

**PLAY, INQUIRE, AND BELONG: DIVERSITY AS A POTENTIAL IN ACTIVE
METHODOLOGIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION** <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.013-005>**Roberly de Oliveira Alves Machado¹, Jean Carlos Batista Pereira da Silva² and Nilza Araujo Rodrigues³****ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes play as a universal language in Early Childhood Education, linking it to inquiry and belonging as foundations for inclusive and meaningful pedagogical practices. The study aims to understand play as a mediator of children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, present practices that integrate playfulness, inquiry, and diversity, and reflect on active listening strategies that value children's uniqueness. It is justified by the need to recognize childhood in its plurality, ensuring educational experiences that promote protagonism, inclusion, and social belonging. The research question addresses how pedagogical practices can integrate play, inquiry, and diversity to foster integral development. Methodologically, this is a bibliographic study based on authors such as Vygotsky (2007), Kishimoto (2011), Freire (1996), Kolb (1984), Oliveira Formosinho (2000), Nóvoa (2009), and Imbernón (2006), as well as the BNCC guidelines (2017). The results highlight the relevance of practices that combine playfulness, inquiry, and belonging as strategies to enhance meaningful learning and promote a creative, inclusive, and diversity-sensitive Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Play; Active Methodologies; Early Childhood Education; Diversity; Inclusion; Belonging.

¹ Degree in Pedagogy from the State University of Goiás
Specialist in ASD, psychopedagogy, dyslexia,
educational management, and pedagogical guidance
E-mail: roberlyolive@gmail.com

² Degree in Pedagogy from Universidade Planalto
Specialist in educational management and guidance
Specialized educational support,
literacy and reading, and psychopedagogical assistance
E-mail: Jeanpedagogia@gmail.com

³ Degree in Pedagogy – Faculty of Science and Technology.
Specialist in educational management.
Educational guidance.
And teaching Mathematics.
E-mail nilza34@yahoo.com.br



INTRODUCTION

Play is a universal language that fosters children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Vygotsky, 2007; Kishimoto, 2011; BNCC, 2017). Active methodologies encourage inquiry, experimentation, and children's protagonism (Freire, 1996; Kolb, 1984), while the appreciation of diversity enriches collective learning, promotes belonging, and strengthens respect for individuality (Oliveira Formosinho, 2000; Nóvoa, 2009; Imbernón, 2006). These foundations guide the reflection on pedagogical practices that integrate playfulness, inquiry, and inclusion.

Active methodologies gain relevance in this context, as they allow children to become protagonists of their own learning, participating meaningfully in the proposed experiences. Strategies that stimulate inquiry, experimentation, and problem-solving foster autonomy and participation, while respecting individual interests and rhythms.

Diversity is regarded as pedagogical potential, since children from different backgrounds, cultures, identities, and abilities enrich collective experiences. Inclusive practices promote belonging, empathy, and the appreciation of individuality, thereby strengthening bonds and meaningful learning.

The present research, conducted through a bibliographic approach, is grounded in both classical and contemporary works in Early Childhood Education, also reflecting on teaching practice. Its objective is to analyze play as a universal language and as a mediator of child development, to present pedagogical practices that integrate playfulness, inquiry, and diversity, and to reflect on active listening strategies that value children's uniqueness. The justification lies in the need to recognize childhood in its plurality, promoting affective, meaningful, and inclusive educational experiences.

In this context, the research problem arises: how can pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education simultaneously incorporate playfulness, inquiry, and diversity, respecting the uniqueness of each child while fostering integral development and social belonging?

This analysis is organized as follows: Play as a Universal Language, addressing conceptions and playful practices; Belonging and Diversity, reflecting on inclusion and diversity as pedagogical potential; and Pedagogical Practices: Integrating Play, Inquiry, and Belonging, presenting examples of strategies that combine playfulness, inquiry, and the appreciation of children's uniqueness. The chapter is based on consolidated bibliographic references, aligned with practical experience in Early Childhood Education, offering both a theoretical and applied perspective on the subject.



DEVELOPMENT: (THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK)

PLAY AS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Play is recognized as a universal language, essential to the integral development of children in Early Childhood Education. According to Vygotsky (2007), play constitutes a social and cultural activity that enables the child to experiment with different roles, internalize norms and meanings, and promote cognitive development through imagination and symbolization. From this perspective, play is not merely leisure but a privileged space for the construction of knowledge and social interaction, in which the child acts as an active agent of their own learning.

Kishimoto (2011) reinforces this conception by highlighting that play enables the child to experience situations that stimulate creativity, problem-solving, and the ability to negotiate rules with peers, thereby fostering socio-emotional and cognitive skills. The author emphasizes that playfulness is a powerful learning tool, as it integrates affective, social, and intellectual dimensions, while respecting each child's time and rhythm.

