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Playful Interactions in Early Childhood Education Yards and Rural Spaces: Confluences and Propositions in Research

Interações brincantes nos terreiros de escolas da Educação Infantil do e no campo: confluências e proposições em pesquisas

Interacciones lúdicas en los terreros de escuelas de la Educación Infantil del/en el campo: confluencias y proposiciones en investigaciones

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How to cite: LEAL, F. L.; LACERDA, W. M.; SOUZA, R. G. P. Interações brincantes nos terreiros de escola da Educação Infantil do e no campo: confluências e proposições em pesquisas. *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, Curitiba, PUCPRESS, v. 25, n. 85, p. 589-602, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.25.085.DS10>

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight the significance of yards located in rural areas, emphasizing their role as essential spaces in the daily lives of rural populations. These spaces are found not only around homes but also around schools and other rural institutions. Based on two master's theses conducted in the Cariri region of Paraíba, the study explores yards as places of life, where rural Brazilian ways of living, particularly childhood experiences, come to the forefront. The reflections and discussions presented here are grounded in various academic studies that examine, among other topics, the cultural and social importance of these spaces. It is emphasized that yards are spaces actively inhabited and desired by children in rural properties, settlements, and communities, serving as a reference to the rural world. Finally, it is noted that this contrasts with the predominance of built spaces in urban centers. Although yards are linked to homes and present around early childhood education schools in rural areas, they are not always recognized as valuable pedagogical and community spaces.

Keywords: Yards. Play. Nature. Early childhood education. Rural culture.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar a relevância dos terreiros situados em áreas campesinas, destacando-os como espaços fundamentais no cotidiano das populações desses contextos, presentes não apenas no entorno das casas, mas também ao redor das escolas e demais instituições do campo. Com base em duas pesquisas de mestrado realizadas no Cariri Paraibano, o estudo problematiza os terreiros como lugares de vida, onde se manifestam modos de existência do campesinato brasileiro, especialmente no que se refere às vivências infantis. As reflexões e discussões aqui apresentadas fundamentam-se em diversos estudos acadêmicos que exploram, entre outros temas, a importância cultural e social desses espaços. Enfatiza-se a noção de que os terreiros são espaços ocupados e desejados pelas crianças em sítios, assentamentos e comunidades, sendo compreendidos como referência do mundo rural. Por fim, verifica-se que isso contrasta com a predominância dos espaços construídos nos centros urbanos; pois, embora vinculados às residências e presentes no entorno de escolas de Educação Infantil situadas no campo, os terreiros nem sempre são valorizados como possibilidades pedagógicas e de vivência comunitária.

Palavras-chave: Terreiros. Brincadeira. Natureza. Educação Infantil. Cultura campesina.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar la relevancia de los terreros ubicados en áreas campesinas, los cuales se destacan como espacios fundamentales en el cotidiano de las poblaciones de estos contextos, presentes no solo en el entorno de las casas sino también alrededor de las escuelas y demás instituciones del campo. Basado en dos investigaciones de maestría, el estudio problematiza los terreros como lugares de vida, donde se manifiestan modos de existencia del campesinado brasileño, especialmente en lo que se refiere a las vivencias infantiles. Las reflexiones y discusiones presentadas están fundamentadas en diversos estudios académicos que exploran, entre otros temas, la importancia cultural y social de esos espacios. Así, se enfatiza la noción de que los terreros son lugares ocupados y deseados por los niños en fincas, asentamientos y comunidades, siendo comprendidos como referencias del mundo rural. Por fin, se verifica que eso contrasta con la predominancia de espacios construidos en los centros urbanos, pues, aunque sean vinculados a las residencias y estén presentes en el entorno de las escuelas de Educación Infantil ubicadas en el campo, los terreros son apenas valorados como posibilidades pedagógicas y de vivencia comunitaria.

Palabras clave: Terreros. Juegos. Naturaleza. Educación Infantil. Cultura campesina.

Introduction

This article aims to highlight the spaces of the yards (in Portuguese, *terreiros*), which are taken as characteristic territories of the rural universe. These spaces are close to what we can call backyards and are present both in the vocabulary and practices of rural populations. These spaces are located around homes, schools, and other institutions that are part of the geography of the countryside since they are incorporated into the lives of their subjects.

