challenges throughout their careers. This journey is both individual and collective, technical and subjective, structured and fluid, requiring training actions that respect and expand teachers' potential, consolidating the profession as a space for continuous growth and transformation. In order to understand these dynamics, it is necessary to observe how the DPDEI is characterized as an integrated, continuous process that is crossed by multiple factors that shape and transform teaching practice (Ferreira, 2023a; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2009).

The aim of this study was to learn about the ways in which Early Childhood Education teachers see and experience play, and it focuses on the constitution of playful Teacher-being in Early Childhood Education, mobilizing teachers' "playing experiences".. The expression "playful experiences" encapsulates memories of games played throughout life, from childhood to adulthood, which have left significant emotional marks. To broaden this understanding, Larrosa (2002) highlights the importance of the subjective and experiential dimension in the construction of knowledge, arguing that experience is not just

a transmission of objective facts, but a complex process that involves interaction between the subject and the world around them. From this perspective, "experience is what passes through us, what happens to us, what touches us. Not what occurs, not what happens, or what touches" (Larrosa, 2002, p. 27). Therefore, experience is influenced by personal emotions, cultural, historical and social contexts, and is intrinsically linked to collective and individual feelings. It is seen as an active process of constructing meanings, in which the subject attributes meaning to their experiences and uses these interpretations to understand the world around them.

We understand that playful experiences are collaborative in the formation and construction of being a person and a professional, characterizing the way of seeing and experiencing play in the daily routine of Early Childhood Education. Certainly, the possibility of resorting to narratives constitutes significant material that complements the teachers' education and self-education. The conversations and images weaved throughout the research about what they played, what their favorite games were or what games they chose to play with the little ones at nursery school, reveal the wealth of experiences that reflect conceptions, behaviors, standards, values, professional and personal attitudes, and these are our first insights into teaching in Early Childhood Education.

With the backyards of memory revived, we have drawn up this article in four sections: in the first, we reflect on play in the (com)position of Teacher-being in Early Childhood Education; then we outline the methodology of the research *Between backyards: methodological paths*. In the *Backyards of Memory* section, we delve into the narratives in an attempt to understand and analyze the ways of seeing and experiencing play in Early Childhood Education. Finally, in the section *Communion of Backyards with Memory*, we present the study's final considerations.

## **Playing in the (com)position of Being a Teacher in Early Childhood Education**

There are many reasons why we are (com)posed as teachers; in addition to the professional and technical knowledge of the profession, there are many other reasons why we are formed as teachers-women-mothers-aunts-wives, among other roles that we take on throughout our careers. To speak of this place is to approach studies on Professional Teacher Development that affirm and attest to these observations, such as Ferreira (2023a) and Oliveira-Formosinho (2002). Teaching in Early Childhood Education today continues to face the challenge of no (or little) professional recognition. Far from presenting a fixed or standardized understanding, we seek to demarcate the field of study on PDD in Early Childhood Education in Brazil, so that we can contribute to broadening reflections on public training policies that take into account the specificities of the profession.

In the search for studies that approach CPD from a more specific perspective, focused on the ways of being a teacher in Early Childhood Education, we highlight the contribution of Oliveira-Formosinho (2009). His research, carried out in the context of Portuguese education, offers innovative reflections on the specific aspects of teaching professionalism at this stage, with emphasis on the relationship between the characteristics of this professionalism and the different contexts in which teachers work. In this sense, Oliveira-Formosinho defines PDD as "[...] a continuous process of improving teaching practices, centered on the teacher, or a group of teachers in interaction, including formal and non-formal moments, with the concern of promoting educational changes for the benefit of students, families and communities" (2009, p. 226). The author is based on an ecological, relational approach, as she confirms that all the contexts in which the EI teacher is inserted influence learning and the development of teaching practice in the classroom. This concept broadens the view of the impacts of professional development, which transcend teaching practice and benefit children, families and communities.

Understanding play as one of the constituent elements of Teacher Professional Development in Early Childhood Education (DPDEI), we want to draw attention to the challenge of teachers' play. Many

teachers may not be familiar with play, which can be attributed to different factors, one of the most significant of which, in our view, is the need to understand play based on the play experiences accumulated throughout life, from childhood to adulthood. Over time, we are subjected to the rationalization of life, the denial of play and the overcoming of childhood, often seen as an unproductive phase for capital.