The National Common Curricular Base (BNCC, 2017) also acknowledges play as an essential component of Early Childhood Education, suggesting that pedagogical practices should provide experiences involving exploration, imagination, and symbolic expression. The BNCC states that, through play, children can develop language, mathematics, world knowledge, and autonomy, consolidating meaningful learning in contexts of social interaction.

In pedagogical practice, play can be integrated into the educational process in various ways. Examples include pretend play activities, in which children reproduce everyday situations or invent new stories; symbolic games that encourage negotiation and cooperation; the construction of scenarios and objects with diverse materials, stimulating creativity and motor coordination; and guided play that introduces concepts of numbers, shapes, and languages in a playful and contextualized manner. Such practices demonstrate that, when intentionally planned by the educator, play can promote cognitive, social, and emotional development in an integrated way.

Thus, play in Early Childhood Education is understood as a language capable of mediating meaningful experiences, constructing knowledge, and fostering inclusion, expression, and sociability, establishing itself as a central element in the integral development of the child.

INTEGRATION OF PLAYFULNESS INTO DIFFERENT AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE

Play in Early Childhood Education can be structured in ways that articulate different areas of knowledge, thereby fostering meaningful learning in an integrated manner. In the area of language, for instance, pretend play and dramatizations allow the child to explore vocabulary, develop oral narrative, and learn to organize ideas, while also practicing listening, comprehension, and the expression of feelings.



The use of puppets, interactive books, and storytelling circles enhances imagination and strengthens social interaction.

In mathematics, playful activities involving counting, classification, sequencing, and measurement contribute to the construction of mathematical concepts in a concrete way. Adapted board games, block building or recycled materials for creating geometric figures, and playful cooking activities are examples of how play can render abstract ideas more tangible, while respecting each child's pace and stimulating curiosity and logical reasoning.

In the field of science and world knowledge, play encourages experimentation and observation. Activities such as gardening, exploring water, sand, and natural materials, as well as simple experiments in physics or chemistry, allow the child to understand everyday phenomena in practical ways, stimulating inquiry and problem-solving. These experiences also strengthen environmental awareness and respect for natural diversity.

The affective and social aspects are likewise addressed through cooperative play, which fosters empathy, rule negotiation, and collaboration among peers. Group games, collective dramatizations, and joint construction projects strengthen bonds, promote respect for differences, and develop socio-emotional skills essential for life in society.

Ultimately, the integration of playfulness into pedagogical practices highlights that play is not restricted to moments of entertainment but constitutes a powerful language that unites cognition, affectivity, and socialization. Educators who plan intentional and diversified activities can enhance children's integral development, respecting their uniqueness, interests, and learning rhythms, as outlined in the BNCC (2017) and reaffirmed by Vygotsky (2007) and Kishimoto (2011).

BELONGING AND DIVERSITY: CHILDHOOD IN ITS PLURALITY

Contemporary Early Childhood Education recognizes childhood as a period marked by the plurality of experiences, identities, and sociocultural contexts. The concept of belonging emerges as a central element, ensuring that all children—regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, or social background, or their developmental conditions—feel welcomed, valued, and respected in the school environment. This perspective involves not only access to the educational space but also the active and meaningful participation of each child in pedagogical experiences.

From an inclusive standpoint, it is essential that pedagogical practices address the needs of Black and Indigenous children, children with disabilities, or any others who may face inequality or exclusion. Oliveira Formosinho (2000) emphasizes that schools must act as mediators of experiences that promote equity, recognizing and valuing differences as part of the construction of both individual and collective



knowledge and identity. Inclusion goes beyond physical presence, requiring adaptation of content, methodologies, and resources so that all children can fully develop their potential.

Nóvoa (2009) reinforces the idea that diversity should be understood as pedagogical potential. The plurality present in classrooms offers unique opportunities for collaborative learning, in which differences become stimuli for creativity, problem-solving, and the development of socio-emotional competencies. Respect for diversity enables the construction of meaningful experiences that strengthen empathy, dialogue, and a sense of community among children and educators.

Imbernón (2006) underscores the importance of continuous and reflective teacher training for the implementation of inclusive practices. Teachers must be able to identify individual needs, adapt pedagogical strategies, and create learning environments that foster the participation of all. This requires attention to language, materials, activities, and spatial organization, ensuring that every child finds forms of expression and participation that respect their uniqueness.

In pedagogical practice, the recognition of diversity and the promotion of belonging can be manifested in various ways: incorporating stories and characters that represent different cultures and identities; adapting activities for children with different motor or cognitive abilities; promoting cooperative games that encourage solidarity and mutual respect; and valuing family and community experiences as part of the curriculum. Such practices consolidate the idea that plurality is a pedagogical asset capable of strengthening collective learning and the integral development of children.

