

ARTICLE

**CONCEPTUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TERMS  
“BRINCADEIRA” AND “GAME” IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is part of a thesis produced for a competitive examination for the full professor position. Its objective was to identify the theoretical differences between the concepts of “*brincadeira*”<sup>1</sup> and “game,” the role of each one in children’s learning, and its implications in pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education. The Cultural-Historical Theory was the basis for the theoretical research through the genetic method in the methodology from a bibliographic survey in books and scientific articles about “*brincadeira*” and “game,” and in Russian authors only about “game.” The results pointed out the importance of the differentiation between both terms in Early Childhood Education, as well as enabled the proposition that “*brincadeira*” is the main activity of children from 0 to 3 years old, and “game,” especially “role-play,” as the main activity of children from three to six years old. The importance of these results for children’s learning corroborates the centrality of the playful aspect in the activities of Early Childhood Education, distinguishing “*brincadeira*” and games in their contents, motives, needs, and specificities for children. This proposal to change the main activity in Early Childhood Education also indicates the need for “*brincadeira*” from 0 to 3 years old to develop into role-play games for children from 3 to 6 years old since both are essential for children’s activities to also change from involuntary to voluntary and volitional activities. The implications of this research for teaching practices are centered on the need for teachers to know and include role-play games in the activities of 3 to 6-year-old children, helping them develop autonomy, volitional activities, and self-control of their attitudes.

**Keywords:** game, *brincadeira*, Cultural-Historical Theory, role play, early childhood education.

**DIFERENÇAS CONCEITUAIS E PEDAGÓGICAS ENTRE OS TERMOS “BRINCADEIRA” E “JOGO” NO  
BRASIL**

**RESUMO:** Este artigo é parte de tese produzida para concurso para o cargo de professora titular, cujo objetivo foi identificar as diferenças teóricas entre os conceitos de jogo e brincadeira, o papel de cada um deles nas aprendizagens das crianças e suas implicações nas práticas pedagógicas na Educação Infantil. A

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Teoria Histórico-Cultural fundamentou a pesquisa teórica por meio do método genético na metodologia, a partir do levantamento bibliográfico em livros e artigos científicos sobre “brincadeira” e “jogo”, e em autores russos apenas sobre o “jogo”. Os resultados apontaram a importância da diferenciação entre ambos os termos na Educação Infantil, bem como possibilitaram a proposição de que brincadeira seja a atividade principal de crianças de 0 a 3 anos, e o jogo, principalmente “jogo de papéis, como atividade principal de crianças de três a seis anos. A importância desses resultados para as aprendizagens das crianças corrobora a centralidade do aspecto lúdico nas atividades da Educação Infantil, distinguindo a brincadeira e o jogo em seus conteúdos, motivos, necessidades e especificidades para as crianças. Essa proposta de mudança da atividade principal na Educação Infantil indica, também, a necessidade de a brincadeira de 0 a 3 anos se desenvolver para jogos de papéis para crianças de 3 a 6 anos, uma vez que ambos são essenciais para que as atividades das crianças, também, se modifiquem de atividades involuntárias para voluntárias e volitivas. As implicações desta pesquisa para as práticas pedagógicas centram-se na necessidade de o corpo docente conhecer e passar a incluir os jogos de papéis nas atividades das crianças de 3 a 6 anos, auxiliando-as no desenvolvimento da autonomia, de atividades volitivas e autocontrole de suas atitudes.

**Palavras-chave:** jogo, brincadeira, Teoria Histórico-Cultural, jogo de papéis, educação infantil.

## DIFERENCIAS CONCEPTUALES Y PEDAGÓGICAS ENTRE LOS TÉRMINOS "BRINCADEIRA" Y "JOGO" EN BRASIL

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo forma parte de una tesis, cuyo objetivo fue identificar las diferencias teóricas entre los conceptos de “juego” y de “brincadeira”<sup>2</sup>, el papel de cada uno de ellos en los aprendizajes de los niños y sus implicaciones para las prácticas pedagógicas en la Educación Infantil. La Teoría Histórico-Cultural basó la investigación teórica y a través del método genético en la metodología, a partir del levantamiento bibliográfico en libros y artículos científicos. Los resultados indicaron la importancia de la diferenciación entre ambos los términos en la Educación Infantil, bien como hizo posible la propuesta de que la “brincadeira” sea la principal actividad de los niños de cero a tres años, y el “juego”, principalmente el “juego de roles”, como actividad principal de los niños de tres a seis años. La importancia de estos resultados para el aprendizaje de los niños corrobora la centralidad del aspecto lúdico en las actividades de la Educación Infantil, distinguindo la “brincadeira” y el “juego” en sus contenidos, razones, necesidades y especificidades para los niños. Esta propuesta de cambio de la actividad principal en la Educación Infantil indica, también, la necesidad de la “brincadeira” de los niños de 0 a 3 años desarrollar para “juegos de roles” de niños de 3 a 6 años, ya que ambos son imprescindibles para que las actividades de los niños, también, evolucionen de actividades involuntarias a actividades voluntarias y volitivas. Las implicaciones para las prácticas pedagógicas se centran en la necesidad de que el profesorado conozca y comience a incluir juegos de roles en las actividades de los niños de 3 a 6 años, ayudándoles a desarrollar la autonomía, las actividades volitivas y el autocontrol de sus actitudes.

**Palabras clave:** juego, brincadeira, Teoría Histórico-Cultural, juego de roles, educación infantil.

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>The decision to keep the word *brincadeira* in Portuguese is because in English the terms “*brincadeira*” and game are normally interchangeable and the aim of the study was exactly to point out the differences they assume in Brazilian context.

<sup>2</sup> La decisión de mantener la palabra *brincadeira* en Portugués es porque en español los términos JOGO y BRINCADEIRA son traducidos por JUEGO y no indican la diferencia relevante para el texto ya que el objetivo de la investigación era exactamente apuntar las diferencias entendidas por los dos en el contexto brasileño. (A decisão de manter a palavra *brincadeira* em Português é porque, no espanhol, os termos JOGO e BRINCADEIRA são traduzidos por JUEGO e não indicam a diferença relevante para o texto, já que o objetivo da pesquisa foi exatamente apontar as diferenças assumidas por eles no contexto brasileiro).

Despite the subject of culture is very present in scientific texts and society's general ideology, even today, school education puts cultural issues in the background of curricula and teaching practices. In the case of teaching in Early Childhood Education, this issue is highly concerning since the biological view of development is predominant and determined by conceptions that label the child as not contributing to the development of learning necessary for their life. The school insists on not conceiving the child as the subject of the teaching and learning activities. The conception of teaching remains that knowledge can be learned sitting still and alone, with exclusively individual effort, in the same time and space for all children, based only on the "teacher's instructions." The so-called "school" contents are the focus of the teaching activities, which often do not correspond to the learning needs of the children.