We investigated the yards as places of life and spaces where a significant part of the Brazilian peasantry develops, through the analysis of two studies¹ conducted in the Cariri region of Paraíba. In these places, events not only occur, but also build ways of life. In particular, the yards observed and experienced in the two studies are those frequented by children, mentioned by them, desired, and occupied in schools, farms, settlements, and communities where they live. They represent a reference to the rural world, where natural spaces are abundant compared to built spaces, and where children circulate in their daily relationships, both at school and in their places of residence.

According to Leal, Cruz, and Silva (2023, p. 5, our translation), yards are “[...] spaces that surround residences and assume a symbolism of life in rural areas. Cared for mainly by women, they are an extension of the home, a place that records the daily lives of the subjects.” Furthermore, the yards, historically linked to residences, are present in the surroundings of rural schools – those located in rural or peri-urban areas –, but they are not always used as a possibility of living and expanding the built spaces, as a place of convergence between broader rural life and the rural school.

Based on the reflection of the yard as a potential for playful interactions between children in Early Childhood Education in schools in rural areas, this article also proposes to reflect on the aesthetics of the yard as something that can and should be expanded beyond rural spaces, as a cultural, social and political experience, which can be found in urban spaces, be they schoolyards, backyards or public squares. It is worth highlighting that this aesthetic expansion can promote new sociability between peers and generations. This provocation emerges from rural culture, which is present in rural schools and can also become a shared experience in urban spaces. These urban spaces, in turn, need to be requalified in relation to the role they can play in the development of children and adults, concerning the possibilities of the body, movement, interactions, learning, and even a new culture of relationships, especially with nature.

The aforementioned investigations are based on an ethical agenda that was not only about the subjects involved, but necessarily with them, since the active participation of the collaborators, including children, was taken into account, considering them as active subjects who perceive and give meaning to the contexts in which they are inserted, based on their specificities and the relationships they establish with their peers and adults (Leal; Lacerda; Souza, 2021). To this end, in addition to formal ethical conduct, such as approval and authorization of research by the Ethics Committee (CEP), priority was given to execute an ethical conception that goes beyond formality and considers, above all, children and other subjects. Thus, actions were planned and developed such as the use of Free and Informed Consent Forms for participating adults, Free and Informed Assent Forms for children, Preservation and protection of the identities of participating subjects, and movements of entry, permanence and exit from the research fields that occurred gradually and agreed with the collaborating subjects.

This article is structured in three parts, in addition to the final considerations: in the first, culture and play are highlighted in the context of the field, as a more comprehensive theoretical discussion. In the second part, two master's theses developed within the scope of the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Campina Grande (PPGEd/UFCG) are presented, which are anchored in the debate

¹ The studies are linked to the Educational Practices and Diversity research line and the Study and Research Group on Childhood, Early Childhood Education and Plural Contexts - Grão, registered in the General Directory of Groups of the CNPq. Both were submitted to the Ethics and Research Committee (CEP) of the Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG), which approved and authorized their implementation through the substantiated opinions under numbers 3.176.143 and 2.918.595.

about rural culture and its relationship with children in school and non-school spaces. The two studies analyzed pointed to the relevance of yards in the contexts of play and broader cultural practices. The third part highlights the yards – typical spaces of rural culture – as living and affective places, experienced by rural subjects in general and children in particular. Hence, the yards are presented as rich spaces, especially for children's games, which use, among other elements, those found in nature and have their own materialities.

Culture and play: perspectives concerning rural children

In this section, we adopt a conception of culture articulated with diversity. We understand the latter as the multiplicity and richness of forms of existence that, despite carrying distinct characteristics in various dimensions, have a central aspect that intertwines such differences: our humanities. Thus, considering as a starting point the complexity of society as a diverse context, we rely on the perspective of culture pointed out by Geertz (1989), by understanding it as a set of meanings that subjects constitute and express within the scope of their social relations. In other words, culture is linked to the meaning of social practices for people, as they produce meaning from this. Culture is produced through what marks us as social collectives. In this direction, Santos (2006, p. 44, our translation) emphasizes:

Culture is a dimension of the social process, of life in society. It does not just concern a set of practices and conceptions, as could be said of art, for example. It is not just a part of social life, as, for example, one could say about religion. It cannot be said that culture is something independent of social life, something that has nothing to do with the reality in which it exists. Understood in this way, culture concerns all aspects of social life, and it cannot be said that it exists in some contexts and not in others.

