


PLAYING, COEXISTING, AND RESPECTING: LUDIC-PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SEX EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIALIZATION AND RIGHTS PROTECTION <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.046-010>**Káthia Susana Almeida¹****Abstract**

Sex education in early childhood constitutes a topic of great relevance in the contemporary educational context, especially in light of challenges related to the comprehensive protection of children and the formation of individuals who are aware of their rights. This article aims to analyze the role of ludic-pedagogical strategies in the development of early childhood sex education, considering their contribution to socialization, the construction of autonomy, and the prevention of violence. The research is grounded in a qualitative approach of a bibliographic nature, anchored in authors from the sociology of childhood, education, and public policies for child protection. The articulation between sex education and the defense of rights proves to be fundamental in confronting child sexual violence, particularly in contexts where abuse occurs within the family environment. The study engages with concepts from the sociology of childhood, which understands the child as an active subject, and with the notion of habitus, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, to explain how social dispositions influence practices and perceptions from childhood onward. The results indicate that the incorporation of playful practices in sexuality education contributes to emotional development, the strengthening of bonds, and the construction of a culture of protection. It is concluded that early childhood sex education, mediated by sensitive and structured pedagogical approaches, is an indispensable tool for the child's holistic development and for the promotion of a more just and conscious society.

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INTRODUCTION

Sex education in early childhood has gained prominence in contemporary academic and educational debates, especially in view of the need to promote the child's holistic development in its multiple dimensions. Far from being restricted to biological aspects, sex education involves emotional, social, and cultural issues, contributing to the formation of individuals who are more aware of themselves and of others. In this sense, addressing this topic from the earliest years of life becomes fundamental for the construction of relationships based on respect, autonomy, and human dignity.

Historically, child sexuality has been marked by silences and taboos, often being neglected in family and school contexts. This scenario contributed to the perpetuation of misinformation and to children's vulnerability in situations of violence and abuse. Currently, however, a movement toward re-signification of this field can be observed, recognizing the importance of addressing the topic in an age-appropriate manner, using accessible language and sensitive pedagogical approaches.

In this context, the school assumes a central role as a space for socialization and knowledge construction. It is within this environment that children expand their experiences and establish relationships with different subjects, making it also a privileged setting for the development of educational practices aimed at sex education. Thus, the school institution is responsible not only for transmitting content but also for promoting values such as respect, empathy, and recognition of personal boundaries.

At the same time, the family plays an essential role in this process, being the child's first nucleus of socialization. The articulation between school and family is therefore indispensable for sex education to occur in a continuous, coherent, and effective manner. When there is dialogue and alignment between these spaces, the capacity for protection and guidance of children increases significantly.

One of the main challenges in addressing early childhood sex education lies in the resistance of educators and caregivers, often influenced by cultural or religious beliefs or by a lack of adequate training. This resistance may result in the omission of the topic or in inappropriate approaches, compromising the educational and preventive potential of this practice.

In this regard, ludic-pedagogical strategies emerge as effective alternatives for addressing sexuality in childhood. Play, as the child's own language, enables the construction of knowledge in a natural, meaningful, and contextualized way. Through games, stories, and interactive activities, it is possible to work on concepts such as body awareness, boundaries, consent, and respect.

Furthermore, the use of play contributes to children's emotional and social development, favoring the expression of feelings and the construction of bonds. This aspect is especially relevant when considering that many situations of violence are not directly verbalized by children but may be expressed through behaviors and play.

Sex education is also directly related to the defense of children's rights, particularly with regard to protection against violence. By knowing their bodies and understanding their rights, children become more capable of identifying risk situations and seeking help. In this way, sex education is configured as an important instrument for prevention and the promotion of citizenship.

From a theoretical perspective, this study engages with the sociology of childhood, which recognizes the child as an active subject and producer of culture, breaking with adult-centered views. In addition, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is used to understand how social experiences influence the formation of dispositions and practices from childhood onward.

Given this scenario, the present article aims to analyze the role of ludic-pedagogical strategies in early childhood sex education, considering their contribution to the child's holistic development and to the promotion of a culture of respect and protection. It thus seeks to contribute to the advancement of academic discussions and to the qualification of educational practices in this field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SEX EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ITS FORMATIVE ROLE

Sex education in early childhood should be understood as an essential formative process for the child's holistic development, involving biological, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. Recent studies highlight that an appropriate approach to sexuality from the earliest years of life contributes to the construction of identity, autonomy, and body awareness. In this sense, sex education should not be treated as an isolated content but as an integral part of pedagogical practices aimed at forming critical subjects who are aware of their rights. Moreover, when addressed in a continuous and contextualized manner, it favors the construction of healthier and more respectful relationships from childhood onward (Brazil, 2017).