In the Cultural-Historical Theory, culture means all human culture, prioritizing the historical human development and the movements of societies over time. According to Vygotski (1995, p. 34), "[...] *la cultura origina formas especiales de conducta, modifica la actividad de las funciones psíquicas, edifica nuevos niveles en el sistema del comportamiento humano en desarrollo*" [culture originates special forms of behavior, modifies the activity of psychic functions, builds new levels in the developing system of human behavior].

From this perspective, the Early Childhood Education stage in Basic Education is essential for the child to be appropriate for this culture since it is the beginning of his school experience through systematized knowledge. However, Vygotski's investigations (1993, p. 235) have shown that at school, "[...] there is never a parallelism between the course of schooling and the development of the corresponding functions" (he refers to the development of the child's psyche). This mismatch happens because, still, the school works based on the ready product and little focus on the learning process. This generates, for the teacher, the loss of the vision of the whole and the primary agent of learning, the student. In the case of Early Childhood Education, the choice of materials, instruments, technologies, tools, methods, activities, and everything that usually involves school learning, from the simplest mediator to the most sophisticated, is made for an idealized and uncritical child. In this context, teaching and learning activities are devoid of meaning and significance, generating disinterest in children.

Vygotski's (1993) investigations also demonstrated that human development presents ruptures and advances by leaps, as opposed to the idea of linearity, linked to the biological conception of development, which does not help teachers to understand children's attitudes toward new knowledge. In this sense, Vygotski (1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, among others) contributed considerably to cultural processes that were considered essential to human learning and development, also opposing the conception that "culture" is restricted to the assimilation of social habits. In this direction, human cultural development can only be conceived as a living process of development, formation, and struggle, as opposed to stereotyped, standardized, and biologizing development models. This living developmental process occurs according to dialectics, that is, in constant contradictions between the primitive forms of development of human beings (primitive in the sense of original; first) and cultural forms (VYGOTSKI, 1995).

Assis (2010) discusses this problem when confronted in his research with the existence of these conceptions in Early Childhood Education schools, in which development and learning are configured as natural and linear processes that follow predetermined stages.

Teaching should make sense for those who teach and for those who learn. The meaning of teaching is related to the teacher's individual experiences, and the meaning of teaching is socially generated by what societies conceive as teaching at a given historical moment. As societies are constantly moving, the social meaning of teaching changes and the meaning of teaching (our conceptions) must also accompany such social changes (LEONTIEV, 1978). These two processes in cultural development — inter and intrapsychic (VYGOTSKI, 1995) — must be connected in the teaching activity so that there is no alienation of either the teacher or the learner, since both processes are inseparable (LEONTIEV, 1978a).

For the learner, it is essential to develop intentionality in learning through the relationships he establishes at school and the activities that provide him with the appropriation of knowledge. At the beginning of the learning process, there may be no intentionality on the child who must learn because they do not know precisely why they are going to school. However, this low intentionality in learning can be modified depending on the way the school is presented to the child, the way the teaching staff

identifies their learning needs in relation to their experiences, even if few, such as those of babies, whose requirements are more noticeable at the biological level (sucking, thermal comfort, sleep, and feeding, etc.). As the baby relates with others, with different environments, situations, objects, sounds, etc., their biological needs must still be met. However, these social contacts create other needs of a cultural nature specific to human beings, which drive their psychological development. In Cultural-Historical Theory, teaching falls within this scope in identifying these learning needs and in the intentional pedagogical practice linked to formulating purposes and underlying values produced by society.

In Early Childhood Education, it is essential to have intentional and systematized teaching since children still have little experience in society. Systematized interventions by the teacher according to the children's cultural learning needs are necessary for their psychological development. Thus, the children's intentionality (motive) in learning develops from the teacher's intentionality in teaching certain subject based on its social meaning for society and creating meaning for the children.

From this perspective, the teaching and learning processes become a transformative social activity based on the "conscious relationship between consciousness and its object" (VÁSQUEZ, 1977, p. 10).

Especially in the areas of children's learning and development, the work of Vygotski (1972, 1987, 1987a, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007) brought significant progress in the understanding of the learning processes of normal and disabled children, breaking stigmas and conceptions crystallized in the concept of heredity and, consequently, glimpsing possibilities of educational practices, whose central axis is the child and his potential learning mediated by the teachers' actions.

A fundamental feature of Cultural-Historical Theory is the development of the Higher Psychic Functions (HPF, explained below), whose theoretical basis provides longevity, attractiveness, and possibilities for development (MESHCHERYAKOV, 2006). The higher psychic functions are unique to human beings, and they are what make us human. They are not developed by our biological apparatus, although they are part of it. They develop through culture, living in society, and mediations that provide us with possibilities of access to learning throughout our lives.

Vygotski (1995, p. 29) explains the importance of the development of Higher Psychic Functions (HPF) and Special Higher Psychic Functions (SHPF) for human beings to live in society:

The concept of "development of the higher psychic functions" and the object of our study encompasses two groups of phenomena that at first sight seem completely heterogeneous but which are two fundamental branches, two chains of development of the higher forms of conduct that never merge into one another even though they are indissolubly united. It is a matter, in the first place, of the processes of mastery of the external means of cultural development and thought: language, writing, calculation, drawing; and, in the second place, of the processes of development of the special higher psychic functions, neither limited nor precisely determined, which in traditional psychology are called voluntary attention, logical memory, formation of concepts, etc. Both, taken together, form what we conventionally qualify as processes of development of the child's higher forms of behavior (VYGOTSKI, 1995, p. 29, emphasis added).

However, our experience in recent years in Brazil leads us to reflect on the type of human beings that societies produce. The incitement to hatred, prejudice, and savagery, by politicians, media, social networks, churches, and schools, that is, in different social instances, these situations show us the dark face of human beings, who are trapped in the individualism that generates inhumanity. Thus, societies can turn into true chaos, as the history of humanity has recorded, if the special higher psychic functions are not developed profoundly, that is, at high levels of intentionality and individual and collective consciousness.

The development of the Higher Psychic Functions is the center of Cultural-Historical Theory, and Vygotski's research (1995, 2006, 2007, among others) has demonstrated that self-mastery of human conduct should be the essential element toward more just, egalitarian societies, despite differences. "*En el proceso del desarrollo histórico, el hombre social modifica los modos y procedimientos de su conducta, transforma sus inclinaciones naturales e funciones, elabora y crea nuevas formas de comportamiento específicamente*

*culturales.*”[In the process of historical development, social man modifies the ways and procedures of his conduct, transforms his natural inclinations and functions, elaborates and creates new, specifically cultural forms of behavior] (VYGOTSKI, 1995, p. 34).

Vygotski (1993) investigated the relationship between school subjects and higher psychic functions using mathematics, reading, and writing. The results showed that the child’s mental development does not take place according to the system of school subjects; that is, the child does not develop functions in isolation and independently since these subjects have a certain degree of common psychic basis (the awareness and mastery of each of the contents), which are also at the forefront of developing learning, both in mathematics and in reading and writing. The child’s thinking is processed in all subjects, and its development is not broken down into separate trajectories according to the different school subjects.

