

## PLAY AS A LITERACY PRACTICE IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS



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### ABSTRACT

Playfulness is a theme that has been occupying more and more space among teaching strategies. This study seeks to analyze playfulness as an important methodology in classroom learning, so that it contributes to the child's learning. It presents the importance of play in the child's socialization process as well as its importance in the teaching-learning process in which play is applied, such as through games, toys, games and, about play in education. The field research was carried out at the Emídio Machado Lisboa Municipal School, with five elementary school teachers, carried out through a questionnaire with closed questions, in which it was sought to know the training of teachers and how they apply play in school activities; the teachers' perception of play and whether the school

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offers support to minimize illiteracy. For the theoretical foundation of the article, a bibliographic research was developed, and then proceeded to field research in order to seek answers to the hypotheses raised. It was concluded that play is a valuable resource in the teaching-learning process and that it should be elaborated from activities planned in a conscious way, aiming at effective learning and contributing to the full development of the child.

**Keywords:** Playful. Gaming. Education. Play. Teaching-Learning. Pedagogical Practice.

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there have been many questions about education in the school system. New techniques and methods are introduced every day with the objective of improving the development of the teaching-learning process, with a view to meeting the demands of this new context marked by the revolution of science and technology that is consequently demanding, from educational systems, the formation of reflective, critical and autonomous educational agents who can live and contribute to the development of society.

Finding illiterate children at the end of the initial grades is, even today, at the height of the first quarter of the 21st century, a problem in evidence in the school routine, a fact that negatively increases the performance of both students and agents of the educational process.

The use of play in teaching-learning is effective in stimulating the development of skills by placing the child in front of activities that enable him to perform actions and reflect on them. However, it is noted that this only occurs when used correctly by the teacher, stimulating and awakening the students' interest in the content, working in a playful way through problems and challenges, because only the simple manipulation of materials or games does not imply that the child can be acquiring or transforming knowledge. In other words, it is not, by itself, that play and play develop the child's intellect, it is necessary to think about factors associated with the teaching stage, conditions of the child's intellectual development and others.

The choice of the theme of this article was based on the empirical observation of literacy teachers in dealing with the difficulties of teaching literacy with play, which led to the inferral of a need for discussion about literacy, based on the following problematizing question: do teachers in the literacy stage use play as a pedagogical tool in their educational practices? Considering the significant number of students who leave this stage without being literate, another question arose: does the practice of these teachers contribute to the non-literacy of their students? The research aims to foster the discussion about changes in the educational context, in which students and teachers are agents of these changes.

Based on the assumption that games are part of the child's life, the article proposes to know the literacy with play in the teaching-learning process at the Emídio Machado Lisboa Municipal School, in the city of Bacabeira, Maranhão, through field research with elementary school teachers. The research was outlined as a proposal for pedagogical

intervention that followed the following methodological path: bibliographic research, field research, elaboration of instruments for data collection (questionnaires), application of questionnaires, sensitization of the teaching staff with suggestions to associate the literacy process with play.

We hope that this study will contribute positively to the discussion about playing in the classroom as a pedagogical tool and not just playfulness for play's sake. Because games are part of children's childhood and their literacy needs to consider not only the school environment, but also the social and family environment, that is, the child's environment as a participant in society. These children also have subjectivities and individualities inherent to their material and immaterial conditions, ancestry, thought.

The methodological procedures used in this research aim to make explicit the steps followed for the elaboration of the fieldwork at the Emídio Machado Lisboa Municipal School, in the city of Bacabeira, Maranhão, based on the assumption that games are part of the child's life. In this way, the investigation proposes to know literacy with play in the teaching-learning process through field research with elementary school teachers. The research was outlined as a proposal for pedagogical intervention that followed the following methodological path: bibliographic research, field research, elaboration of instruments for data collection (questionnaires), application of questionnaires, sensitization of the teaching staff with suggestions to associate the literacy process with play.

The questionnaire was applied to collect data (from June to July 2015) with five teachers of the Initial Grades of Elementary School Emídio Machado Lisboa Municipal School. The questionnaire was structured as: teacher training in relation to playfulness, support from the pedagogical body to combat illiteracy, teachers' conception of playfulness; and the use of play in literacy classes.