Thus, since culture is a historical construction that comes from the meanings produced in all social contexts, as a process, all dynamics must be considered spaces of culture, as long as human relations are being constituted from what is significant. Indigenous peoples, people who live in coastal areas, riverside dwellers, peasants, or any other social group produce cultural marks through the way they organize and relate to each other.

In this context, various markers of differences stand out within each cultural arrangement. Dimensions that involve, for example, gender, race, social class, age, and other intersections. Specifically regarding generational issues, we start from a sociological perspective that understands society as a structure organized by structural categories. For example, children, adults, and older adults relate to and experience their cultures socially. However, each social group is marked by specific characteristics, whether due to biological or social conditions.

In this sense, by recognizing children as social actors engaged in the dynamics of life in society, we defend the idea of childhood as a structural category that is constituted, primarily, by children themselves who, based on the relationships they establish among themselves, with adults and cultural artifacts, (re)create ways of being and existing in the world, based on their terms, marked by the dimension of play.

Corsaro (2009) helps us understand this movement by using two key concepts: peer culture and interpretive reproduction. For the scholar, peer culture is "[...] a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro, 1992, p. 162). These are attitudes carried out by children among themselves, whether through imitation, imagination, creation, dialogue, or other forms of socialization. Regarding the concept of interpretive reproduction, the researcher points out that:

The term interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society. Children create and participate in their own peer cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns. The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture but are actively contributing to cultural production and change. The term also implies that children are, by their

very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structure and by processes of social reproduction. That is, children and their childhoods are affected by the societies and cultures of which they are members (Corsaro, 2014, p. 709).

Therefore, regardless of the social context in which children are inserted, they perceive and interpret the situations around them, thus producing children's cultures. In this case, children are affected by the cultural production present in the social spaces they inhabit, but they also influence it and can cause changes in the established dynamics. Based on the understanding of culture and children's cultures, when considering the context of rural areas, we recognize that it is a space with its own cultural aspects, experienced, perceived, and interpreted by children in unique ways. Concerning playing, for example, specific forms of interaction with materialities and spaces stand out, which are possible due to the geographical, social, and cultural characteristics of the context.

The National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, in Portuguese DCNEIs (Brasil, 2009), in Brazil, establish interactions and play as structuring axes of pedagogical practices aimed at children in Early Childhood Education, guaranteeing them spaces, times, and materials that enable experimentation, imagination, and social interaction. Thus, in addition to being a fundamental childhood right, playing is a language of its own and an essential cultural practice for the integral development of children (Brasil, 2009). According to Kishimoto (2010), play is a means by which children explore the world, experiment with new possibilities, and build knowledge. Likewise, Brougère (1998) highlights that playing is not just an act of entertainment but a form of cultural production, through which children give new meaning to their experiences and strengthen their identity. In this sense, playing enables rich and meaningful interactions, contributing to the construction of meanings about reality and the active insertion of children in their sociocultural context.

However, its meaning cannot be reduced to a generic or decontextualized view. Studies, such as those by Corsaro (2009) and Sarmento (2005), show that play is a cultural practice through which children interpret, recreate, and attribute new meanings to the world around them. In the context of Early Childhood Education in rural areas, playing presents particularities marked by the relationship between children and the rhythms of nature, the materials available in the environment, and the open spaces that encourage autonomy and experimentation. According to Gouvêa (2019), interaction with these elements enhances significant learning, connecting children to their cultures and territories, a thought similar to that of Almeida and Barbosa (2020), who state that playing in the countryside keeps local traditions alive, strengthening community ties and the construction of children's identity.

Based on two empirical studies conducted with children from rural areas in the Cariri region of Paraíba, we highlight the specificities of playing in the context of rural areas, showing how it is structured based on community experiences, contact with nature, and the social dynamics of the territory. By analyzing these practices, we seek to avoid an empty approach to play, recognizing its complexity and its multiple dimensions in the constitution of rural childhood.