In the same way that there is a reciprocal influence of teaching on the development of higher psychic functions, which goes beyond the limits of the specific content of each school subject as if there were a subject that aggregated and was inherent to all school subjects, also the child, when becoming aware of certain knowledge, starts to dominate a structure that transfers to other fields of his thought, not directly related to that specific knowledge. Here also occurs the interdependence and interrelation between the different psychic functions that make up the learning of a given knowledge. Thus, for example, the development of the higher psychic functions of voluntary attention, logical memory, abstract thought, and scientific imagination is intrinsically produced as a complex and unique process through the awareness and mastery of knowledge itself, whose development constitutes the main focus of school education (VYGOTSKI, 1993).

For this reason, the school is the primary channel for human development because it systematizes the scientific knowledge produced by humanity and, through the relationships among its members, should provide activities that are supposed to mediate the learning needs of all those involved. Moreover, its function in societies is to disseminate this knowledge, with the objective that all students consciously appropriate it to master it for themselves and others. Thus, if children, young people, and adults are not learning at school, then we can state that its function is not being fulfilled for the development of this portion of the population since the prioritization is occurring in the specific school subjects (Portuguese language, math, etc.), subjugating the learning needs of students of the cultural type, instead of inserting them in these school contents, through powerful mediators that can generate the appropriation of knowledge produced by society.

Assis (2010) researched the cultural development of children in Early Childhood Education and identified the role of school for them and the families ratify the arguments that the school needs to change the types of activities it develops with the students since the children do the activity because the teacher taught them to, but they do not know what for.

The school should use time to its advantage. This means that instead of emphasizing teaching at the actual development level - ADL (what the child has already learned) — it should prioritize teaching in the zone of proximal development (ZPD; what the child can learn with collaboration at different levels of help) (VYGOTSKI, 1995).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is based on teachers’ diagnostic observation of children. Vygotsky (1993, p. 238, Volume II) helps us to understand that the child’s development cannot be determined only through what he has already learned: “[... ] *el horticultor, que deseando determinar el estado de su huerto, no tendrá razón si limita a valorar los manzanos que ya han madurado y han dado fruto, sino que debe tener también en cuenta los árboles en maduración*” [the horticulturist, who, seeking to determine the state of his orchard, will not be right if he limits himself to valuing the apple trees that have already matured and borne fruit, but must also consider the trees in maturation].

Thus, what Vygotski (1993) calls the actual development level (ADL) is not enough for the teacher to diagnose the students’ learning needs but only to verify what they have already learned. The knowledge in the zone of proximal development is the guideline for teachers to know what knowledge and skills children need to develop. These guidelines are effectively the cultural type of student learning needs that are in the process of being implemented. Therefore they are the ones that the teacher must intentionally mediate. Suppose teachers focus their observations on these guidelines of children’s cultural

type learning needs. In that case, they can help them identify the types of mediators, strategies, and activities that motivate children to perform the proposed activities. The activities can be proposed initially by the teacher, and the children will gradually participate in the activity's structuring as they become autonomous. For each activity, the teacher's mediation in the ZPD evolves in different ways, depending on the children's cultural learning needs and development.

Serrano (2018), when working with the category of zone of proximal development in Early Childhood Education, showed that, at this stage of education, the development of activities in children's ZPD is still insufficient in pedagogical practices.

The importance of the concept of the zone of proximal development of the Cultural-Historical Theory for the teaching and learning processes in the school of the 21st century increases the need for knowledge by the school community, in this case, the Early Childhood Education teacher, and how to use it in pedagogical practices through methodological tools that allow teachers to make the diagnostic assessment of the cultural learning needs of children, implement the necessary mediators in the activities for the development of this learning and, finally, evaluate how the mediated activity occurred in the process of appropriation or not of this learning.

Thus, when we delve into the assumptions of the Cultural-Historical Theory towards the transforming social activity of teaching and learning, the teacher's intentionality alone is not enough as a link between consciousness and its object. Using powerful intentional mediators in the children's zone of proximal development is necessary. Still, it is not enough to know the importance of the zone of proximal development for learning children, youth, and adults if we do not objectively understand what makes up a teaching and learning activity.

Leontiev (1978) defends the thesis that internal psychic activity originates from external activity (the work and the transformation of things). Therefore, the activity is social and develops through a process of collaboration and communication between men, having as a fundamental component the "motive." There is no activity without reason, meaning the main components of activity are the "actions" performed by men to achieve the desired end and see their needs satisfied. If there is no reason, an activity is not configured, hence the importance of identifying and mediating the cultural type of learning needs.

The work of Leontiev (1978) on the development of the human psyche reveals to us the complexity of the process of consciousness-raising as we relate to other human beings and reflect on our conceptions. In this perspective, the objectified activity is that mediated by the psychic reflex (development in different levels and forms), which guides the subject in the objective world. Such activity cannot be conceived outside the social relations of life in society and is premised on the category of "need," which guides and regulates it. Creating new needs in human beings impels them to learn and develop. This learning and development have great importance for teaching the child, with the teacher's intervention, precisely, in creating new learning needs, at different times, which generate new zones of proximal development.

In the area of Early Childhood Education, the children's learning situation is compromised by the learning needs they demonstrate, sometimes silently, perhaps due to lack of stimulation, as well as a deeper understanding of child development by teachers due to continuing education actions that do not provide them with this knowledge, among other factors related to the objective conditions of the daily school life. This situation is aggravated today with the global COVID-19 pandemic, since Brazilian children have had no face-to-face contact at school for two years. This lack of social relationships expanded by schools may have generated learning needs in children<sup>3</sup> that teachers will need to prioritize in their choice of activities. Thus, a quality diagnostic evaluation will be an essential tool in this learning process to develop activities that act on the children's ZPD. The formation of concepts in children, for example, does not occur as the formation of generic sensory images but is the result of a process of appropriation of meanings, historically elaborated and developed in the child's activity through

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<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the study conducted by the Research Laboratory on Educational Opportunities - LaPopE - UFRJ: <https://www.educacaoecovid.org/>.

communication with those around him. Thus, the internal relations of activity involve the psychic reflex, motives, actions, and conscious ends (LEONTIEV, 1978a).

Lazaretti (2013) discusses the issue of teaching in the period from 0 to 3 years, revealing that the didactic organization of teaching centralizes objectives related to “hygiene care, feeding and rest, with procedural content, not systematized and made aware by the teacher, and in methods in which spontaneous and improvised ways of organizing the pedagogical work prevail” (LAZARETTI, 2013, p. 140).

Garay González (2016), when working with the development of conceptual thinking in children aged 4 to 6 years, argues that the child must appropriate “the essence of the objects and phenomena of reality through internalization in the face of performing a challenging, meaningful, and meaningful activity.” (GARAY GONZÁLEZ, 2016, p. 172).

Thus, the concepts of culture, history, society, mediation, needs, activity, zone of proximal development, higher psychic functions, meaning, meaning, and motive, among others, engender the teaching and learning processes in schools at all levels of education. Such concepts are intrinsically related to the social relationships within the school and, therefore, need to be part of the pedagogical practices; in our case, in Early Childhood Education, the emphasis is on “*brincadeira*” activities.

