

WHAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TEACH US ABOUT CHILDHOOD - A LOOK AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



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ABSTRACT

This article originates from an excerpt from the master's research, precisely from the observation of children from a municipal daycare center in Floriano-Piauí, specifically in the 2 and 3 year old classes, with the objective of deepening the debate for a proposal for early childhood education from the worldview of indigenous peoples, inspired by the play of indigenous children immersed in nature. Presenting the defense of free play in contact with nature and the indigenous worldview that was evidenced in the research. Some questions were raised: Why are the moments of free play so reduced? Why are there almost never moments of intertwining with nature? Answers were sought through exploratory research that is mainly based on the authors Prodanov and Freitas (2013), who state [...] this type of research has the following characteristics of [...] guiding the setting of objectives and the formulation of hypotheses or discovering a new type of approach to the subject (p. 51). We conclude that a proposal for the education of young children, based on the worldview of

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indigenous peoples, involves the idea of putting their hearts in the rhythm of the earth, providing them with a deep connection with the world around them, a fundamental contact for them to incorporate values such as care and belonging into their identities.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Play free. Indigenous Childhood. Nature. Childhood.

INTRODUCTION

This article arises from the master's research that resulted in the dissertation entitled "Indigenous Histories and Cultures in Early Childhood Education: The knowledge and practices of teachers in the municipal education networks of Barão de Grajaú/MA and Floriano/PI"¹⁰ which focused on making a dialogue from the conceptions of child and childhood throughout history, not dwelling on the conceptions developed in Europe, and reflecting here from what Nunes (2002) puts it [...] we should not want a mistake of the past to be repeated, namely, that the knowledge built about childhood is only that of dominant societies, and that the understanding of all others starts from the application of this model, without question, thus perpetuating the hegemony of a Western and Eurocentric "child" pattern. [...] what interests us is to deconstruct this model" (p. 66), and for this, continuing the escape from traditional patterns, he defends the need to explore other forms of childhood that have been historically invisible, the childhood of indigenous children.

In the inspiration of indigenous childhood, based on the anthropological study of Angela Nunes (2002) "In time and space: games of the A'uwẽ-Xavante children", it aims to deepen the debate for a proposal for the education of young children, from the worldview of indigenous peoples, understanding that to think about the temporality of childhood is to think for the future, paraphrasing the indigenous author member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL), to think of childhood as an "Ancestral Future".

I had a childhood walking barefoot through the streets running freely playing sack jumping, we got into a big bag and we had to go from one point to another, whoever arrived first won the game, dusty by the earth that welcomed us, the joy was contagious on our faces, on rainy days the party was guaranteed, mud puddles were the favorites of the kids, but nothing beat the baths in the river in the morning and in the afternoon of far away I heard the children calling me to swim we passed in front of the house and with a loud cry said: Ngĩa ta aiyagũ tatũwa?, which in Portuguese means let's bathe in the river? (Kambebe, 2021 p. 12)

According to Nunes (2022, p. 65) [...] the child in urban societies ends up being isolated in spaces and times defined by adults [...]. In Brazilian indigenous societies, according to the reports and works available, the phase that corresponds to childhood is marked by what we consider to be an enormous freedom in the experience of time and space, and of societal relations [...], in view of this support for freedom (of playing) in childhood, a phase in which the child is attending schools/daycare centers, some

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questions arose, so when questioning the pedagogical practice in the daily life of Early Childhood Education, some questions were raised, they are: Why keep children between four walls with so many tables and chairs lined up? Why so many concrete spaces? Why is the moment of free play so reduced? Why are there almost never moments of intertwining with nature? Why is nature only remembered in an experiential way on the commemorative date of September 21 (Arbor Day)? And mainly, why the excessive use of printed paper in Early Childhood Education?

It is a bibliographic study, which based on the relevance of the questions above, sought to follow the path of exploratory research to find answers, according to Gil (2008) this type of research [...] provides greater familiarity with the problem (evidence it). The use of images serves as a record of the week that was dedicated to free play in the green areas of a school/daycare center in the municipality of Floriano/PI.