The universe of the study was the Emídio Machado Lisboa Municipal School, on BR 135, km 58, in the village of Centrinho in Bacabeira-MA. The institution belongs to the Municipality of Bacabeira and was created by law No. 6,187, of November 10, 1994, dismembered from the municipality of Rosario, recognized by current legislation, operating in its own building. And it offers elementary school modalities from the 1st to the 5th grade.

## **LITERACY WITH PLAY IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

The school is realizing the need to improve the task of literacy. It is necessary that schools know how to follow the natural sequence in which human beings manifest their full

mastery of language, such as speaking, reading and writing. In the school environment, children are silent, filling notebooks with symbols that they do not know and that, possibly, do not mean anything materially to them. Writing is seen in a mistaken way, only transferring graphic signs to paper. However, it should be seen as a graphic technique that represents the oral language, that is, it is necessary for children to understand what they are writing.

In view of the difficulties encountered by teachers of the Initial Grades in relation to the teaching of literacy with play in the classroom, it is perceived that some have been looking for ways to improve their pedagogical practices through differentiated methodologies that lead students to awaken a taste for classes. In the case of literacy, games and play contribute significantly, enriching the intellectual development of students. Playful practices worked in a planned and directed way can lead children to the development of their linguistic, sensory-motor and communicative skills. The insertion of playfulness in classroom activities makes learning more pleasurable and fun.

One should start reading with the continuous growth of the student, which can be fast or slow, and this is what the educator himself can highlight. Only he can diagnose if his students already have the necessary maturity and what is fundamental for this. Writing is equally vital in the development of literacy and language learning. Therefore, it is preferable for the teacher to develop activities in a playful way, through which the student can develop his body, his rhythm, his attention, his concentration, making his imagination, which is peculiar to him, and organizing himself to face more safely this complex task that is learning to read.

It is understood that the ludic in the teaching-learning process in the Early Grades has great importance in the development of the child, in all areas of knowledge, the student's work is not only fundamental to promote learning in the subjects, but also to cultivate essential behaviors that contribute to the development of their personality.

For the practice of play to become a reality in school, it is necessary to change the view of educational establishments regarding this action and the way they understand the curriculum. This requires a faculty capable of reflecting and changing their pedagogical practices (Carneiro; Dodge, 2007, p. 91).

In this way, it is understood that the school can and should meet all the conditions so that children can develop as a whole, fully. This fact needs the training of teachers, better preparation, especially of educators in the Initial Grades. Learning needs to be pleasurable,

it must arouse curiosity, involving games and challenges. Thus, literacy will occur more easily, that is, learning happens in a continuous and progressive way and requires tools that enable its development, knowing that the child needs time to play.

The proposal of working with games cannot be understood as a cake recipe, which must be faithfully followed by those who use it. The idea would be to propose something referential, which could be modified, adapted, to the pedagogical practice, according to the needs of each teacher, and that the games be transformed above all into study and teaching material, as well as learning and knowledge production (Macedo, 2000, p. 16).

It is understood that any game can be used when the objective is to propose activities that favor the acquisition of knowledge. The issue is not the material, but the way it is exploited. It can be said, therefore, that any game will do, but not just any way. Many students have difficulties in learning to read and write. Literacy methods are increasingly unsatisfactory, thus leading to low school performance. For the construction of knowledge, an active process of internal elaboration is necessary, where the development of social and cultural exchanges occurs, guided by economic, political and psychological factors.

In this way, the school should facilitate learning by using playful activities that create a literacy environment to favor the process of acquiring learning autonomy. To this end, school knowledge must be socially valued and literacy must be a dynamic and creative process through games, toys, games and musicality (Silva, 2009, p. 17).

In this sense, Bittencourt and Ferreira (2002) elucidate that school knowledge cannot lose its social value, but literacy must have at its core that this process needs to be dynamic and creative. It is in this sense, therefore, that games, toys and games, as well as musicality, come into play, to value the construction of school knowledge.

When the student has access to school, he makes use of orality in the interaction with peers. It is necessary to guarantee a space of respect and acceptance of the diversities that may arise. The school institution has the task of providing opportunities for the student to use orality and writing to become literate in various situations, with the objective of selecting the most appropriate form of expression for the different communicative situations.