The “*brincadeira*/game”<sup>4</sup> is a type of activity in which the motive is in the process itself and is characteristic of the Early Childhood Education stage. However, it is important in other stages of education. It is the main type of activity in childhood and is characterized by its goal residing in the process and not in the product of the action (LEONTIEV, 1978). For instance, for a young child who plays with sand or wooden blocks, the goal of *brincadeira* is not in building castles or structures, nor in counting or writing down the number of red blocks used in their construction, but in doing (i.e., in action itself, in the process of assembling and disassembling, dropping, etc.) (MELLO, 2007).

However, this “doing” as intrinsic content of games and *brincadeira* is not enough for teaching or children’s learning towards self-control of human behavior and the transformation of society. From the Cultural-Historical perspective, the kindergarten teacher’s role as a mediator of children’s learning and development is essential and central to children’s games. Hence, the teacher needs to be clear about this meaning for the child, when proposing, providing, and making available conditions and toys for *brincadeira* and game activities, as well as understanding the meaning these activities have for her pedagogical practice.

However, how can the teacher have clarity about working with *brincadeira* and game in Early Childhood Education if academia uses both terms as synonyms? Can we really consider *brincadeira* and game as synonyms? What are the consequences of this conception on children’s learning? Can we continue to say that the difference between them is only in relation to the rules, to the seriousness or not of the activity? What would be the role of each one of them in Education, if we could differentiate them? These questions motivated a theoretical study by approaching the main authors and scientific productions about both terms.

This study hypothesized that *brincadeira* and game are not synonyms but that both are fundamental to the learning and development of the child. Nevertheless, they also have different roles and functions in school education, especially in the periodization of Early Childhood Education in Brazil. Based on this, the research question that guided the study was: are *brincadeira* and game synonyms in the teaching and learning processes at school, considering the role of each one in children’s learning? Therefore, the objectives were: a) to identify the theoretical differences between the concepts of *brincadeira* and game based on the Cultural-Historical Theory; and b) to discuss the role of each word in children’s learning and pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education.

## THE QUESTION ABOUT THE NON-DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN *BRINCADEIRA* AND GAME

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<sup>4</sup> When referring to the Cultural-Historical Theory based on Russian authors, we will use the binomial “*brincadeira*/game,” as they are translated into Portuguese, although we consider that they are not synonyms in Brazil.

The concepts of *brincadeira* and game are important in Cultural-Historical Theory to explain human learning and development. In Russia, there is only the word “*igra*,” which means game, but in Portuguese translations, we find the word game replaced by the word *brincadeira*. However, we have both words used as synonyms and antonyms in Brazil, generating conflict in pedagogical practices.

Different authors have already demonstrated the importance<sup>5</sup> of games in learning and human development: Piaget (1978), Vygotski (1972, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001), Elkonin (1987, 1998), Leontiev (1978, 1978a), Brougère (1993), Huizinga (1951, 2005), Brunner (1983), and Bettelheim (1988), among others. Games are conceived as an activity with defined rules and *brincadeira* as a spontaneous activity, demeaning playing by associating it with non-seriousness. However, the lack of clarity of their role at school also creates the view of *brincadeira* as a hobby, placing them in opposition to the school environment and most of its contents.

Kishimoto (1999) elaborates a significant theoretical deepening on the subject, subsidized by Henriot (1983), Wittgenstein (1975), Caillois (1967), Fromberg (1987), and Christie (1991a), although the author does not define *brincadeira*. Bomtempo (1999) and Santos (2001) approach *brincadeira* and games without differentiating them. Gonzalez-Mena (2015) relates *brincadeira* to children’s cognition and learning but does not deepen this relationship. Ryngaert (2009, p. 35) treats games as “therapy itself” and, simultaneously, as something scary. Ide (1999) attributes to game the integral development of the child, and to play just fun, which corroborates the conception that games are serious and *brincadeira* is not. For Oliveira (2002, p. 160), both games and *brincadeira* have the role of “privileged resource for the development of the young child.” Thus, differentiating between them seems impossible, and the gap in research remains as to the role of each one in school learning.

## Research on *brincadeira* and games in Cultural-Historical Theory

The Cultural-Historical Theory includes multiplicity of authors, illustrious and unknown, who developed studies on the influence of *brincadeira*/games on children’s learning and who, despite their publications having occurred between the 1940s and 1990s, helped us to analyze the necessary differentiation between *brincadeira* and game, even though they did not establish such differences. In this theory, *brincadeira*/game is intentional, conscious, voluntary, and volitional. For this reason, they are essential tools for developing higher psychic functions, which makes the differentiation between both fundamental.

Yadeshko and Sojin (1990), Krupskaja (1973, apud YADESHKO; SOJIN, 1990, p. 309), and Makarenko (1957, apud YADESHKO; SOJIN, 1990, p. 310) stated that the child, by imitating the actions of adults in the *brincadeira*/games, can experience the positive and negative side of these actions. Jukovskaia (1978) discusses the importance of games based on scientific studies by Russian researchers of his time and that their dependence on social life is due to Plejánov (1925, apud JUKOVSKAIA, 1978, p. 12). Ushinski (1948) and Gorbatenko (1957), both cited by Jukovskaia (1978, p. 4), advocate the development of the child’s autonomy. Jukovskaia (1978, p. 29 and 32) also cites Golitseva, Klindova, and Berdyjova (1959) because, in games after school contents, children used the knowledge previously learned, relating it to the current ones, demonstrating the union between meaning and sense, which enhances the motive to continue learning and to generalize this knowledge (JUKOVSKAIA, 1978).

Manuilenko (1947, apud ELKONIN, 1987, p. 83) demonstrated that young children control their movements better in a game than in a school activity. Zaporózhets and Neveróvich (1965, apud ELKONIN, 1987, p. 83) related games to forming the child’s motricity. Istómina (s/d, apud ELKONIN, 1987, p. 83) focused on the emergence of voluntary memory in the preschool age.

This theoretical framework shows us that *brincadeira* and games are important at school. However, the differentiation of each one as to its specificity in learning makes them just one more activity at school.

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<sup>5</sup> All these cited authors, in their original texts, refer to the word game, and not, for example, to *brincadeira*, differentiating several types of games.



## THE METHODOLOGICAL PATH OF THE STUDY

The theoretical differentiation between *brincadeira* and game emerged from the deepening of Cultural-Historical Theory as a teacher and researcher in Education, from experience as a preschool teacher, and by the implication of each of them in pedagogical practices with children, especially if we consider the development of the higher psychic functions of children. Therefore, the methodological unit of the study was the mediating character that involves *brincadeira* and role-play, based on the potentiality of different mediating instruments engendered in each of them.

The first ideas originated in the research problem: are *brincadeira* and game synonyms in the teaching and learning processes, considering the role of each one in children's learning at different levels of school education? Thus, the hypothesis emerged: "*brincadeira*" and "game" are not synonyms, although both are fundamental to the learning and development of children despite having different roles and functions in school education, especially in the different age groups of the Early Childhood Education stage.