In the rural context, playing takes on specificities related to local culture, open spaces, and more accessible materialities, especially nature and its elements. Rural children build their games based on natural elements and community practices, exploring backyards, yards, rivers, and plantations as playful environments rich in possibilities (Oliveira, 2012; Silva; Corsino, 2020). This relationship with the environment expands sensory and cognitive experiences, favoring significant learning and strengthening the bond with culture and territory.

Thus, guaranteeing the right to play in Early Childhood Education, especially in rural areas, means recognizing its power as a language of childhood and an essential pedagogical strategy for the integral development of children. By respecting and encouraging games that emerge from the territory and rural culture, the school contributes to a more contextualized and meaningful education, strengthening children's identity and sense of belonging to their environment.

This perception directly dialogues with the assumptions of Childhood Geography, which recognizes that children have their own language, memory, and spatial experience, distinct from those of adults, but deeply contextualized in their environment and interconnected with society and culture. (Lopes, 2019). From this perspective, children not only inhabit space but constitute it as territory and place, creating a continuous interaction between objectivity and subjectivity.

In the contexts analyzed here, playful experiences go beyond preserving the culture of play, highlighting how children remain connected to the space in which they live. These games reaffirm their belonging to the territory and produce culture, as Brougère (1998) states. For the author, the toy, as an object, has a significant cultural value, functioning as an artifact that expresses the meanings produced by the human being. When playing, rural children not only have fun but also actively participate in cultural construction, integrating elements of rural daily life into their playful expression.

Based on the concept of culture already highlighted, we corroborate Freire and Faundez (1988), who emphasize that the simplest gestures of everyday life also reveal culture, such as the way of speaking, eating, greeting, and organizing oneself to play. Thus, playing, in rural spaces and elsewhere, transcends the act itself, manifesting rural culture and the interaction of children with the world, redefining space and its relationships.

In the rural context, an essential aspect of play resides in materialities and privileged contact with nature. According to Piorski (2016), natural materials found on the ground, such as twigs, stones, and leaves, have high educational and cultural potential because, when reinterpreted by children during play, these elements stimulate creativity, strengthen the connection with nature, and contribute to integral development. The author emphasizes the importance of valuing spontaneous play as a universal language, capable of interpreting and transforming the world around us, especially in contexts where the bond with the natural environment is more intense, such as in the rural contexts noted in the studies mentioned.

From this perspective, Tiriba (2019) argues that nature must be recognized as an essential space for children's experiences, defending the need to "unwall" the school, so that children can experience playing outdoors, expanding their possibilities for learning and interacting with the environment. This approach reinforces that contact with natural elements expands children's imagination and autonomy and strengthens their relationship with their territories and cultures.

The "unwalling" of the rural school enables the children to use the external spaces called yards (*terreiros*) in several regions of Brazil, such as the Northeast. Although equivalent to the courtyards and external spaces of schools located in urban contexts, the yards maintain an intrinsic relationship with rural culture in their designation, function, and singularity. Proof of this is that, as we will see later, children living in rural areas refer to the school's external spaces as yards, where they enjoy playing and moving around.

In the following section, we will discuss two studies developed in rural contexts that present data and concepts of different orders. Both found yards as powerful spaces in their findings, which are configured as a fact and as inspiration for other practices concerning the education of rural and urban children, whether in their homes, in their communities, or at school.

Contextualization of two studies developed at PPGEd/UFCG: Early Childhood Education in the Cariri region of Paraíba

The master's thesis entitled "The demand for Early Childhood Education in rural areas: the perspective of families from the Zé Marcolino Settlement, in Cariri, Paraíba" (Lacerda, 2019) was developed in the Graduate Program in Education (PPGEd), at the Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG). The research focused primarily on rural children and their right to education, emphasizing Early Childhood Education. It also sought to understand the perspective of the families of these children about their education, especially concerning the demand for a school located in a settlement in the Cariri region of Paraíba.

The object of study of this investigation was the demand of families in the Zé Marcolino settlement for education and school for children aged 0 to 5 who reside there or live nearby. The research was based on studies by Leal and Ramos (2012), Silva and Pasuch (2010), Rosemberg and Artes (2012), and Silva, Pasuch, and Silva (2012), among others. In it, we discuss Early Childhood Education and Rural Education as already consolidated areas of study, in addition to addressing Early Childhood Education in rural areas as an emerging area of research. We explore the concept of family and, specifically, rural families, highlighting the importance of family ties as structuring elements for the rural population.