According to Rocha (2003, p. 381), the term ludic is related to games and toys; However, it is known that this expression has a much broader meaning. Through play, knowledge and learning are built. The school should seek to reproduce the natural environment lived at home and on the street. According to Almeida (2003, p. 24), "[...] the

game makes the child's natural environment while the abstract and remote references do not correspond to the child's interest". The challenge that arises, then, is to ensure, in the school environment, learning conditions that respect the natural inclinations of childhood, such as the need to play.

We have an impoverished image of the child who learns: to reduce it to a pair of eyes, a pair of ears, a hand that picks up an instrument... There is, behind this, a knowing subject, someone who thinks that he constructs interpretations... it is necessary to break with the poor image that one has of the student (Ferreiro, 1995, p. 40).

We start from the assumption that children build ideas or hypotheses about writing even before entering school, because learning is a constructive process that goes through social, historical and personal aspects and the educator needs to overcome the condition of passing on ready and finished knowledge and allow the student to elaborate his hypotheses and strategies for reading and writing. When the school is unable to teach children to read and write, it automatically produces adult illiteracy, as all future teaching and learning processes continue to be deficient.

For education to be truly effective, it is essential that it emerges from an environment that is pleasant, playful and pleasurable. This type of environment favors more active and engaging learning for students, promoting, especially through games, opportunities for discussion and interaction between students and teachers.

## **PLAY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Playfulness is a theme that has been emphasized in the most diverse sectors of society, since playful activities are part of the life of the human being and, in particular, of the life of the child. For Ricardo (2017), the concept of playfulness is polysemic, often understood as being the same thing as playfulness and playful activity. For Luckesi (2006 apud Ricardo, 2017, p. 29),

[The playful activity is the one that offers the person who experiences it, a perception of freedom, a state of plenitude and total surrender to this practice. What playfulness brings new is the fact that the human being, when he acts playfully, experiences a full experience. There is no division. The concept of playfulness, for Luckesi, goes beyond the idea of leisure, it expands understanding to a state of full consciousness and internal experience.

In this sense, even before thinking that playing is a form of learning, it is necessary to awaken the learner, as in the example of cubes, where colors stimulate the child to want



to play and discover what can be assembled. Santos (2000, p. 57) conceptualizes the word ludic as: "means to play" and, in this playing, "games, games and toys are included, and this playing is also related to the conduct of those who play, who play and who have fun". According to Ricardo (2017, p. 29), "Playfulness comes from the Latin *ludus*, which in Huizinga's (2004) conception involves children's games, recreation, competitions, liturgical and theatrical representations, [...]". In turn, the educational function of the game provides opportunities for the individual's learning, his knowledge, his knowledge and his understanding of the world.

In this way, games and toys are understood as fundamental activities in childhood since they contribute to the development of imagination, confidence and curiosity, in addition to providing the student's socialization in the world in which he is inserted. Antunes (2003, p. 23) The etymological approach to the term "game" emphasizes that it is understood as a "fun, play, pastime subject to rules". This definition is not limited to the idea of competition, in which one group must win while the other loses. On the contrary, games should be seen as opportunities for individual growth and learning, providing experiences that contribute to the student's personal development. This perspective broadens the notion of games in education, emphasizing their educational and formative function in a collaborative environment.

Understanding the game as an activity that imposes challenges is essential to recognize its importance in child development. Through interactions such as conversations, questions and looks, the game stimulates children's curiosity and expression. Playing becomes a way of interacting with the world, where the child engages without the pressure of winning or losing, allowing the experience of learning to happen naturally and spontaneously.

Toys, in this context, are tools that arouse children's interest and, even if unconsciously, help in the development of various skills. Therefore, play goes beyond the simple act of playing — it is an opportunity to unravel life's riddles and foster curiosity and creativity, essential for the child's integral growth.

These skills increase with the age of the child, so it is important to observe and respect the phases he goes through. It is observed that all children, in all eras, spend most of their time playing. In this regard, several childhood scholars have similar conceptions regarding the importance of this act in the development of the child, being unanimous in



recognizing that the child, when playing, acquires experience, that is, the toy provides learning by doing, in addition to developing a sense of companionship and creativity.