The bibliographical survey was conducted in books and scientific articles in two moments: 1) choice of classical authors of the theme game and those who discuss *brincadeira* in Early Childhood Education; 2) survey of classical books of unknown Russian authors, translated into Spanish, among them: Yadeshko and Sojin (1990), Krupskaja (1973), Jukovskaia (1978), Ushinski (1948), Gorbatenko (1957), Golitseva, Klindova, and Berdyjova (1959), Manuilenko (1947), and Zaporózhets and Neveróvich (1965).

The methodological procedures responded to the need to understand *brincadeira* and game beyond what was already theoretically established in the various areas of knowledge (Pedagogy, Physical Education, Sociology, Psychokinetics, etc.), to establish implications of both in pedagogical practices, especially in Early Childhood Education. The hypothesis guided the theoretical research, whose analysis of the collected bibliographic material involved: 1) reading to recognize the internal organization of the works and articles; 2) exploratory reading to identify the real possibilities of the theoretical references; 3) selective reading to focus on the information pertinent to the research problem; 4) reflective or critical reading to elaborate a synthesis that integrated the author's ideas, identified their affirmations and why through the necessary estrangement, impartiality, and objectivity of the researcher; 5) interpretative reading concerning the research problem and objectives (SALVADOR, 1973, p. 71-81).

The search for the proof or refutation of the research hypothesis followed Vygotski's (1991, 1995) guidelines on the relations between the socio-cultural context, the scientific knowledge, and the state of the object of study today. The methodology based on the genetic method of going in search of the root of the object of study involved the theoretical deepening of it, the identification of its contradictions and abstractions, the application of the dialectic spiral on the still syncretic knowledge, the separation of its characteristics, the expansion of the abstract idea to its concrete meaning, by confrontation with reality, generating modification of the object of study.

The homogenization process (HELLER, 1977) and the development process of the volitional activity (PETROVSKY, 1980) helped us to separate the characteristics of *brincadeira* and game — and to analyze them theoretically. The theoretical deepening of both terms generated constructs and connections with experiences that confronted the theoretical productions, but we continued in the search to advance them.

Thus, the idea that originated the hypothesis was expanding and becoming more abstract since, in the Cultural-Historical Theory, the word was just game. The word *brincadeira* came from Russian to Portuguese translations, based on Brazil's social meaning. At this point, the hypothesis seemed to be refuted, and the ways to prove it became more difficult.

At this stage of the research process, it was necessary, again, to fraction the syncretic knowledge of that moment to analyze it in the light of our previous practical experiences, with the support of the Cultural-Historical Theory. Thus, in this process, which was neither simple nor fast, the more abstract formulation of the idea was expanding in relation to what it initially meant, to what it represented in the reality of the teaching activity and the learning activity, modifying it. The hypothesis

seemed to be confirmed, to the extent that the knowledge produced already differed, in some way, from the original idea.

From then on, the answers to the problem and the hypothesis became clearer. We started to confront the initial idea with the knowledge about child development, about children, and to delimit the differentiation between the terms, using, for this, the extrapolation of the limits of the concept of game, in the Russians' research, taking care not to mischaracterize it. On the contrary, proceeding in the search to unveil its comprehensiveness related to teaching and learning, in which *brincadeira* became evident, through the needs of theoretical and methodological advancement in Brazil, especially in Children's Education, so that the result could be considered as the production of reliable scientific knowledge.

Based on these procedures of collecting the theoretical data toward the analysis of the research problem, we proceeded to the genetic explanations (VYGOTSKI, 1995) to attempt to clarify the present from the past, having the explanatory hypothesis as a guide, identifying the evidence for or against involved in its assertion. Furthermore, we took care in the data analysis: a) with ambiguities in the reasoning of the explanations; b) in showing the contradictions; c) in verifying if the explanations of the problem address the whole object of study; d) in "reading between the lines," in order to identify the scientific and philosophical assumptions that subsidize the explanations. After analyzing and discussing the results, we proceed to the "integrative synthesis," ordering the solutions of the problem into an organic system (SALVADOR, 1973, p. 138–145).

## **DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF GAME AND *BRINCADEIRA***

We elaborated three analysis guidelines that guided us to answer the research problem and that is also configured in analysis units of the study object: 1) The difference between *brincadeira* and game as being only in relation to the rules and the seriousness or not of the activity; 2) Consideration or not of *brincadeira* and game as synonyms and their consequences on the children's learning; and 3) The role of the distinction between *brincadeira* and game in Children's Education.

The discussion of these three guidelines/units of analysis was based on Mukhina's (1995, p. 58) periodization in which child development is divided as follows: birth (infants), first year of life, early childhood (1 to 3 years), and preschool childhood (3 to 7 years).

### **The difference between game and *brincadeira* as being only in relation to the rules and the seriousness or otherwise of the activity.**

The question of the rule is apparent in the game, but the lack of appearance does not mean that it does not exist in *brincadeira*. Both are cultural activities dependent on societal experiences, and their contents can change depending on the culture. Nevertheless, although the specificities of different cultures are also conceived in Cultural-Historical Theory, its main basis is always human culture. Hence, if *brincadeira* and games are cultural and social, the difference between them cannot be only in relation to rules because living in any society presupposes rules.

In the game, the rule is always well defined and already built, although every game has the possibility of modifying its rules, depending on the context and the intention of the players. In *brincadeira*, the rules are not apparent because they are always intrinsic to social relations, as well as to imagination and, mainly, are defined by those who play based on their repertoire of experiences in relation to people, objects, spaces, and the social situation of development (VYGOTSKI, 1994 apud BOZHOVICH, 1981, p. 122).

The concept of the social developmental situation is related to the child's experience of the influences of the social environment but mainly to the variation of these influences depending on the child's psychological development. The same social situation can have different meanings for two children. Thus, this concept of the Cultural-Historical Theory can be identified, analyzed, and worked on in role-play and *brincadeira* activities. However, the role-play activity, by requiring that the child already has a greater repertoire of words that the teacher can understand, can help the latter to expand her

understanding of what the children have already appropriated about the relationships between people in society and, thus, modify or expand them.

Elkonin (1998) explains that the most evolved form of game is role play, which takes on different levels depending on the child's needs; as they become more independent of adults, the level of role-play increases. *Brincadeira* and games are of central importance in the child's psychic development, so both should be considered as serious activity — *brincadeira* for the child is their life; it is true, it is real, it is the activity that inserts them in human relations. The child has doubts about what they are seeing and feeling; they think about what they are experiencing, even if they do not fully understand the situation. This process is often silent. Whoever observes them carefully when they are playing, whoever tries to understand what they are thinking when they play, and whoever wonders about their need for knowledge at that moment, can perceive this silent process.

Thus, we cannot persist in the statement that the difference between *brincadeira* and game is only in relation to the rules and the seriousness or not of the activity because such a conception does not direct the pedagogical practices to the accomplishment of mediations in the children's zone of proximal development and does not create new learning needs in them.