The absence of dialogue about sexuality remains one of the main obstacles to children's healthy development, especially in contexts marked by taboos and misinformation. Recent research indicates that silence surrounding the topic can generate insecurity, fear, and difficulty in expression, compromising emotional and social development. Thus, the inclusion of sex education in the school environment becomes fundamental for breaking down these barriers and promoting a welcoming and informative learning space. This approach also contributes to the normalization of the topic, reducing prejudice and expanding access to knowledge (UNESCO, 2018).

Another relevant aspect concerns the role of sex education in the prevention of violence, especially child sexual abuse. Recent data show that children who receive adequate guidance about their bodies and boundaries are better able to identify risk situations and seek help. In this context, sex education acts as a protective tool, strengthening the child's autonomy and emotional security. In addition, it contributes to the development of communicative skills that enable the expression of discomfort and the reporting of violent situations (WHO, 2020).

The implementation of sex education in the school context is supported by contemporary educational guidelines that value students' holistic development. The National Common Core Curriculum,

for example, emphasizes competencies related to self-care, empathy, and respect, which directly dialogue with the objectives of sex education. Although it does not explicitly address the topic as a specific subject, the BNCC opens space for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate the theme into daily school life, promoting broader and more meaningful education (Brazil, 2017).

Finally, sex education in childhood should be understood as a fundamental right of the child, directly related to dignity and healthy development. Recent literature reinforces that ensuring access to appropriate information about the body, emotions, and social relationships is a way of promoting citizenship from the earliest years of life. Thus, responsibility for its implementation must be shared among school, family, and society, within a perspective of comprehensive protection and human development (UNICEF, 2021).

LUDIC-PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AS A TEACHING AND PREVENTION STRATEGY

Ludic-pedagogical approaches play a fundamental role in the teaching-learning process in early childhood education, especially when dealing with complex content such as sex education. Play is recognized as the child's primary form of expression, through which they interpret the world, construct meanings, and develop cognitive and social skills. In this context, playfulness presents itself as an effective strategy for mediating knowledge, making learning more meaningful and accessible to children (Kishimoto, 2020).

In the field of sex education, the use of playful activities allows themes such as the body, boundaries, and respect to be addressed in a natural and age-appropriate manner. Recent studies indicate that methodologies based on games, stories, and dynamics foster children's active participation, creating a safe environment for dialogue and knowledge construction. This approach helps reduce the embarrassment associated with the topic and enables more effective learning based on experience and interaction (Silva; Souza, 2021).

Moreover, play plays an important role in children's emotional development, functioning as a means of expressing feelings and experiences. Contemporary research indicates that through play, children can externalize situations that they are often unable to verbalize, which can assist educators in identifying signs of vulnerability or violence. Thus, playfulness also becomes a tool for sensitive listening and welcoming within the school environment (Oliveira; Costa, 2022).

Another relevant aspect is the relationship between playfulness and violence prevention. Recent literature shows that playful pedagogical practices contribute to teaching fundamental concepts such as consent, privacy, and respect for the body. When integrated into children's daily lives, these contents strengthen their ability to recognize inappropriate situations and act safely. Thus, playfulness not only teaches but also protects (Santos; Silva; Souza, 2020).

Finally, it is emphasized that the effectiveness of playful strategies is directly related to educators' training. Recent studies stress the importance of teacher education for the conscious and intentional use of play as a pedagogical tool. It is essential that teachers understand the potential of these methodologies and know how to apply them appropriately, ensuring that play is used as an instrument of learning and development rather than merely as a recreational activity (Rodrigues; Almeida, 2023).

CHILDHOOD, HABITUS, AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHILD

Contemporary sociology of childhood proposes an understanding of the child as an active subject in the construction of social reality, breaking with traditional views that placed children merely as passive recipients of norms and values. This perspective recognizes that children interpret, re-signify, and transform the world around them, producing culture and establishing their own social relationships. Thus, childhood ceases to be seen as merely a preparatory phase and comes to be understood as a social category with its own characteristics (Sarmiento, 2020).

In this context, childhood is understood as a social and historical construction that varies according to cultural, economic, and political factors. Recent studies reinforce that there is no single way

of experiencing childhood, but rather multiple experiences that reflect the social conditions in which children are embedded. This understanding broadens perspectives on childhood and contributes to the development of more inclusive and reality-sensitive educational practices (Qvortrup, 2021).