So play, toy or game, are auxiliary resources to promote the physical, mental and socio-emotional development of the child, because, when playing, there is learning by the child, providing the release of energy, the expansion of creativity, strengthening sociability and stimulating freedom and performance. "In the act of playing, the satisfaction they experience when participating in the activities is observed. Signs of joy, laughter, a certain excitement are components of this pleasure, although the contribution of playing goes far beyond partial impulses" (Iantsch, 2012, p. 7). The child is able to reconcile, compare, his fantasy world with reality, moving freely from one situation to another, that is, in the act of playing, the child proposes to do something and seeks to fulfill this objective.

## THE THEORY ABOUT PLAY

Play plays a fundamental role in education, being a practice that dates back to prehistory and stands out today for its ability to motivate and engage students. Its pleasurable nature not only increases children's interest but also favors concentration and productivity in educational settings.

In addition, play and play are universal, permeating all stages of human life, which gives this practice a special relevance. Playfulness not only enriches the learning experience but also strengthens interpersonal relationships, allowing creativity to express and develop. This playful interactivity is, therefore, an essential ingredient for strengthening social bonds and improving the educational process.

Currently, there are several theorists who approach the ludic and its importance for the teaching-learning process and especially for human formation. Theorists such as Piaget and Wallon (*apud* Almeida, 2003, p. 28) "affirm that the relationship between the child and play, or play, occurs from birth, since the child does not have speech, but uses the game of gestures and sounds to communicate with the external world and when developing speech begins the game of words". All communication is carried out through gestures and both the adult and the child use playfulness for entertainment and communication.

Vygotsky's approach to symbolic play, or pretend play, is vital for us to understand how children attribute meanings to objects in their playful context. For Vygotsky, the focus should not be only on the objective functions of the toy, but on the interpretation and role

that the child assigns to it during play. This practice of symbolizing allows children to explore and understand the world around them, developing cognitive, social, and emotional skills.

The symbolic game, by allowing the child to create narratives and scenarios, also serves as a learning tool, where lived experiences can be interpreted and reimagined. Thus, play not only reflects reality, but also allows children to experience different roles and realities, expanding their understanding of themselves and others. Vygotsky emphasizes, therefore, the importance of the subjective meaning attributed by the child, which is fundamental for his integral development.

For Vygotsky (2003, p. 8), "when children play, they create an imaginary situation, where there are rules of behavior, which are represented in play and there is a relationship between play and learning". When developing a symbolic game, the child imitates adult behaviors, such as attitudes, values, habits, and situations that prepare him for real life. Thus, when the child plays doctor, he seeks to act as similar as possible to what he observed in the doctors of the real context, that is, he creates and submits to the rules of the game by representing different roles.

According to Kishimoto (2005, p. 61): "The child does not see the object as it is, but gives it a new meaning, when the child mounts a broom and pretends to be riding a horse, he is giving a new meaning to the object". Therefore, play for the child is characterized by the imaginary situation in the action of playing, since the toy can either contain an imaginary situation or a rule related to what is being represented. Thus, it can be said that the use of imagination by the child can be compared to the social context experienced by the child, which allows him to build his knowledge processes.

Another aspect to be considered is the role of imitation in play, because it is starting from imitation as an act of simply repeating what he saw the other do to perform an activity consciously, that the child creates new possibilities and combinations and builds his own knowledge.

The Piagetian theory about children's playfulness is based on the evolution of mental structures, where the child's development happens through play, and as this happens, the child builds his own knowledge.