When analyzing the presence of play in the practice of early childhood education teachers, it is essential to consider this subject in its complexity, with all the subjectivities and conscious and unconscious structures that make it up. We have observed that a teacher who doesn't know how to play or doesn't like to play is unlikely to get involved in games with the children in her class. By reconnecting with her play experiences, the teacher can develop a keener sensitivity to creating learning environments that value and promote play, stimulating children's imaginative exploration. This awareness also allows the teacher to better identify her professional needs. From this perspective, "not only are the children subjects of the learning process, but their teachers are also included in the fascinating process of being an eternal learner, a builder of their professionalism" (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2002, p. 14), which reveals the need to enable teaching experiences and theoretical-practical knowledge capable of promoting new meanings of play in the daily routine of Early Childhood Education.

We agree with Gobbi and Pinazza (2014, p. 38) when they say that adults must nurture their "inventive capacity". In other words, during playtime, the preschool teacher must regain her "playful" dimension. This doesn't mean going back to being a child or playing as one, but rather becoming part of a playful culture. This culture distances itself from the logic of productivity and mechanization imposed by capitalism, and comes closer to the sensitive and creative experience of reactivating the Playful Being that we were - and that children provoke us to be - in and through multiple languages, as Richter (2017, p. 14) points out:

Being playful implies a demanding and questioning experience of language, because only when we allow ourselves to be open to new interpretations - ruptures and reconnections - can we carry forward the becoming of ourselves. This is the game: the joy of expanding thought. Gaming and playing with meanings alludes to the creative and inventive force of what is done for its own sake, for no reason or prior "already knowing", but for being where you are - here and now, in other words, for "not knowing yet". That's experience, that's play.

Based on this understanding, it is a question of adopting a concept that allows the teacher to recognize herself as someone who plays, who lets herself be affected by play and who learns from it. The playful teacher is not limited to being a recreationist, or using play as a pedagogical strategy; she makes herself present, open to the unexpected and to the infinite possibilities of being touched by the creative capacity to construct meanings together with children. This movement requires abandoning rigid certainties, because we are talking about play as a creative, free proposal that includes pleasure and uncertainty.

By coining the term Playful Teacher-being, we are referring to a professional attitude that values childhood as a time of discovery and imagination, which implies connecting with the multiple languages present in play - words, gestures, objects, sounds, traces and even silences - and being willing to experiment with "not knowing yet". This return to the Playful-being reflects the need to create a learning environment that values freedom, creativity and being present in the here and now. We are aware that changing the value patterns of teaching is not a task that simple "training" can solve. However, when approaching the DPDEI, it is necessary to overcome the mistaken idea that the polyvalent training offered by the Pedagogy course is enough to work in EI, Nursery and Pre-school, because we know that the format [and ways] made available today by Higher Education institutions to train teachers, do not take into account all the specificities pertinent to early childhood, perhaps of Playful Teacher-beings.

Thus, the approach of this study reveals that Being a Teacher in Early Childhood Education transcends the limits of the profession's professional and technical knowledge. Throughout this journey, we are shaped by a multiplicity of roles and experiences that go beyond the classroom. We assume the



identity of teachers, women, mothers, aunts, wives and other roles that intertwine and make us up as multifaceted beings. This constant process of (com)position challenges us to continually reinvent ourselves, to position ourselves in the face of challenges and to impose ourselves in the face of adversity. As we develop as teachers, we also develop as human beings, in a continuous cycle of learning and transformation. We therefore believe that being a teacher in Early Childhood Education is a journey of self-discovery and constant movement, as we (com)position ourselves.

## **Through backyards: methodological paths**

In the search for answers to the questions that arose during the construction of the research, we anchored ourselves in a comprehensive approach to sociological phenomenology, Schütze (2011), as a reference in the mission to analyze how the reflections of play reveal the ways of Teacher-beings in Early Childhood Education, we were able to elucidate how this aspect reveals itself in different phases of their personal and professional trajectories.

In this way, we can see that, even though they share the same context, their consciences apprehend the phenomenon differently, because there will always be additional content in their narratives that form part of the representation along Husserlian lines. Therefore, this is individual experience, with an emphasis on subjectivity or, in Schutzian terms, individual experience as a derivative experience of other T's (family, work, religion) and society (Schütze, 2011).