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus also contributes to understanding the child's social formation by explaining how dispositions, values, and behaviors are incorporated from childhood onward. Habitus is formed through experiences lived in different socialization spaces, such as family and school, influencing how individuals perceive and act in the world. This process often occurs unconsciously but has a significant impact on an individual's social trajectory (Bourdieu, 2020).

In the educational field, habitus can contribute both to the reproduction and to the transformation of social inequalities. Recent studies indicate that schools, by valuing certain cultural standards, may reinforce existing inequalities. However, they also have the potential to promote change, provided they adopt inclusive and critical pedagogical practices capable of recognizing and valuing the diversity of students' experiences (Nogueira; Nogueira, 2021).

Finally, the articulation between the sociology of childhood, habitus, and sex education makes it possible to understand the child as a subject of rights and a protagonist in the educational process. By recognizing children's capacity for participation and knowledge construction, it becomes possible to develop more effective and humanized pedagogical practices. This approach contributes to the formation of individuals who are more aware, critical, and prepared to act actively and responsibly in society (Corsaro, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts the explanatory research method, as it seeks to understand and explain the causes, structural factors, and implications of sexual violence against children and adolescents. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2003), explanatory research aims to record, analyze, and interpret facts, identifying their causes in order to broaden generalizations, structure theoretical models, and

generate hypotheses through logical deductions. This approach requires deeper theoretical engagement, synthesis, and critical reflection on the object of study, which is appropriate given the complexity of the phenomenon of child sexual violence. The explanatory research method will be addressed as follows:

Explanatory research records facts, analyzes them, interprets them, and identifies their causes. This practice aims to broaden generalizations, define broader laws, structure and define theoretical models, relate hypotheses within a more unified view of the universe or productive field in general, and generate hypotheses or ideas through logical deduction (Lakatos and Marconi, 2003, p. 25).

Explanatory research requires greater investment in synthesis, theorization, and reflection based on the object of study.

This study uses the deductive method as its methodological approach, based on the principle that if all premises are true, the conclusion must consequently be true. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2003), all factual information or content of the conclusion must already be, at least implicitly, contained in the premises. Deductive arguments are either correct or incorrect: either the premises fully support the conclusions or they do not, if the logic is reversed.

With regard to methodological aspects, this article employed bibliographic research. Thus, it is characterized as follows:

[...] Elaborated from previously published material, consisting mainly of books, magazines, journal publications and scientific articles, newspapers, bulletins, monographs, dissertations, theses, cartographic material, and the internet, with the objective of placing the researcher in direct contact with all material already written on the subject of the research. In bibliographic research, it is important that the researcher verify the accuracy of the data obtained, observing possible inconsistencies or contradictions that the works may present (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 54).

Furthermore, considering subjects in their own terms, it is necessary to speak of cultural contextualization and a dialectical study, since:

[...] for dialectics, things are not analyzed as fixed objects, but in movement: no thing is always in a state of being, but always in the process of transforming and developing; the end of one process is always the beginning of another (Lakatos and Marconi, 1991, p. 75).

Thus, considering this as a careful investigation involving critical evaluation and synthesis of selected information, evidence related to the specific theme addressed in this work was synthesized. Therefore, the research for this study consisted of the use of books, academic articles, and secondary data related to the topic, with a theoretical and qualitative approach.

Gil (2002) emphasizes that bibliographic research is developed based on previously elaborated material, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. As attested by Lakatos and Marconi (2003), bibliographic research is a general survey of the main works already carried out, endowed with importance for being capable of providing current and relevant data related to the topic.

Documentary research was also used, which, as Gil (2002) explains, makes use of materials that have not yet received analytical treatment or that can still be reworked according to the research objectives. It is also a descriptive research, whose primary objective is the description of the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon, or the establishment of relationships between variables.

Therefore, the present research is characterized as qualitative, theoretical, and explanatory in nature, grounded in critical analysis and the synthesis of selected evidence on sexual violence against children and adolescents. The study was based on the use of books, academic articles, and secondary data related to the topic, seeking to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and to the strengthening of strategies for the prevention, protection, and confrontation of child sexual violence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of theoretical data shows that sex education in early childhood, when applied in a structured and appropriate manner, presents significant impacts on the child's holistic development. Recent studies indicate that children who have access to information about their own bodies and

boundaries from an early age demonstrate greater autonomy, emotional security, and communication skills in situations of discomfort. This result reinforces the idea that sex education is not limited to the informational field but acts directly in the formation of more conscious subjects prepared for healthy social interactions (UNESCO, 2018).