### **Consideration or not of *brincadeira* and game as synonyms and their consequences on children's learning**

This unit of analysis was the main focus of the research since it is related to one of the main contents of Early Childhood Education: playing. One of the problems of conceiving these terms as synonyms in Education is related to their use with the sole purpose of learning other contents. For instance, using games in mathematics to learn operations, to learn new words in Portuguese, using playing to learn colors in Child Education, etc. Thus, *brincadeira* and games are reduced to school-type contents (mathematics, Portuguese), losing their main focus, which is the development of special higher psychic functions. This problem limits learning and the development of the special higher psychic functions in children, especially the function of voluntariness, which is fundamental to establishing the difference between *brincadeira* and game.

In Cultural-Historical Theory, the concept of voluntariness (as opposed to the sense of spontaneity) indicates intentionality and conscious motives, whose meanings and senses are imbricated to drive the action and development of the activity. Petrovsky (1980) defines it as an activity motivated by human needs that transform the world. Thus, the author differentiates between two types of actions: involuntary and voluntary. The involuntary actions are related to the biological apparatus and have an impulsive, reflexive character, are not conscious of the objectives and purposes and do not have a precise and reflected plan, and may originate from emotional states in situations of fright, fear, perplexity, etc. Voluntary actions are related to the cultural aspect and the development of consciousness. Thus, unlike the involuntary ones, they are directed by a conscious objective from the previous establishment of operations to reach a specific end. Among the voluntary actions, there is a special group that the author calls volitional actions, which are those in which the level of consciousness and the reasons for performing the activity are deeper since they require perseverance and effort to achieve the proposed goal, even if the activity itself is not pleasurable. In volitional activity, the person subordinates himself to the goals that are most important to him. For instance, if a person wants to sleep more on a rainy and cold day, however, early in the morning, they have to do a more important activity. They subordinate their comfort and sleep to that activity that is a priority for them. Thus, volitional activity generates in individuals independence, decision, perseverance, and the ability to master oneself (PETROVSKY, 1980, p. 361). In the author's words:

The systematic execution of volitional acts and actions of different aspects represents such a type of *activity of the individual that is related to the participation in it of consciousness*. Volitional activity necessarily presupposes a series of acts that foresee a high degree of awareness of the efforts and the character of the psychic processes carried out. It also includes appreciating the created situation, choosing the paths for future action, selecting the necessary means for the ends, deciding, etc. (PETROVSKY, 1980, p. 363, our emphasis).

Thus, we arrive at an important differentiation between *brincadeira* and game: the voluntary character, which, due to its principle of being conscious and intentional, is a characteristic that can approach or distance itself from *brincadeira*, depending on the content that the child attributes to the game (even if it still has a non-depth and non-conscious intentionality); nevertheless, it is always related to the game. Moreover, the principle intrinsic to its characteristic (voluntary character) helps us to affirm that *brincadeira* and game are not synonyms because the main difference between them is in the type of activity: involuntary, voluntary, and volitional, and in the relationship between them: between involuntary and voluntary activity, and between voluntary and volitional activity.

In *brincadeira*, the intentionality of the one who plays may not be conscious: the object or toy itself may elicit the *brincadeira*. Thus, in the process of playing, the child's activity (babies up to roughly 2 years old) develops from involuntary activity to voluntary activity (approximately 3 years old onwards), but with one condition: if the *brincadeira* is intentionally mediated by the teachers so that this evolution is objectified in the child.

In contrast, in the game, there must always be a high degree of intentionality of consciousness of the one who plays. Thus, the game development process evolves from voluntary to volitional activity. Based on the differentiation between the terms *brincadeira* and game regarding the voluntary character or not in relation to the reasons, needs, and specificities of the children in Early Childhood Education, in the period from 0 to 3 years of age, we cannot state that their activity is a game, but a *brincadeira*, because, initially, the intentionality of the game is not in the child itself, due to its little experience with the objects of its game. However, it is the teacher's role to provide the necessary mediation for the child to develop the intentionality that triggers learning and the development of the child's psyche. The child's intentionality in *brincadeira* develops into a game as they play with different mediators and progresses in creating imaginary situations that help them understand social relations. Thus, the baby initially has no intentionality when playing with the mother's body, with their own body, the objects around him; their *brincadeira* activity is involuntary and necessary for their development. Children from 1 to 3 years old already have a certain degree of intentionality when playing and, as these children relate to each other in *brincadeira*, with different objects, spaces, and people, this involuntary activity tends to become voluntary based on the intentionality of those who organize the mediators necessary for such development.

Bozhovich (1981) explains that the success of the activity and conduct of a 1 to 3-year-old child depends on the adult's approval, and this is the "essential factor that drives their psychic development" (BOZHOVICH, 1981, p. 165). The activity of playing is also related to the main activity (LEONTIEV, 1978) of the 1 to 3-year-old child, which changes very quickly. For the baby, the main activity is the relationship with those who take care of them, their *brincadeira* is directed to this, and the sensations with their surroundings are the focus of their psychism development. As their relationships expand in this *brincadeira*, their interests change. Then objects begin to catch their attention and give a certain intention to their *brincadeira* activity, even if it has no social meaning yet. Their independence increases with the ability to walk, and their relationship with objects expands. Thus, their developmental needs are satisfied through their relationship with adults, objects, other children, the environment, and the learning that *brincadeira* promotes.

Bozhovich (1981, p. 157) argues that in developing "new impressions" in the child, the role of relationships with adults and objects are determinants of learning. Similarly, Quintanar Rojas and Solovieva (2009, p. 56) argue that the "psychological image" guides the child's development through objects. Thus, at the beginning, approximately until one year of life, in *brincadeira*, its content is not always that the child imitates the roles of the adult, often, it relates only to objects. The manipulations with objects, provided intentionally by the teacher during play, are performed by the child only based on "external properties — the child manipulates the spoon in the same way as the stick, the pencil, or the shovel" (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 107).

Another problem arising from using both terms as synonyms is the confusion between role-play by older children and playing "house" because the child plays the role of the mother with the doll. However, this situation does not configure itself as a role-play game because the intentionality and the

concept of the role of mother and daughter (doll) may, even in this period of early childhood, be related to the imitation of the mother's and daughter's behavior, necessary for the formation of social habits in the child, so that she can establish relations of understanding and intentionality with the cultural and historical knowledge.

Thus, for it to role-play, "house" play must necessarily evolve to the level of intentionality and awareness about the social roles of mother and daughter so that they are extended and abstracted from the observable behavior of both. Role-play involves many implicit and explicit relationships and emotions in the roles played. Therefore, the example of the "little house" activity that children develop alone or together can be placed in the concept of "*brincadeira*" and not in the concept of "role play."

However, since dialectics involves contradictions, we cannot forget that the very activity of playing also brings contradictions in itself. Of course, the transitions between *brincadeira* and role-play are important to clarify the difference between the two because, in these transitions, the development changes are present.