[...] The ethnographic material that will be presented and analyzed in this essay on the Xavante children was captured in a distant and different scenario from the one in which the aforementioned researchers carry out their research, so little is reported to the school as an institutionalized school space and time, it does refer to a space and there is a time of sociability and informal education that exists and is concretely experienced by the children and that I think should be respected and considered when we reflect on the directions of school education [...] (Nunes, 2002, p. 67).

Sharing the idea that time and space are experiences that must be experienced in a unique way by each individual, children aged 02 and 03 years old from the four classes of daycare I and II were observed in the morning shift. Observations are made in sequence, pre-listed considering playful characteristics. Also according to Nunes (2002), the A'uwẽ-Xavante children have [...] routines and play are intrinsically linked, although this connection is not always conscious or intentional, this means that the play I am referring to is not what has a scheduled time to happen or rules for certain things, as in a soccer game, for example, but what is inherent in children and what emanates from it, whatever they are doing [...] (p. 69).

Thus, it was observed that the children moved around in the open space without limiting the area to play (explore), paying attention to their speech and questions (moment of listening), the formation of groups (moment of interaction) and idleness (rest).

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[...] to encourage children to take up schoolyards: public spaces that belong to them! Because if in the classrooms the situation of walling is ensured thanks to the imposition of control mechanisms that value individualistic and competitive behaviors and values, in the playgrounds children will be able to exercise the democracy necessary for sustainable and democratic societies: in connection with nature, free in its movement, powerful in the joy of playing, creating, revolutionizing! It is these beings that the world needs! (Timbira, 2018).

Image 1 – Children playing freely without limited space



Source: personal collection

During a week in August 2024, some activities were carried out outside the planning determined by the daycare coordination, with four classes of 2 and 3 years old. With no predetermined learning guidelines, only with guidelines for the use of the courtyards freely, the order was just to play, to play without haste and without timed time, to play for the sake of playing taking advantage of the green areas and the shadows of the trees.

Considering the available spaces, the children were observed from the readings about indigenous childhood: how they behaved, their rhythms, interactions with their peers, with nature and their interests, thus reflecting on what the indigenous author Daniel Munduruku teaches, "The time of the body is the time of nature. Respecting this time is offering the body everything it needs to live with balance. [...] the body follows the time of its needs, obeying the circularity that nature itself awakens in it" (Munduruku, 2018).

When observing children playing ball, tag, running in groups, in pairs or alone, it is impossible not to remember the circle games (cirandas), which over the years has disappeared from children's playtime, and this has probably happened because the

estimated duration of the game, is between 30 and 40 minutes, but the time allocated by schools/daycare for free play, It's only 15 minutes to recess. This disappearance causes damage to the entire cultural heritage that will form the children's identity.

By providing short walks in the courtyards, the children take real walks as if they were in a forest, collecting flowers and seeds, looking at every corner as in the many stories told in children's books, one of them says that observing "[...] the cunhã listens to the forest to understand the place" (Kambeba, 2023 p. 20, position 12 of the Kindle). For a long time there has been talk of distancing from children and nature, and the debate re-emerges in the face of the serious problem of our time, which is the harmful use of screens in childhood, when children are spending a lot of time in contact with electronic devices. Especially in the urban context, regardless of the size of the city, the natural world that had ceased to be seen as essential, is once again considered a fundamental element, seen with bright eyes as an indispensable part of childhood.

Image 2 – Children playing freely in a delimited space



Source: personal collection

In a limited space, children will continue to play, even if they now make small groups and the games are perceived at the same time. Providing moments of play in the sand, taking advantage of the shadows of the trees to have picnics, moments of enchantment with the singing of birds, observing an anthill or appreciating beautiful flowers are experiments that put children in contact with the beauties and charms of life. And when you realize how nature is presented to the indigenous child, it is easy to understand that for the non-indigenous child, it does not have to be different.