From this reflection came the choice to listen to those who construct the narrative in "educational situations" (Josso, 2007), in other words, the teachers. To do this, we had the support of three nursery school teachers. The *lôcus* chosen to carry out the research was the Bem-te-vi Nursery School (fictitious name) located in the town of Rio Real, in the northeast of the state of Bahia. In 2023, the nursery had 247 children enrolled between 06 months and 05 years old, with 11 classrooms and 11 classes, accounting for 22 teachers.

In order to build closer ties, we used the following methodological devices: a questionnaire, a Notebook of Playful Memories, and Narrative Interviews. The Notebook of Playful Memories was a research tool produced for use during the "BrincAteliê", which was a device derived from inspiration in Delory-Momberger's (2003) concept of a biographical project atelier, with a formative character to raise awareness of reflection and the construction of meaning through personal expression. The proposals included dialogues, writing and drawings, records of which enabled us to share oral, written and graphic narratives. The choice to listen to and analyze narratives is associated with a specific type of interview, developed and named by Schütze (2011) as the Narrative Interview (NE) (Jovchelovitch; Bauer, 2015). In view of this, the choice of NL was justified with the intention of understanding what they narrated as a constituent part of their life and training trajectories.

The research that led to this article was carried out as part of the doctorate in Education, linked to the Postgraduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and approved by the School of Nursing's Research Ethics Committee (opinion no. 68162823.2.0000.5531). Ethical care permeated all stages of the research, from the development of the methodological devices to the production of the narratives. In order to guarantee respect for the participants' autonomy, privacy and integrity, strategies were used such as signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF), the teachers themselves choosing fictitious names and creating a welcoming environment during the interviews and the BrincAteliê. Understanding ethics as a living and relational practice (Larrosa, 2002), we sought to establish relationships of trust and co-responsibility. It is worth noting that the fictitious name of each of the teachers was chosen by them during the BrincAteliê and recorded in the Notebook of Playful Memories that was given to each one when they were asked to recall and choose a game or toy that could represent them. In addition to the notebook, they also answered a questionnaire on personal and professional information, as shown in the table below:

Figure 1 – Profile of the research participants



Source: Table drawn up by the researcher (2025).

To interpret the narratives, we opted for Schütze's (2011) comprehensive-interpretive analysis, an approach that allowed us to grasp the teachers' experiences in their complexity, including both subjective and intersubjective aspects. Thus, through voices, silences and memories, the methodological paths we took allowed us to collect fragments of stories that, intertwined, reveal the ways in which these women-teachers see and experience play. Listening to them was like entering the backyards of memory - and, in this soil of sharing, the narratives that underpin this research flourished.

## Backyards of memory: ways of seeing and experiencing play in Early Childhood Education

In the backyards of memory, where memories and experiences intertwine with lines from the past and present, an interpretive journey begins. Here, the terms "memory" and "backyard" take on a sensitive need for explanation, shedding light on the interpretative analysis that follows. It is from the delicate traces in the drawings in the Notebook of Playful Memories and the stories told during the Narrative Interview that we weave our way. The uniqueness and intrinsic richness of the narratives of the teachers taking part in this research are considered precious, transcending their conventional meaning to reveal ways of seeing and experiencing play. The challenge now presents itself: to unravel these narratives and act as interpreters of understandings, revealing the secrets and nuances of the universe of play.

The first step was intimacy, when we (the researcher and the teachers) began to play. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the participants in this research, we proposed starting with a swap game, which began like this: What if we agreed to play in a different way, swapping names and changing the game? If you could replace your name with a game or toy, what would it be?

It's interesting to see how the pseudonyms emerged loaded with meaning, significance and the desire to eternalize, as the teachers recalled a stage of their lives, which was childhood. In the first proposal for the Notebook of Playful Memories, the drawing of children gathered in a field began to give shape to what would become her name, referring to a game she used to play when she was a girl, the teacher said aloud as she drew, which would be almost impossible to keep to herself. Next to her, the other teacher was enthusiastic as she told us about the backyard of her house, the trees that provided shade to build the "little

house" and the swing that her father had hung from the branch of the mango tree. We also heard a story about her dream of getting a "baby doll", a wish that was only fulfilled when her first daughter was born. At the center of the memories, traces and tales, each of them shared their decision about the name they had chosen, the story they had written and the drawing represented in the Notebook of Playful Memories. Thus, I present to you the protagonists of this research:

Figure 2 – Name and representation of the research participants



Source: Teachers' Memoirs (2023).