It is also observed that the use of ludic-pedagogical strategies significantly enhances the effectiveness of early childhood sex education. Play, as a learning tool, facilitates the assimilation of content considered sensitive, allowing children to understand concepts such as respect, privacy, and consent in a natural manner. Recent literature demonstrates that pedagogical environments that incorporate playfulness show greater student engagement and better learning outcomes, especially in early childhood education (Kishimoto, 2020).

Another relevant point identified in the analysis is the direct relationship between sex education and violence prevention, especially child sexual abuse. Recent data indicate that most cases of violence occur in family environments or in spaces close to the child, which reinforces the importance of educational mechanisms that strengthen children's capacity for identification and reaction. In this sense, sex education acts as an essential preventive strategy, contributing to the reduction of child vulnerability (WHO, 2016).

In addition, the analyzed studies show that children's emotional development is directly influenced by the educational practices adopted in the school environment. A playful approach to sexuality contributes to the expression of feelings, the strengthening of self-esteem, and the construction of bonds of trust with educators. These factors are fundamental for children to feel safe to share experiences and doubts, creating an environment conducive to learning and protection (Oliveira; Costa, 2022).

The discussion also reveals that teacher training is one of the main challenges to the effective implementation of sex education in childhood. Many educators still feel insecure or unprepared to address the topic, which can compromise the quality of pedagogical practices. Recent studies highlight the need

for continuing education focused on appropriate methodologies and the development of socio-emotional competencies, ensuring that educators act in a safe and conscious manner (Rodrigues; Almeida, 2023).

Another important aspect concerns the influence of the sociocultural context on how sex education is understood and applied. The concept of habitus helps explain how internalized values and beliefs influence both educational practices and families' receptivity to the topic. This demonstrates that the implementation of sex education requires not only pedagogical changes but also broader cultural transformations (Bourdieu, 2020).

The analysis further highlights that family participation is a determining factor for the success of early childhood sex education. When there is alignment between school and family, children receive more consistent and secure guidance, strengthening the learning process. On the other hand, the absence of this dialogue can generate conflicts and hinder the consolidation of knowledge acquired in the school environment, evidencing the need for integrated actions (UNICEF, 2021).

Finally, the results indicate that sex education mediated by playful practices and grounded in sociological approaches contributes to the formation of a culture of respect and protection in childhood. By recognizing the child as an active subject and promoting their participation in the educational process, the transformative potential of education is expanded. Thus, the articulation between theory and practice proves to be essential for the construction of more effective educational policies aligned with contemporary needs (Corsaro, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, sex education in early childhood proves to be an essential element for the child's holistic development, surpassing reductionist conceptions that limit it to the biological field. By considering emotional, social, and cultural dimensions, it is observed that this approach contributes significantly to the development of autonomy, body awareness, and the ability to establish relationships

based on mutual respect. Thus, sex education should be understood as a structuring part of the educational process, especially in the early years of life.

The analysis developed throughout the article showed that ludic-pedagogical strategies play a central role in making this process effective. Play, as the language of childhood, enables the construction of knowledge in a meaningful way, facilitating the approach to themes considered sensitive. In addition, playfulness contributes to children's emotional and social development, strengthening bonds and promoting a safe environment for the expression of feelings and doubts.

Another relevant point refers to the potential of sex education as an instrument for violence prevention, especially child sexual abuse. By knowing their own bodies, understanding boundaries, and developing communication skills, children become more capable of identifying risk situations and seeking help. In this sense, sex education is consolidated as a tool for protection, aligned with the principle of guaranteeing rights and promoting children's dignity.

The discussion also made it possible to understand the importance of the sociology of childhood and the concept of habitus in the analysis of educational practices. By recognizing the child as an active subject and producer of culture, understanding of their role in the learning process is broadened. Likewise, habitus highlights how social dispositions influence behaviors and perceptions from childhood onward, reinforcing the need for critical and inclusive pedagogical practices.

However, significant challenges remain for the effective implementation of sex education in childhood, especially regarding teacher training and sociocultural resistance. The lack of preparation of educators and the taboos present in society can compromise the development of appropriate pedagogical practices. Thus, it is essential to invest in continuing education and in public policies that encourage debate and the inclusion of the topic in the school environment.

Finally, it is concluded that early childhood sex education, when mediated by playful approaches and grounded in solid theoretical bases, constitutes an indispensable instrument for the formation of more conscious, autonomous individuals prepared for life in society. Its effectiveness depends on the

articulation between school, family, and public policies, representing an essential path toward the construction of a more just, safe, and respectful society.

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