I learned from my people the true meaning of the word education when I saw the father or mother of the boy or girl leading them step by step in cultural learning. Fishing, hunting, making bows and arrows, cleaning the fish, boiling it, fetching water, climbing the tree, etc. In particular, my understanding increased when, as a group, we lay down under the light of the stars to contemplate them, trying to imagine the immense universe in front of us, which our shamans had visited in their dreams. [...] I realized that in indigenous society, educating is to tear from the inside out, to make dreams sprout and, sometimes, to laugh at the mystery of life (Daniel Munduruku, 2013 p. 57).

Not experiencing these moments, whether at school or in other spaces, generates impoverishment of the experiences that children should and need to live. Experiences that constitute meaningful learning, allowing children to interact with the world. Therefore, it is easy to understand why even living in the urban context, indigenous peoples seek to maintain the connection with nature.

Indigenous peoples have one thing in common: a message of love for Mother Earth, of attachment to ancestral roots transmitted by rituals; a deep respect for nature, seeking to walk with it through a knowledge of the properties it offers us and with which it sustains each people, like a loving mother who always feeds her children (Munduruku, 2013).

Image 3 – Children exploring green spaces freely



Source: personal collection

Ailton Krenak, an indigenous philosopher and writer, teaches us that it is in friction with nature that learning happens.

If we observe a child in the village during his first five years of life, he got dirty with mud, he got rained. A child who can climb a tree, who can be stung by a wasp, an ant, is exposed to risks and this will help him deal with the world. She will be able to create and protect herself in the world. If you only have insecurity and fear in

relation to everything around you, it is difficult to develop a collaborative attitude" (Krenak for the Lunetas portal, 2017).

Image 4 – Children exploring green spaces freely 2



Source: personal collection

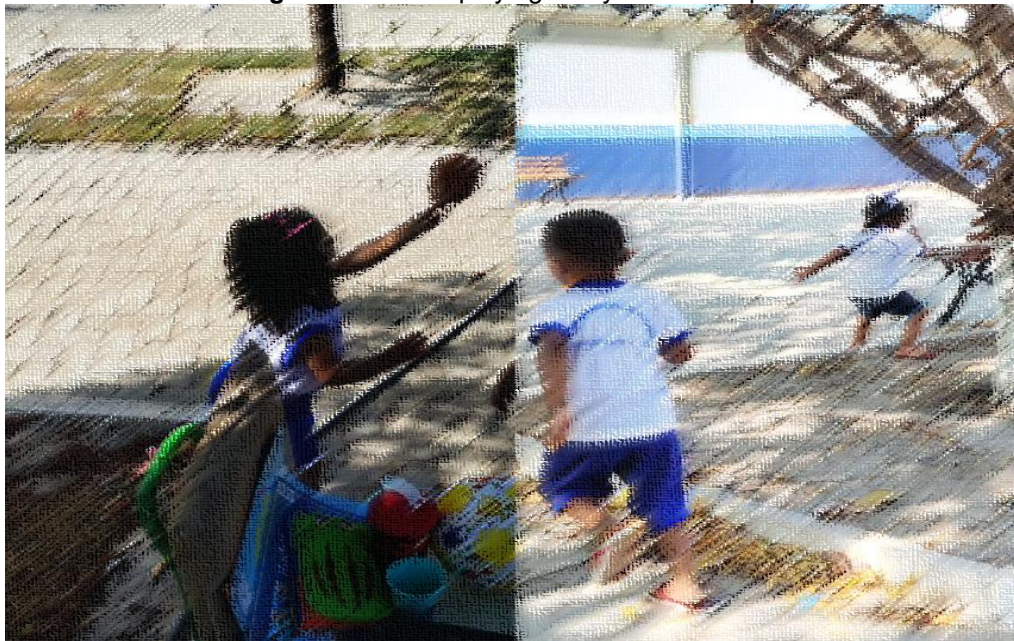
To think about exploration freely is to provide children with new discoveries, to play with natural elements without the obligation to scribble or color sheets of paper, but to have contact with fruits, seeds, water, dry leaves, branches, sticks, ants and ladybugs. This movement makes evident the need to (re)think the pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education, understanding that playing is essential for child development, since it is from this activity that children experience, explore, investigate and manifest their creativity.