Furthermore, we problematize the concept of demand in its relationship with educational provision, highlighting the importance of families' cultural belonging in the formulation of curricula and pedagogical practices. We also discuss the concept of territory in its material and relational dimensions, as well as the concept of resistance associated with rural movements.

From a theoretical-methodological point of view, this is qualitative research (Ludke; André, 1986; Minayo, 2008), described as a case study (Martins; Theóphilo, 2007). Data were collected using techniques such as observation, semi-structured interviews, field diary, and photographs.

The rural settlement researched is located between three municipalities in the Cariri region of Paraíba and is a community structured in four agricultural districts. Its production base is focused on agriculture, mainly cotton, corn, and beans. Furthermore, horticulture has an essential role, with coriander, zucchini, lettuce, and cherry tomatoes predominating. However, the community's main subsistence activity is raising goats, whose milk production has a fundamental role in feeding families and generating income, whether through their consumption or the sale of milk and its derivatives.

The settlement has had a Residents' Association since its creation, which has had a fundamental role in fighting to guarantee the rights of rural workers, strengthening community organization, and promoting improvements in the quality of life of settled families. At the time of the research, 86 families lived in the settlement, including approximately 17 children aged 0 to 5 years and 21 children aged 6 to 12 years. This expressive number demonstrates the relevance of these subjects in the community and the importance of initiatives aimed at their development and well-being, such as education.

Fifteen subjects involved in the organization and routine of the studied settlement and school participated in this study: five representatives of families who required the settlement school for their children, five representatives of families who do not require the settlement school for their children, two representatives of the residents' association, the teacher of the multi-grade class of Early Childhood Education, the manager of the settlement school, and the Secretary of Education of Prata-PB (municipality where the settlement is located).

The data collected revealed that the experience of Early Childhood Education in rural areas, as well as the other stages of Basic Education (Elementary Education and High School) developed in the settlement school, is guaranteed by the struggle and resistance of families in defense of their children's right to education and the need for this education to take place in where they live. However, factors such as political-party disputes, challenges related to managing daily life and interpersonal issues, including disagreements and rivalries, emerged as determining elements in the families' decision to demand or not the school in the settlement.

The master's thesis entitled "Early Childhood Education in rural areas: How does Preschool see and experience children's cultures?" (Souza, 2020) was conducted in the Graduate Program in Education (PPGEd), at the Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG). The motivation for conducting this investigation arose mainly from concerns built up throughout our academic and professional careers, as well as from questions raised within the scope of the Study and Research Group on Childhood, Early Childhood Education and Plural Contexts (GRÃO/UFCG/CNPq), in which we participate.

Among the guiding questions, the following stand out: what aspects make up the cultural practices of rural children in the various spaces they frequent, especially with their families? Have the pedagogical practices developed with them in Early Childhood Education considered their cultural belonging in relation to their experiences in rural spaces? Do such practices consider the specificity of early childhood education,

concerning the conception of children, to be in line with the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) (Brasil, 2009)? Is the identity of the rural school recognized and implemented as recommended in the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Rural Schools/DOEBEC (Brasil, 2002)?

Given the questions, this research aimed to understand how rural preschools see and experience the childhood cultures of 4- and 5-year-old children living in rural areas. To this end, our main objective was to analyze whether and how the agents of an Early Childhood Education institution located in a rural context see and experience the childhood cultures of preschool children through their practices and conceptions.

For our investigation, we utilized theoretical perspectives from the Pedagogy and Anthropology of Childhood, especially on studies of the Sociology of Childhood (Rocha, 1999; Cohn, 2005; Alderson, 2005). Such theoretical frameworks understand children as active social actors, engaged in social dynamics, and childhood as a social category created by children themselves, based on the relationships they establish among themselves, with adults, and with the whole social structure. We also base ourselves on educational legislation, especially regarding Early Childhood Education and Education in rural areas (Brasil, 2002; 2009).