Playing "house" can tell us a lot about the moment of psychic development of children and the forms of mediation needed to move forward. The teacher's observation activity while the children play is fundamental to developing her view on these children's learning and psychological development moments. Those who are near the end of early childhood can start the role play, with the teacher's mediation, once their social experiences have expanded and their perceptions about human relations have evolved. This approach to role-play also depends on the quality of mediation and mediators arranged by the teacher. In a room where infants and toddlers are encouraged with different mediators in *brincadeira*, the tendency is that role-play will develop, through the teacher, in the same proportion as they learn and develop. If children just play with objects in playrooms without mediated, organized, and systematic intervention by the teacher according to the needs of the children and babies, the higher psychic functions will not develop with the necessary quality to advance in role-play.

So far, we can state the main difference between the concepts of *brincadeira* and game: *brincadeira* has fundamental specificities for learning and the psychic development of the child from 0 to 3 years old; game, especially role-play, has specificities for learning and the psychic development of the child from 4 years old on. *Brincadeira* can assume similarities with the concept of game and, also, crucial differences related to this concept. Therefore, to minimize the role of *brincadeira* in children aged 0 to 3 years and role-play between 4 and 6 years is to prevent the child from appropriating higher psychic functions that are fundamental to their learning and psychic development. The mediating role of the teacher working in Early Childhood Education is central to this process; this means that both *brincadeira* and game require the teacher's intervention in the transition from involuntary to voluntary activity and from voluntary to volitional activity.

Vygotski (2006, p. 179) argues that, in the process of *brincadeira*, children perform activities with "separate meanings of their objects and actions" without knowing what they are doing. For us in Brazil, this occurs during *brincadeira* activities with younger children because they are still appropriating the concepts and do not master these activities voluntarily. However, through *brincadeira*, the child learns the definition of concepts, objects, and words that give meaning to things (VYGOTSKI, 2006, p. 179). Novoselova (1987, p. 1) also corroborates that "The child's thinking in the early stages of development is concrete and inseparable from his practical activity."

Another important difference between game and *brincadeira* that prevents us from considering them synonyms is about imagination that, according to Vygotski (2006, p. 172), "[...] It is not present in the consciousness of young children and is totally alien to animals [...]" Therefore, if imagination depends on voluntary, conscious activity and types of experiences, then, in *brincadeira*, the child from 0 to 3 years old does not operate based on imagination but on the concrete facts that they see, feel, and experience.

However, through *brincadeira*, the child can develop their psychism more and more; Mukhina (1995, p. 84) shows that in the process of *brincadeira* the child's main activity is his relationship with objects:

I ask Kiriusha: Show me another Aímedói” (puppets representing Doctor Aímedói), and he points to the first one. “Show me the other one,” he looks and shows me the first one. “That’s one, where’s the other one?” as he searches with his eyes. He looks at the second one, but doesn’t recognize it. Leave him alone. Kiriusha crawls, sits up, and then starts smiling and shows me the second Aímedói. Now the puppet has his foot towards him; he recognizes it, remembers my request, and points. I ask again, “where is the other Aímedói?” Kirill searches and finds the second one, which, now its head is facing him, points it with his finger. He points to the first, then to the second, and again to the first. He is satisfied. (From the diary of V. S. Mukhina) (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 87).

Thus, both *brincadeira* and objects and the emotional relationship with the mother (or caring adult) are major activities of psychic development for the child aged 0 to 3 years, depending on the types of mediating activities to which the child has access.

Role-play differs from *brincadeira* in that it always presupposes communication with another, imagination, consciousness, and voluntary activity toward volitional activity. The game, necessary at school, which can develop the child’s special higher psychic functions, is not only individual but mainly group and collective. The child will need the other to accomplish the game’s objective: to generate learning and psychic development.

In pre-school — called by Mukhina (1995) from 3 to 7 years old and, in Brazil, from 4 to 5 years and 11 months — the main activity of the child is the role-play game (ELKONIN, 1987, 1998). We emphasize that we will use the term “role-play” because we consider that, in this kind of game, the child assumes characters consciously chosen by them in collective situations (i.e., within a game theme) chosen by all participants, in which each character has its importance in the unfolding of the game, and all participants enter into an intrinsic relationship, and should not be encouraged to have a protagonist, as it happens in dramatizations, *brincadeira*, and other similar performances. Although in the capitalist system, individualism is increasingly in evidence in different social situations, the school, when using the role-play game for the students’ psychic development, will need to counteract this tendency, prioritizing solidary and collective actions of the children when playing their characters.

An important feature of the game is that the diversity of topics about reality becomes the argument of the game, that is, scenes from family life, professions, individual and collective work, etc. “The broader the reality that children know, the broader and more varied will be the arguments of their games” (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 157). In turn, children’s experiences diversify the arguments of role-play games and their duration. “As the variety of arguments increases, so does the duration of the games. The games of 3 to 4-year-olds last 10 or 15 min; the games of 4 to 5-year-olds last 40 to 50 min; and 6 to 7-year-olds extend the game for hours and even days” (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 157). Nonetheless, the characterization of role-play is not enough just for its argument. Another fundamental aspect that complements it is its content: “*The content of the game is what the child highlights as the main aspect in the adult’s activities*” (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 157, our emphasis). Thus, a single theme can have different contents, but the main focus is human relationships.

Yadeshko and Sojin (1990, p. 312) also argue that in *brincadeira*, the argument and content are important: “The argument of the game determines the development, the variety, and interrelationship of the *brincadeira* actions, the interrelationships of the children. “The game’s content makes it attractive and arouses interest and the desire to play.” Similarly, Mujina, Cherkes-Zade, and Rechetnikov (1981, p. 117) state that “the game has a collective character.” Furthermore, children organize the space for *brincadeira* according to their own decisions based on reality.

Yadeshko and Sojin (1990, p. 312) explain the importance of oral communication in role-play for the development of children because, in the process of exchanging ideas and experiences, they establish the content of the game: “The verbal agreement in the game establishes an organizational function, contributes to the development and strengthening of interrelationships and friendship between children, as well as their relationship with one or other facts and phenomena of surrounding life.”

Despite all these important aspects of role-play, Vygotski (2006, p. 171) highlights another that, a priori, opposes what we are highlighting in the game: the fact that it is not always pleasurable for the child:

The definition of the game as a pleasurable activity for the child is inadequate for two reasons. First, many activities provide the little one with greater pleasure experiences than playing, for example, sucking on a pacifier even if it does not satisfy them. Second, there are games in which the activity is not pleasurable in itself, for example, games that only produce pleasure if the child finds the result interesting. This tends to predominate at the end of preschool age and the beginning of the school stage. Sports games (not only athletic but also other games in which one can win or lose) are often accompanied by disgust if the outcome is unfavorable to the child (VYGOTSKI, 2006, p. 171).

The game has, however, other important contradictory aspects that form it, which Vygotski (2006) explains. The first is that, while *brincadeira* may not be pleasurable, it provides the child with the possibility of satisfying his or her wants and needs when playing through imagination. Vygotski (2006, p. 172) explains his point:

For my part, I am convinced that if the needs that could not be realized immediately in their time did not arise during the school years, the game would not exist as it seems to emerge when the child begins to experience unrealizable tendencies. [...] To resolve this tension, the child of preschool age enters an illusory and imaginary world where these unrealizable desires find a place: this world is what we call *game* (VYGOTSKI, 2006, p. 172, our emphasis).