All games, in one way or another, help the social development of students, because when playing it is necessary to obey the rules, respect the turn to play, know how to win and accept that one has lost. The playful aspect can provide moments of joy during

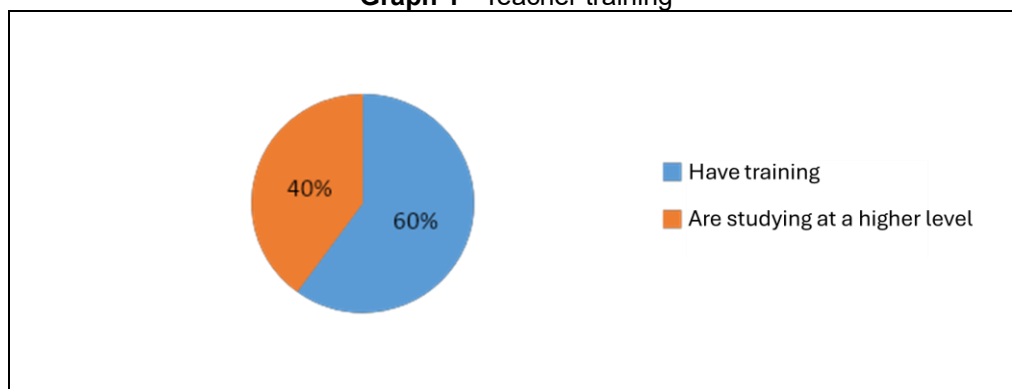
classes, regardless of the stage of life in which we are. It adds lightness to the school routine, making it easier for students to absorb the teachings in a more meaningful way.

For the class to be truly meaningful, the playful component plays a fundamental role. This is because, in addition to transmitting knowledge, the teacher also learns about what the student has already built so far, which is essential for future learning. The expectation is to overcome, as long as the environment favors learning and the educator is aware of the responsibility that this journey requires. We study the past, live the present and project the future. Through playfulness, we are able to ask new questions to already known answers.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the first instance, we sought to investigate teacher training, a fact of paramount importance to achieve success in the teaching-learning process.

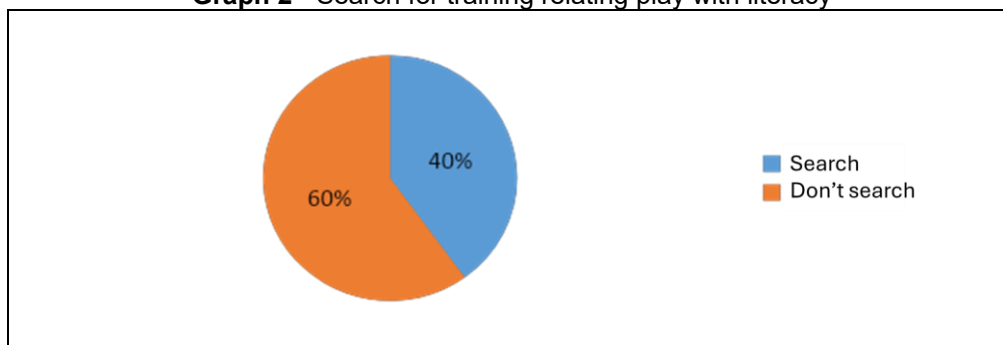
**Graph 1 - Teacher training**



**Source:** field research data

The issue of training was emphasized in 60% of the teachers who have a higher education course and 40% are attending higher education. It is necessary for teachers to reflect on their training in order to understand and intervene in problems that may arise in the school environment.

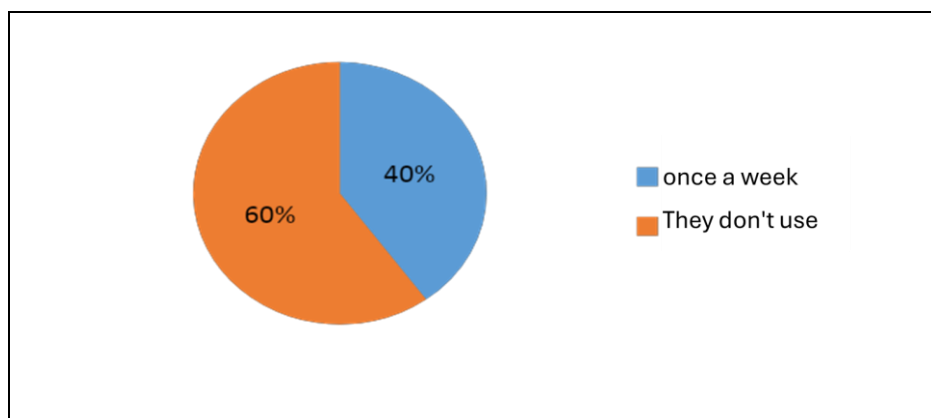
**Graph 2 - Search for training relating play with literacy**



**Source:** field research data

The interviewees were asked if they seek training that allows them to work with play. 40% of the teachers declared positively to seek this training; 60% answered that they do not seek it. In view of the advance of cases of illiterate students that schools have been experiencing, it is understood that it is necessary for the educator in his training process to have studies aimed at working on literacy by associating play. It is important to seek knowledge and enable training to enhance the teaching-learning process.