Methodologically, the research has a qualitative approach, following an ethnographic logic. It was also characterized by being research conducted not only about children, but with them (Alderson, 2005). Furthermore, to achieve the main objective proposed, we chose observation, interviews, conversation circles, children's drawings, video recordings, and photographs as instruments for data production. We used the Content Analysis method (Bardin, 2012) and the Data Triangulation methodological procedure (Souza; Leal, 2022), which made it possible to analyze the phenomenon investigated from different points.

Fifteen children, seven family members of children, one director, one teacher, and two employees of the institution where the research was conducted participated in the study. The research proposal was presented to the Education Department of Campina Grande/PB (SEDUC) and received approval to be conducted. The research was also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the National Health Council CEP/CONEP.

After presenting the two studies briefly, we now highlight aspects that were perceived and are related to the object of this article: play and playing, the yards, rural culture and the possibilities that the experience of rural children about play and the yards can be an inspiration for practices in school spaces in urban contexts.

Yards – living and affective place of rural culture

“We like it when we go to play in the yard!”
(Diogo, 5-year-old child)

From the perspective of studies of Brazilian rural populations, the place where one lives goes far beyond where one dwells, but concerns the place from which identities are constructed and cultural meanings and significance are produced (Sousa, 2024). This perspective can also be applied to the territories of the farm yards. In these spaces, experienced in children's homes and schools, life unfolds in its full breadth, as well as unique creations of the universe of the subjects who use them for various actions, such as playing, especially for rural children. For these, the presence of the yard is so great that they even equate its name to that of "courtyards," a common term in everyday school life, as we can see in the following passage:

Diogo: We like it when we go to play in the yard.
Researcher: Do you like it when you go to play in the yard?
Diogo: Yeah, there in the courtyard.
Researcher: Folks, let's listen to Diogo. He said you like it when you go where, Diogo?
Diogo: There, to the courtyards, because the aunt brings the push and pull toys.

Researcher: Then you go outside to the yard. And what is the yard like?

Diogo: Big.

Researcher: And what is the floor like?

Diogo: Really long, for us to play with!

(Souza, 2020, p. 158, our emphasis).

Diogo says that he and his colleagues like to play in the yard. Then, the researcher asks if they like to play in the yard, to which Diogo responds, replacing "yard" with "courtyard." Two observations can be drawn from this substitution: Firstly, Diogo seems to want to make it clear that the yard he refers to is, in fact, the schoolyard; secondly, between "yard" and "courtyard" there are common meanings, such as that both spaces are suitable for playing and games. In his research, Souza (2020) made observations in the same direction:

Upon arriving at school, the teachers organized the children into lines in the schoolyard, which one child, in a conversation circle, called 'yard' - as the spaces outside the homes of families living in rural areas are normally called. Each class forms a line. After a brief welcome and a collective good morning, the teachers led their students to the classroom. The children who make up the Early Childhood Education group are the first to go to the classroom (Souza, 2020, p. 119, our translation).

In the school context, the yard is the first and last space perceived when arriving and leaving the educational institution. The daily reception before children and teachers meet in the reference rooms occurs in the yard. However, this territory also constitutes a welcoming place at other times, such as situations when proposals are made in the external area or Physical Education classes. The children see the yard as a space for playing, where they can play freely through games they invent and experience among themselves and with their teachers, as shown in the following excerpt:

Today, we witnessed the teacher and the children leaving the classroom. They all went to the schoolyard. There, the children were able to play freely. Even in very high temperatures and on an uncovered yard, the children played hopscotch, hide-and-seek, make-believe, running, and tag. The joy expressed on all their faces was noticeable. This moment lasted about twenty minutes (Souza, 2020, p. 157, our translation).

Considering that in the Cariri region of Paraíba, yards are also common in homes, for the children of these territories, being in the yard seems to translate into an extension of the spaces of their homes. Stepping on the ground while playing brings a feeling of familiarity. In this sense, it is important to highlight that this perspective does not reduce Early Childhood Education institutions located in rural areas to the domestic environment, but, on the contrary, encompasses their potential as a place to produce knowledge for and with children, as it values a significant space that exists both in schools and in homes. The way children play in their yards, using various elements of nature and thus fostering imagination and creativity, is reflected in the school, which, through systematized and contextualized educational processes, can articulate this cultural experience of children with knowledge in the context of multiple languages.