Another way for indigenous peoples to maintain a connection with nature are traditional games, dances, stories and their rituals involving the entire community. These activities keep culture alive and strengthen social bonds, as well as collective identity.

Daniel Munduruku in his book "The Banquet of the Gods" presents that [...] the indigenous culture expressed in its educational process: treating the child as a child, a playful being who forms his view of the world from his internal vocation: games and games (p. 79-80), and this explanation of the writer goes against the way many educators understand childhood, but because of the legislation, the framed planning, often plastered by the education departments to fit into the inflexible school schedule, they end up not allowing the child to build his repertoire of belonging to the world and its culture.

[...] Playing is fundamental because at the same time that the child interacts, he exercises various skills and functions, learns about himself and the other. [...] Any element of nature can turn into a toy, such as stones, leaves, branches, fruits, seeds, water, wind. And so, through imagination and social and cultural representations, she pulls the thread to invent stories (Teixeira, 2024).

Image 5 – Children playing freely in limited space



Source: personal collection

It was only when I entered school that I began to hear the question that I needed to be someone when I grew up. I don't remember my father or mother having put on me the obligation to be anything other than what I already was. And what was I? Child. It was the only thing I had to be, therefore. I didn't need to be anything else (Daniel Munduruku, 2017).

Indigenous peoples bring us great lessons about childhood, the environment and our own history. Law 11.645/08 makes the teaching of indigenous history and culture mandatory in schools, but unfortunately this is not a reality, especially in schools/daycare centers and the erasure of this memory is still persistent. With these forgotten memories, everyone loses, not just the original peoples.

From the experience of the Baniwa peoples, it is possible to better understand the Pedagogy of the Earth, where education takes place in harmony and at the pace of nature. In the speech of Gersem Baniwa (Director-President of the Indigenous Center for Studies and Research – CINEP), the importance of contact with nature, interaction with others and games in childhood is evident.

The first thing the child learns is to learn to care. Taking care of yourself, taking care of nature. Take care of nature, take care of yourself [...] young people studying under a tree that is guaranteeing shade. These are experiences that take place within the school [...] (Baniwa, 2024).

Image 6 – Nursery I reading in his own way under the tree



Source: personal collection

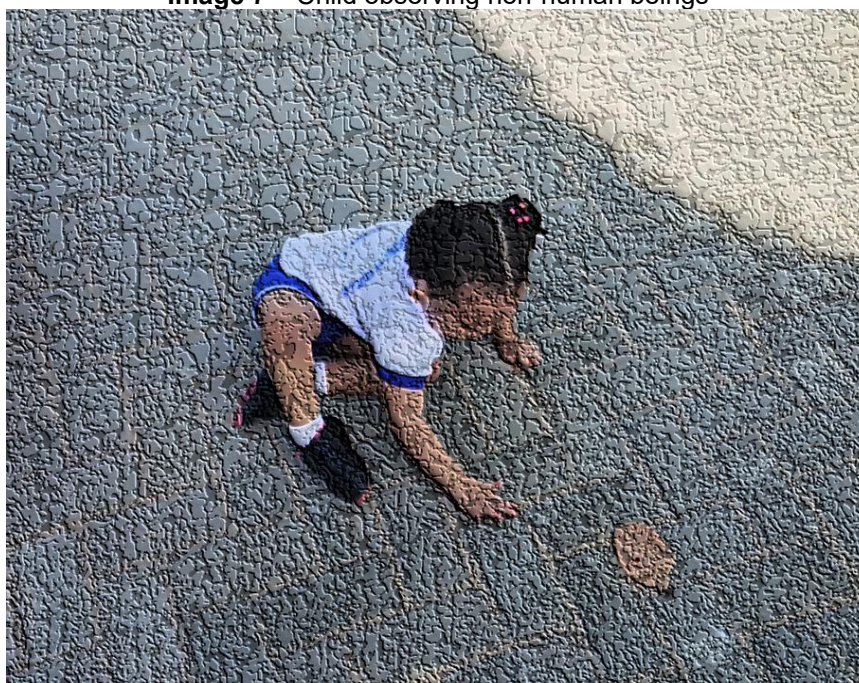
When reflecting on the speech of the professor with a PhD in Anthropology, one can ask: Why not make a non-indigenous Early Childhood Education, based on the so-called Pedagogy of the Earth? As he well explains, [...] Living in nature, with nature, as an experience, as an exercise of freedom and democracy in the diversity of human and non-human beings" (Baniwa, 2024).