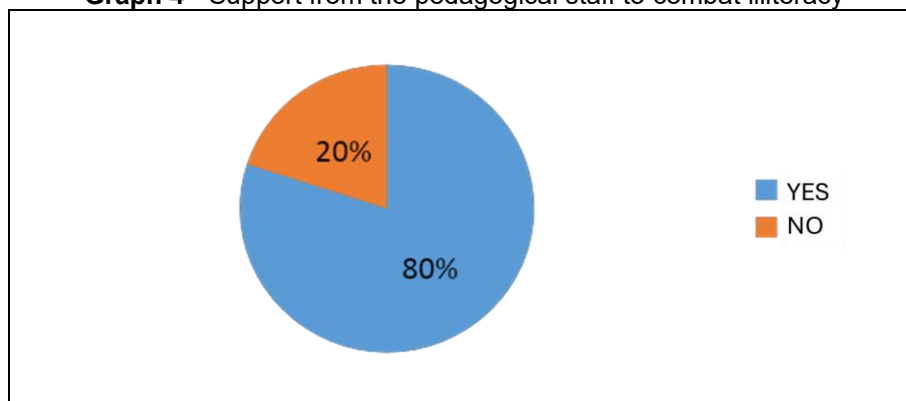
**Graph 3 - Frequency of the application of playfulness in the classroom**



**Source:** field research data

In this context, it was questioned how often playfulness is developed in the classroom. 40% of respondents stated that they use it once a week and 60% stated that they do not use it. Many renounce resources available to them within and around the school, as well as interventions that can guide their school habits. Therefore, methodologies that make it possible to instrumentalize the classes should be encouraged, leading the student to accept the content.

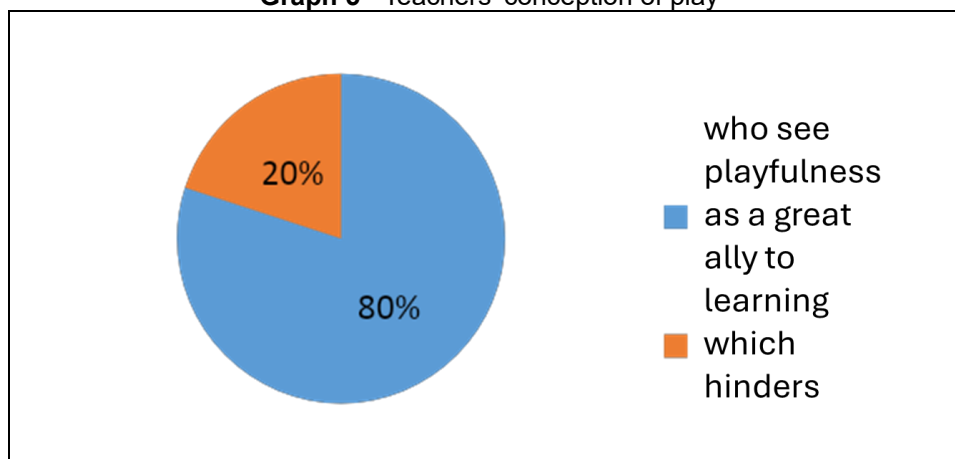
**Graph 4 - Support from the pedagogical staff to combat illiteracy**



**Source:** field research data

It was questioned whether the school has support from specialized professionals, who can help in the literacy process in the classroom, 80% of the teachers stated that they have support and 20% say they do not. It is the coordinator's task to monitor the teacher and detect cases of illiteracy in order to search for solutions, as schools need a specialized body to monitor, guide or assist in decision-making to solve such problems.