When we return to Diogo's words during the conversation, we confirm the understanding that children like to experience the institution's yard, especially because they can have moments of play with the teacher, using toys. Furthermore, in the dialogue shown, the boy expresses that his connection with the school yard is because it is an extensive space, as he explains. In this sense, we can reaffirm the potential of the yard as a space for welcoming, playing, expanding, and intersecting cultures between the Early Childhood Education institution and the rural context.

Lacerda (2019) includes the yard as one of the spaces that children take care of in their rural routine. In her research, she observed that the relationship between school, caring for younger siblings and household chores, which includes keeping the yard clean, is part of children's daily lives, a way of life that is configured as a script with specificities when compared to the routine of children who live in urban contexts.

Outside of school, we realize that the routine of these children, despite seeming arduous to us, as they work a lot with their parents in tasks that they perform, such as carrying heavy objects, is quite calm for them. In informal conversations with some children and even during observation, we noticed that, when leaving school, the older children take care of the younger ones, usually the older brother or sister, in most cases. When they arrive home (the settlement school operates in the morning, from 7 am to 11 am), they have lunch, do household chores - some girls help their mothers clean the house, wash the dishes, sweep the 'yard,' among other tasks, and both boys and girls are responsible for organizing and cleaning their rooms — and school chores, such as doing homework, assignments, rehearsing a school presentation, among others (Lacerda, 2019, p. 57, our translation).

Body movement, inherent to children's culture, constitutes an experience easily perceived in the courtyards and yards of homes, and is often more intense in the latter, as found by Cruz (2022), in research conducted in a school located in a rural community in Brejo Paraibano, and Souza (2020), in research developed in a rural school and with the families of five children. Leal, Cruz, and Silva (2023) point out that games are, most of the time, organized by children and, in the case of the rural school they researched, the repertoire of games is marked by movement and the relationship with nature, as they state:

The records denote a characteristic of childhood on the farms, the relationship established by the children with the yard as a cozy space to experience fully their games. The yard expands possibilities. Outside the physical structure and far from institutional limitations, from the role of student, children can run, scream, sit on the ground, roll in the sand, swing from tree branches, be in contact with elements of nature, and with aspects that characterize their communities and their daily experiences (Leal; Cruz; Silva, 2023, p. 9, our translation).

As a specificity, movement in broader spaces and nature is perceived as materiality for play. Given the objective condition in which children are immersed, this specificity can inspire practices in other territories, such as urban territories, which, in the pedagogical experience, can also consider open spaces in institutions or their surroundings, such as squares and groves, to expand possibilities and produce or even strengthen the child's relationship with nature, this being a pedagogical, political and planetary awareness aspect.

Body movement is an experience that constitutes children's daily lives and is experienced with greater possibilities in open spaces, such as schoolyards and, especially, in the yards of homes in rural areas. These places are like childhood territories where children show what they know, feel, and create with their moving bodies. Through play, children build their thoughts and subjectivity through a process permeated and mediated by culture. Regarding this, studies such as those by Cruz (2022) and Souza (2020) reveal the value of these experiences in yards, in which external places – broad, natural, and simpler – are predominant in enriching the playing experience.

In this view, Leal, Cruz, and Silva (2023) say that, in rural schools, games arise naturally and are often organized by the children themselves. They show a culture of fun that is very marked by movement and interaction with nature. The authors state that "the games seen involve running, jumping, hiding, balancing, climbing trees, and messing with natural objects" (Leal; Cruz; Silva, 2023, p. 102, our translation).

Regarding the relationship between play and culture, Brougère (1998) indicates that this manifests itself as a cultural event, that is, an action permeated by the social meanings that involve childhood. According to the author, these processes do not occur spontaneously: they are reinterpreted by children within a specific social scenario. Culture, in this context, not only inspires the theme of games but also how children experience the act of playing.

In line with this thought, Vygotsky (2002) states that it is through playing that children develop their reasoning and individuality, on a path of internalization guided by culture. From the beginning of life, individuals absorb and internalize socially constructed and constantly changing symbols, and it is in contact with more experienced subjects, in culturally organized activities, such as the simple act of playing, that the so-called "shared systems of consciousness" are formed. Play and movement are the main ways children

assimilate and give new meaning to these symbols, converting them into subjective structures of thought and practice.