As announced, after giving meaning to their names through drawings and oral sharing, the participants showed the choices they had made and told the stories behind their choices. Listening to their memories, we curiously wondered: where did their memories come from, childhood, motherhood, living with children at school? Wherever they came from, these memories anchored in the ships of our memories (Evaristo, 2008), made it possible to bring to light playful experiences that open up like a sea of interpretative possibilities.

When we think back on these moments, we realize that the names chosen refer to childhood games, a common link between all the participants in the research. And even though time has moved on, the memories of this chapter, that of childhood, seem to echo, bringing with them the purity and joy that permeate good memories. Recovering memory sheds light on the ways in which all the participants see and experience play, since "memory" transcends the mere retention of mnemonic data; Ricoeur (2007) understands it as an act of remembering, an active process of reconstruction and reinterpretation of the past.

These memories are, in fact, subjective interpretations we make of past events, subject to constant fluctuations, transformations and changes, and can be understood as a "phenomenon constructed both socially and individually" as pointed out by Pollak (1992). In line with this view, Halbwachs (2003, p. 69) characterizes it as a social phenomenon, as he understands that "the sensations of memories, even



personal ones, are always explained by the changes that take place in our relationships with the various collective environments". In this dynamic, the construction of memory highlights the past as a raw material that can be constantly molded and remodeled as we get involved in telling our own stories.

This understanding enriches the reflection on the representativeness chosen by early childhood teachers, when their reminiscences reveal a preference for non-school spaces, playing in backyards, open and spacious environments, where time and space are not rigidly limited. These settings convey an idea of freedom, allowing them to explore their creativity and imagination to the full, without the restrictions imposed by the strict school structure of their childhood.

The doll, house and hide-and-seek games, narrated orally and visually, reveal a kind of play that took place in backyards, on the streets, under the shade of trees, at a time when childhood manifested itself freely. If, in the childhood of the participating teachers, the school didn't provide play, at least their backyards and streets guaranteed this experience. However, the scenario has changed: contemporary childhoods often have school as the only space available for play. This could represent a step forward if school institutions provided playful experiences, but, as recent research has shown, school has consolidated itself as a disciplinary space, where play is restricted, regulated and often instrumentalized for pedagogical purposes (Gnoatto, 2020; Rosa, 2020).

Throughout history, the school has functioned as a disciplinary instrument of the political system, delimiting bodies, times and spaces, imposing norms and rules that override the spontaneity of childhood (Foucault, 2002). Play, in many contexts, was gradually controlled, whether by standardizing toys, regulating playtimes or transforming play into a teaching tool, stripping it of its free character. Schools during the participants' childhoods already operated within these control patterns, and today this logic persists, especially in the face of educational policies that reinforce early schooling and the anticipation of content to the detriment of play (Gnoatto, 2020; Rosa, 2020).

This regulation of play affects teachers, shapes their practices and their way of conceiving pedagogical work. As Ferreira (2014, p. 157) points out, "the marks of school define being", in other words, the experiences lived in this space contribute to their professional development. In this process, the teachers learned to mold themselves to institutional standards, inscribing their bodies and gestures within a certain disciplinary logic. Play, for many of them, remained in the past, restricted to their own childhoods, and the reproduction of practices that restrict play at school reflects this trajectory.

When they talked about their experiences of playing at school, they didn't remember a teacher who played, which suggests that play was dissociated from teaching practice. In addition, the teachers reported little time for play, conditioned by a rigid routine, controlled by signals and sirens, which organized activities into watertight compartments that were not open to spontaneity.

*Teacher Doll: At the village school I didn't play, it was a multi-grade class, the school even had space to play, but they wouldn't let us play. The recess was quick, I'd have a snack and go back to the classroom. [...] In my career, I only remember one teacher who played, the second grade teacher, she got involved in the games. She played dodgeball, soccer. (Narrative Interview)*

*Teacher Little House: I can't remember ever seeing an adult playing with a child in the playground, it was usually just us children! Or in the classroom, even worse, the teacher had to impose respect. (Narrative Interview)*

*Teacher Hide-and-seek: Even though it was a school that didn't have a big playground, we always found a way. It's a pity that there wasn't much time for recess and there was a girl watching and complaining, as if she were a play supervisor, telling us not to run, not to shout, not to push. (Narrative Interview)*

The absence of adults playing reinforces the mistaken idea that play is exclusively for children. The limited space and time for play reflects a restrictive view of children, while the absence of toys points to public policies that have not prioritized the creation of rich and stimulating environments for play, offering adequate infrastructure and continuing training for educators, with a focus on curricula that do not privilege play as a specificity of teaching in early childhood.