Making use of a book, a toy in a relaxed way under a tree, without the obligation to learn to read or to know the alphabet, provides the child with the opportunity to learn to take advantage of the shade for that moment, which even without yet understanding how important his preservation of that tree is, for the child, in that context what matters most is the imaginary, The fantasy, the joy of playing and enjoying without worry, without the pressure of time, the feeling of keeping that space a pleasant place for all, will arise from the memories created in childhood, which according to the indigenous peoples [...] Memory connects the facts with each other and provides an understanding of the whole (Munduruku, 2013).

Early Childhood Education does not need to be full of sheets with ready-made activities and stereotyped images, it needs more moments of freedom to: explore,

participate, discover, demonstrate, show, socialize, know and play. Krenak (2022) teaches us that: "This is the indigenous mystery. A legacy that passes from generation to generation, what our children learn from an early age is to put their hearts in the rhythm of the earth" (p. 60. position 571 Kindle). It is by playing, exploring, discovering with and in nature, that children can be happier and less exposed to electronic devices.

Image 7 – Child observing non-human beings



Source: personal collection

In his adventures covered in the book *Meu vô Apolinário*, the indigenous man tells what it was like to observe non-human beings during their moments in the village,

In the countryside I liked to chase the ants. They are interesting because they work all the time. I saw them all coming and going to an indeterminate place, a great confusion. [...] From time to time they stopped and exchanged some ideas (p. 15)

Every child, when they have the chance to see an anthill up close, it is possible that they have the same thought, and soon begin to create some story as the indigenous author/writer did, this time of observation awakens the imagination, and can generate fantastic narratives about what they are seeing. This creativity sharpened by curiosity is important for the child's development, allowing him to explore the environment in which he lives more and more.

I kept imagining the conversation:
"Hello, my relative, how are you? Is this sheet heavy? Want help?"
"It's a little bit, yes, but I think I can take it to house. Will it rain today?"
"I don't think so. The weather is firm. But, just in case, yes we better hurry."
"That's it! Let's do it."
"Bye!"
I tried to chase them and went after them as far as possible, yet they always escaped my watch.
(Munduruku, 2013).

CONCLUSION

[...] I have already attended school in a village under a tree and I thought it was very good. People were at ease in that experience [...] they know that the pedagogical experience can be carried out on the edge of the stream, on a stone slab, anywhere [...] (Krenak, 2022 p. 59).

Can you idealize a child without playing? Playing is necessary and indispensable for child development, it is not only a spontaneous activity of childhood, but a primordial experience for the integral development of children.

I once read a phrase that said that games are the heart of childhood, a perfect thought that allows us to understand that it is through play and play that children explore the world around them and themselves, developing social and emotional skills, in addition to strengthening affective bonds. In play, children are not passive, but agents of their development.

Thus, we conclude that a proposal for the education of young children, based on the worldview of indigenous peoples, involves the idea of putting the heart in the rhythm of the earth, providing children with a deep connection with the world around them. Allowing them to learn in practice about respect and care for the planet, which is fundamental for the survival and good living of human and non-human beings.

Outdoor play in contact with the land, water and nature are ways to demonstrate to children that the world they are inhabiting belongs to other living beings. This contact is fundamental for them to incorporate values such as care, respect and belonging into their identity.

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