This understanding aligns with Kishimoto (2007), who recognizes play as a fundamental language of childhood and points out that, through the body, children learn, communicate, and constitute themselves as subjects. Thus, body movement should not be seen only as a physical practice, but as a cultural and formative element of childhood.

Therefore, when inserted in contexts that value children's culture and territorial knowledge, the body in movement becomes a powerful instrument of expression, learning, and cultural resistance. In rural contexts, especially, movement is experienced more freely and integrated with nature, strengthening children's emotional, social, and cultural ties with their surroundings. Recognizing this dimension is essential to think about an education in the rural areas that values childhood in its multiple ways of being, living, and playing.

In this sense, the yards, as a cultural space in rural territories, constitute spaces for the production and reproduction of rural culture, in which specific daily events occur, shared by generations. These territories represent transition zones between the worlds of home or school and nature. However, if considered as inspiration for urban realities, they can configure, in the school context, areas of sociability, freedom, and playful expression conducive to games. The yards can represent the necessary pause to construct children's cultures in rural and urban contexts. In the first, the yards actually exist, in the second, they can be invented with unique spaces and materialities.

The global climate crisis we are experiencing demands other forms of sociability and relationships with nature, with non-built spaces and experiences that provide contact between children and adults with nature, natural landscapes, the wind, the sky, the water, and the air. Contrary to the walling that constitutes our current sociability, the yards are an inspiration to think about new forms of relationships between people. In the studies presented, they are present in the lives of children, both in their homes and schools, being named and used by them and constituting their ways of life. Based on Schildkrout (1978), Sousa (2024) asserts that children must always be heard, to avoid an incomplete view of any topic under study. In this same direction, we defend this perspective and, in this article, seek to address the theme of rural yards from the perspective of what occurs in them, considering the children, their games and their ways of producing children's cultures in these spaces.

Final considerations

Based on the reflections developed in this article, we highlight the centrality of yards as spaces of life and culture in the context of rural populations, especially in childhood. Based on the mentioned studies conducted in the Cariri region of Paraíba, it is evident that these spaces go beyond simple geographical delimitation, configuring themselves as symbolic and affective territories, fundamental for social organization, interactions, and playful experiences of children.

Thus, the yards, whether in children's homes or around rural schools, even though not always used as educational and community spaces, are places of utmost importance for child development, building social ties, and preserving local cultural practices. In them, children experience freedom of movement, explore nature, and build knowledge through interactions with their peers and different generations, strengthening their identities and ways of life in rural areas.

We reaffirm the idea of culture as a historical and dynamic construction, which allows us to expand the conception of these spaces beyond the rural environment, incorporating them into new forms of sociability in urban environments, such as courtyards, schoolyards, backyards, and public squares. This expansion favors the appreciation of an educational model that integrates body, movement, nature, and intergenerational interactions, reaffirming childhood as a legitimate time and space for cultural production.

We also believe that every cultural construction is permeated by social markers such as gender, race, class, and age, which directly influence the way in which different groups experience their daily lives. Thus, understanding yards as dynamic cultural spaces allows us to rethink the relationships between children, adults, and older adults in the context of the rural area and the city, enabling a broader look at generational interactions and their implications for education and play.

Therefore, we reinforce the importance of recognizing yards as cultural and educational territories, capable of promoting new forms of interaction and learning that respect and enhance children's experiences in their multiple sociocultural contexts. More than physical spaces, yards represent a place of resistance, political expression, freedom, and children's rights, whether in rural areas or the city. Valuing these spaces means recognizing childhood as a producer of culture, ensuring that their experiences and ways of life are respected and strengthened in different territories.

Hence, reflection on yards from this perspective and other educational spaces and practices that consider human experience as an educational context, contributes to the composition of sensitive and ethical postures to children and other subjects from different collectives. It is a micro and macro perspective, that is, a way of visualizing spaces not restricted to yards, but encompassing all those that can be occupied in life as a whole, with the attribution of meanings and production of new meanings.

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RECEBIDO: 31/01/2025

RECEIVED: 01/31/2025

APROVADO: 17/04/2025

APPROVED: 04/17/2025