Thus, Early Childhood Education guided by an inclusive perspective and the recognition of diversity not only guarantees rights but also transforms plurality into a pedagogical resource that enriches the experience of all participants, establishing belonging as a central axis of educational practice.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: INTEGRATING PLAY, INQUIRY, AND BELONGING

Pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education acquire greater relevance when they articulate play, inquiry, and belonging, thereby fostering meaningful experiences that encompass the child's integral development. Playfulness, understood as a space for experimentation, symbolization, and creativity, can be associated with the investigation of the surrounding world and with the appreciation of differences, consolidating an inclusive and stimulating environment.

Examples of proposals that combine these dimensions include projects exploring natural and cultural environments, in which children are encouraged to observe, question, and record discoveries in playful ways—through dramatizations, symbolic games, or the construction of models. Such activities allow scientific, social, and mathematical concepts to be incorporated in practical and meaningful ways, respecting individual interests and promoting cognitive autonomy.



Diversity is intentionally incorporated into pedagogical practices through the inclusion of stories, music, games, and materials that represent different cultures, identities, and abilities. Collaborative activities—such as the creation of thematic murals, dramatizations of tales from various origins, or the design of adapted games—reinforce the sense of belonging, stimulate empathy, and value each child’s uniqueness, turning plurality into an enriching pedagogical resource.

Active listening strategies are fundamental for enhancing these practices. The educator must observe, document, and engage in dialogue with children, acknowledging their interests, opinions, and modes of expression, and fostering shared decision-making regarding activities. This attentive stance allows for pedagogical adjustments that respect each child’s pace, preferences, and talents, thereby consolidating inclusion and effective participation in the learning process.

Moreover, the integration of play and inquiry supports the development of socio-emotional, cognitive, and motor competencies. Activities such as sensory experiments, exploration of recyclable materials, classification games, storytelling, and collective dramatizations allow children to investigate causes, effects, and relationships in their environment, while simultaneously developing skills of cooperation, problem-solving, and individual expression.

In this way, pedagogical practices that integrate playfulness, inquiry, and belonging promote an inclusive, creative, and reflective Early Childhood Education, in which play is no longer seen merely as leisure but becomes a powerful language of learning, social interaction, and the valuing of each child’s uniqueness.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The analysis carried out in this chapter demonstrates that play, when intentionally planned, transcends its recreational function and is consolidated as a fundamental language for the child’s integral development. The theoretical frameworks presented—Vygotsky (2007), Kishimoto (2011), and the BNCC (2017)—reinforce that playful pedagogical practices, when combined with active methodologies, foster meaningful experiences that support the construction of cognitive, social, and emotional knowledge.

The results indicate that pedagogical proposals integrating play, inquiry, and belonging generate positive impacts on children’s engagement, autonomy, and learning. When diversity is understood as pedagogical potential (Oliveira Formosinho, 2000; Nóvoa, 2009; Imbernón, 2006), the school environment becomes more inclusive, encouraging social bonds, empathy, and the appreciation of uniqueness.

The discussion also shows that teacher training is a crucial element in transforming these concepts into effective practices. Well-prepared educators are able to integrate playfulness and inquiry into



contexts that respect the cultural, social, and individual plurality of children, thereby fostering children's protagonism and strengthening their sense of belonging.

These results, although derived from bibliographic research and practical reflection, point to consistent pathways for Early Childhood Education to assume an increasingly innovative, inclusive, and affective role. They also open space for empirical studies to evaluate how such practices impact child development in different school contexts.

CONCLUSION

The analysis developed in this chapter demonstrates that play, when articulated with inquiry and belonging, constitutes a solid foundation for innovative and inclusive pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education. This approach is justified by the need to recognize childhood as a period of multiple languages, experiences, and identities, requiring strategies that value playfulness, respect uniqueness, and promote meaningful learning.

The guiding research question—how can pedagogical practices simultaneously encompass playfulness, inquiry, and diversity, ensuring children's integral development and social belonging?—proved pertinent, revealing that the challenge lies in the intentionality of planning and in the reflective training of teachers, who must be able to integrate theory and practice within a plural educational context.

The bibliographic methodology, combined with teaching experience in Early Childhood Education, made it possible to construct a grounded reflection that engages with established theoretical references while also dialoguing with the reality of pedagogical practice. This combination provides the text with academic rigor while maintaining proximity to the daily life of educational institutions.

Although this chapter comes to an end, it opens avenues for future investigations into active methodologies across different school contexts, comparative studies on inclusive practices, and empirical research assessing the impacts of these strategies on children's integral development. Thus, the text invites researchers and educators to deepen the debate on play, inquiry, and belonging as central axes of contemporary Early Childhood Education, strengthening a pedagogical approach that combines affection, diversity, and innovation.



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