In this way, we can say that the training (initial and continuing) of teachers who work in Early Childhood Education becomes a determining factor in broadening this restricted view of play and, likewise, as a possibility of appropriating new knowledge to guide changes in their daily practices. In view of this, we emphasize the need for preschool teachers, during their PDD, to have playful experiences as professionals who need to know how to play, in order to be a Playful-Teacher. Having listened to their childhood playful memories, the teachers brought up memories of the present, of how they think about playing in their routines with the children: Asked "how should play be experienced in everyday life with the children?" the teachers answered as part of the routine, as fundamental for those who work in nursery schools:

*Teacher Hide-and-seek: The child, we have to understand that the child comes from home, sometimes the environment they live in isn't good. Children need our help, I teach them games, I play, they teach me too. Things have changed a lot, the child is the first stage, early childhood education is important because it's the basis of everything, but we won't be able to solve everything, unfortunately there are many problems that the child brings. So, I think that's it, the nursery school teacher has to be open, available to enter the student's life and make a mark on them. (Narrative Interview)*

*Teacher Little House: I learned throughout my teaching life that play should be part of the child's routine, I saw how other teachers did it. We need to divide play into free moments and directed moments. In my classroom routine, I try to introduce play in free moments, that moment when I'm playing with my classmates as a form of socialization and interaction. (Narrative Interview)*

*Teacher Doll: You go into nursery and you find yourself being challenged to play. We have to play with them all the time, because they don't stop! I've discovered this, they awaken my memory with my daughter, I remember the games I used to play - the black-faced ox, my little yellow chick... I also remember a teacher who used to tell stories, she was the teacher who gave me the most attention, who was the most affectionate. (Narrative Interview)*

The teachers reveal their ways of experiencing play in teaching from different perspectives, which are influenced by their life experiences and professional careers. Teacher Doll, for example, looks to motherhood as a reference, recalling fond memories of playing with her daughter and of her own childhood, which leads her to perceive play as a constant and essential activity in the nursery. Teacher Little House, on the other hand, finds inspiration in the examples of other teachers, learning throughout her career to give play the objective of promoting socialization and interactions between children.

On the other hand, Teacher Hide-and-seek perceives the demand for play as she takes on the role, recognizing the importance of being open and available to welcome the experiences and challenges that children bring from their family contexts. These different ways of experiencing play, although not necessarily ideal, show how teachers appropriate knowledge about the demands of the profession as they go about their practice, facing new demands, challenges and needs, shaping them and being shaped by them. As such, play in Early Childhood Education emerges as a complex phenomenon, which encompasses both the individual and collective dimensions of "being a teacher".

We also found in the narratives discontinuous and sometimes biased ways of guaranteeing play as a demand from children *versus* play as a child's experience. Teacher Doll mentions that she needs to be playing with the babies all the time, because they won't stop. This excerpt shows a certain inexperience with teaching (justified by her short time in the teaching profession), and at the same time a surprise at discovering that play is the language of children. Malaguzzi (2016, s.p.), in his poem, says that "each child has more than a hundred, a hundred ways of thinking, dreaming and doing, but they are robbed of 99". We need to give them back. As a teacher in Early Childhood Education, we have the privilege of being able to experience play, because we work with children. Who knows, maybe we can go against the grain of a society that has been erasing play from the adult agenda, because we shouldn't stop playing!

This suppression of play gets worse as we progress through the school stages. Educational policy, under the strong influence of neoliberal logic, establishes who can and cannot play - and this authorization is always conditional on pedagogical objectives. In Early Childhood Education, play is allowed as long as it serves to teach content, as it is considered an axis of learning. In elementary school, it almost disappears, being restricted to recess and rare planned moments. And as we progress through the school grades, play disappears altogether, giving way to a teaching model based on the rationalization of time, the standardization of content and an exclusive focus on academic performance.

As the participants revealed, throughout our lives we are gradually forced to replace games with other activities. The make-believe "little school" becomes going to real school, and the same happens with games about professions, about having a house. It's commonplace to say that we stop playing when we grow up, or rather, that stopping playing becomes a necessity so that we become more and more part of the big world. Behind this thinking is the idea that play is child's play, because play isn't serious, it distances us from the real world.