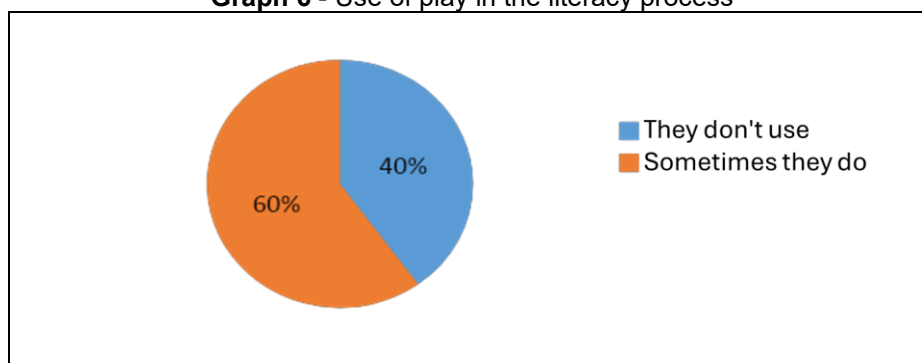
**Graph 5 - Teachers' conception of play**



**Source:** field research data

The interviewees were asked about their conception of playfulness and 80% answered that they see playfulness as a great ally of learning and 20% said that it hinders. However, in informal conversations, 80% said that play is worked as an ally in the sense of fixing the content and they think that this should be well planned and worked on, because the student needs to understand that this is part of their learning and is not just a game.

**Graph 6 - Use of play in the literacy process**



**Source:** field research data

About 40% of the teachers admit that they do not use play in the literacy process, 60% say they sometimes do. This question demonstrates the need for this methodological proposal that provides educators with suggestions based on literature for the improvement of their educational practice in the literacy process. Thus, according to the statements of the interviewees:

"The playfulness in classroom activities facilitates the understanding of the contents, in addition to the child having pleasure in learning".

"Because it helps more in learning"

"It makes the child learn while having fun, so it is easier to explain the content".

## **PROPOSAL**

It is intended to suggest, based on the literature and the questionnaire carried out, that the educational practice of the Initial Grades associating play with literacy should be dynamic, thus being able to transform the classroom into a place where everyone is involved in a process of construction.

It can be seen that there are numerous advantages of educational games, which involve motor and social aspects. It is necessary for the educator to select, create and know how to use the games that give opportunities to students to develop these aspects that are interconnected.

This study seeks to analyze playfulness as an important methodology in classroom learning in a way that contributes to the child's learning. Therefore, for the educator to get a good class, it would then begin, making them curious about the subject, providing them with the opportunity to obtain and research so that everyone in the daily experience develops their critical sense.

It is necessary to train students who are questioning and who have the discernment, ability to judge and choose. Students need to be well-informed and educators have the

obligation to work on all aspects for the search for knowledge, in addition to offering them a school of solidary coexistence, cultural coexistence, participation and social fulfillment, both for students and educators.

## CONCLUSION

The study allowed a deeper knowledge about literacy with play, an activity that is part of the life of all human beings, especially children.

When investigating the training of educators, it was found that, despite knowing play, most do not have the qualification to work with playfulness, and should seek to base themselves through readings and courses, and participating in continuing education. It was noted that some teachers, despite being trained with such activities, playfulness is still not being worked on daily in the school environment as a support in pedagogical practice.

On the other hand, the teachers, who participated in the study, and who are partners in the journey, enabled the exchange and the living of rich and remarkable experiences. Thus, the whole process allowed for a more solid training and an awareness of the complexity and importance of the teaching work.

In view of the research and the theoretical basis used, it can be concluded that the game is a very useful work tool for the educator, because through it the teacher can introduce the contents in a differentiated and very active way. With a simple game, the teacher will be able to provide knowledge apprehension in a pleasant way and the student will not even realize that he is learning. Therefore, this study shows the importance of working in a playful and pleasurable way, especially when it comes to children, while pointing out that in every field of education, playfulness is extremely relevant.

The study pointed out as a weak point the lack of training of most of the teachers interviewed to work on playfulness in literacy classes, which, however, is a rich pedagogical resource for the intellectual development of students. In this way, it is hoped that this research can contribute positively to educators who are concerned with the performance in children's education, helping with content about the playful activity for the child's development, making their classes more motivating.



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