Han (2015) invites us not to follow every step of this straight, linear rhythm; we need to give way to "revolting" movements, which are only possible when we are able to stop and think, look, listen and do, all slowly. May we finally stop. We need to transcend the expectations and demands imposed by today's performance and productivity-oriented society. We need to learn to slow down, because we're going too fast, everything is at "2.0" speed and we can already feel the harmful consequences of this lifestyle.

We've taken the advice of a wise grandmother when she said: "Those who are disappointed die inside. It is urgent to live enchanted. Enchantment is the only possible cure for devastating sadness" (Hugo Mãe, 2021, p.40). For it is only in the field of enchantment (Barros, 2010) that we can find space to explore our creativity, nurture our imagination and seek a deeper connection with ourselves and the world around us. By embracing the in-between time mentioned by Han (2015), we are dancing in harmony with the human essence, celebrating the freedom to be who we are and to express ourselves in authentic and meaningful ways.

However, going beyond the issues raised so far, it is important to point out that the same society that restricts play also silences the memories associated with this practice, which is at the heart of this research. These reflections aim to rescue and give meaning to the memories of play in the current context, because these memories transport us to another era. This rescue can be considered dangerous for contemporary society, because remembering a time when freedom was more prevalent can awaken a desire to return to that state. In fact, remembering is dangerous, as it can inspire a desire to escape the constraints imposed by today's society, which seeks to keep individuals trapped in a culture of productivity and control. The question remains: How can we resist a society that seeks to limit our Playful-Being?

Therefore, with this research we want to propose an invitation to resistance. Remembering to play is, above all, an act of insurgency against a society that has silenced the multiple voices of childhood. Being a playful teacher means, above all, trying to give children back their stolen languages and cultivating a pedagogical practice that values the transformative power of play. It also means fighting for this right - play - as the essence of childhood and as the language of our profession, an intrinsic part of our Professional Teaching Development. This means demarcating play as one of the specificities of Early Childhood Education and, with it, fighting for public policies that listen to us - that listen to children.

## **Backyard Communion with Memory: considerations**

In this context, teachers Doll, Little House and Hide-and-seek's reflections on play take on an even more significant dimension. Their narratives reveal individual stories and essential aspects of the complex relationship between play and the human being, at different stages of life and in different social contexts. Through their experiences, a field sown with meanings emerges, highlighting ways of seeing and

experiencing play: a repertoire of games passed down throughout life; playing at school; a different perspective; playing outside of school; freedom and creativity; the challenges of the adult perception of play; and the influence on teaching practice.

In sharing their life stories, the teachers revealed a deep connection with play, rooted in their childhoods, family ties and multiple roles as mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Their narratives show the generational transmission of a play repertoire that mixes the traditional and the contemporary, revealing how an understanding of play is built up throughout life, rescuing and reinventing a playful memory.

The teachers experienced play beyond the classroom, in backyards, on the streets, with nature, in times without a clock. We realized that play is not necessarily mediated by industrialized toys, but as invention and presence. Their narratives revealed that school has historically been a space where play has been absent or restricted, conditioned to the logic of formal teaching and productivity, which reveals a legacy that still needs to be overcome.

In this article, we state that there is an urgent need to think about Professional Teacher Development in Early Childhood Education in dialog with teachers' playful experiences. By analyzing the memories of playing as formative elements, we identified that being a Playful Teacher-being requires the rescue of a body that plays, feels, creates and relates to the world in a way that is sensitive and open to childhood. Thus, the main contribution of this research is to recognize play as knowledge that runs through teacher training and, more than that, as a way of being a teacher. This implies considering play as training knowledge and as a right - of the child and of the teacher. In the context of the Professional Development of Early Childhood Education teachers, this study points to the need to insert devices that enable future teachers to revisit their childhoods and play experiences as part of the constitution of their professional (com)position. It also points to the need to create training spaces (initial and/or continuing) that welcome the singularities of each trajectory, allowing them to get closer their realities and singularities through listening, memory and presence.

In the communion of backyards with memory, we find a sacred space where we keep the precious memories that shaped our childhood and transformed us throughout our lives. For this reason, we reaffirm that the Professional Development of Early Childhood Education Teachers needs to take into account the particularities inherent to this profession, after all, we are not separate life-profession, we are one-being a woman-mother-aunt-grandmother-wife-teacher in a constant (com)position. And perhaps only by rediscovering play itself can we sustain childhood's right to remain childhood.

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