Another contradictory point is that although the character of imagination has symbolic elements. Vygotski (2006) warns that the game is not exactly a symbolic action because otherwise, it could be compared to algebra. However, a different element unites imagination and symbolic elements that has a fundamental role in the game: motivation.

When Vygotski (2006, p. 174) states, “We could go even further and assure that there is no game without rules. The imaginary situation of any type of game already contains in itself certain rules of conduct, although these are not formulated explicitly or in advance,” he is referring to role-play, mainly, but also to the *brincadeira* of children in early childhood, whose main activity is their relationship with objects, specifically in the 3rd phase (MUKHINA, 1995, p. 109), the last of the object activity, in which the child uses objects, “freely,” to satisfy their imagination, but aware of their functions in society.

Another aspect apparently not differentiated in the game/*brincadeira*, in the books translated from Russian, are the characteristics of games, which, only through the deepening of the Cultural-Historical Theory in this unit of analysis, we were able to identify. There are similarities between *brincadeira* and game regarding the argument and content characteristics. Thus, both *brincadeira* and game have this same argument characteristic related to themes and content, which concerns the aspects highlighted from the themes by the children. However, in early childhood, children use objects to reproduce the actions of adults. If we take the example of playing “little house” in this period, the main content of this theme will be related to the objects used, mainly by the mother, in her daily activities at home. “When playing at eating, children of this age cut bread, cook soup, reproducing the same action several times. Although they do not put the bread on the table or serve the soup. At this age, the content of games (*brincadeira*) is reduced exclusively to actions with objects.”(MUKHINA, 1995, p. 157).

When the author refers to the actions of “serving the soup and putting the bread on the table,” he is pointing to a type of psychic development in which the child can already understand the relationships between people and their actions. So, suppose with a small child, the *brincadeira* is limited to cutting the bread, making the cake in the sand, and mixing the ingredients as they expand their experiences at the same time. In that case, they start to extract other, more important content on the same theme. Serving the cake, soup, and bread, therefore, indicates that the child already perceives that the action of the mother, the father, or whomever it represents involves the other. Thus, in kindergarten, there is a difference between the younger child’s *brincadeira* in imitation of the adult and the older children’s role-play, in which they take on the adult role.

When the child is in early childhood, they imitate the mother’s role in how the child perceives it. That is why, in the house game, the “little daughter” can have more than one mother and only one father or only several mothers, depending on the needs of the children who will be in that game concerning the choice of objects to imitate the adult. In the role-play game, the situation is different,

because the child, when playing the role of mother, does not rely only on their own mother but on what the mother's relationship is with the other members of the game, who are not necessarily only her children. The concept of mother is broader and can expand further with the teacher's mediation.

Thus, *brincadeira* and game have differences and significant consequences for the development of children's special higher psychic functions and learning. We emphasize, however, that it is not just a matter of differentiating between the two to set them against each other in pedagogical practices mechanically and uncritically — for example, *brincadeira* is related to the child in kindergarten, and GAME, to other children and young people. In no way do we suggest this polarization; on the contrary. Based on the foundations of Cultural-Historical Theory, this differentiation between both concepts makes it clear that they are fundamental in school education, especially in Early Childhood Education, and that, therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of each one in children's learning, that is, their functions and consequences.

### **The role of the distinction between *brincadeira* and game in Early Childhood Education.**

At the same time that we discussed the function and need for differentiation between *brincadeira* and game in pedagogical practices in Early Childhood Education, we also reaffirmed the inseparability between them in this last unit of analysis. However, under the concept of play originating from Cultural-Historical Theory, what would be the role of *brincadeira* for babies and early childhood children, as well as role-play for pre-school children, in Early Childhood Education?

To answer this question, we will need to return to Vygotski's (1994, apud BOZHOVICH, 1981, p. 122) concept of the social situation of development, which depends on the type of experiences of the individual in the social environment and how he appropriates the knowledge in these experiences. Therefore, as we have already said, the same social relationship situation can have different meanings for two people, and therein lies the importance of the teacher's role in diagnosing the influence of the social environment on children's learning and development, as well as in selecting, organizing, and implementing powerful mediators that can meet the children's cultural needs.

Vygotski (2005 p. 114) states that "the psychological criterion requires recognizing that in the educational process the personal experience of the student is not everything. Education must be organized in such a way that the student is not educated, but that he educates himself." In this passage, the author is not referring to letting the child learn alone because otherwise, there would be no need for two fundamental concepts of his theory for education: mediated activity and the zone of proximal development. Rather, he is opposing the European school education of the time (which is not different from today) of reducing school learning to the passive assimilation of scientific knowledge by students, in which such a situation may not trigger development. Thus, the author explains that the social environment is the lever of the teaching and learning processes and that the role of teachers is in handling this (VYGOTSKI, 2005). To overdirect the children's activities, as well as to leave them free and without direction, are two inappropriate ways to exercise the management of this lever of children's learning and that do not contribute to the development of the special higher psychic functions at deep levels of consciousness, which can lead people to self-control their behavior, to self-educate themselves in the near future.

Vygotski (1994) argues for the need to reiterate the social environment's role in children's development as a relative rather than an absolute measure. He explains that the influence of the environment varies according to the age of the children; this means, for example, how people express themselves when they are with children. This influence is not only related to the dialogue itself but also to how the child relates to this experience. For instance, the types of words, amount of vocabulary, etc. may be the same for all children at different points in their development (babies, early childhood...); however, the quality of the role these expressions play in the children's development depends on how the child itself relates to them in these moments of interrelations, what associations they are making when hearing these words.

Thus, handling leverage appropriately means that as the teacher identifies how the child is relating to the social environment, she also develops knowledge of how to modify that environment



according to the needs of each child's cultural type of learning so that she can empower each child to learn to consciously assimilate scientific knowledge in a meaningful way for herself and others.

In this perspective, the ultimate goal of school education is not only related to the appropriation of school contents. The appropriation of scientific knowledge produced by humanity, which is generally in the functions of the school, goes beyond the contents of the school curriculum. It involves the transformation of human beings, the education of the ability to control and educate themselves, through volitional activities and actions, from the development of special higher psychic functions. In Early Childhood Education, especially with children from 0 to 3 years old, *brincadeira* assumes an important role because, through it, the teacher will be able to know the "social development situation" of each child, their learning needs, and how to modify the school social environment so that each child can learn and develop.

In this direction, Mukhina's (1995) periodization of child development helps us to identify the role and function of *brincadeira* and role-play and the difference between these roles for children's learning. *Brincadeira* takes on different functions/roles depending on the child's main activity. For babies, the main activity is the emotional relationship with the adult who cares for them; therefore, playing with the mother's body, the father's body, and their own body is fundamental for them to progress in psychic development, in social relations, at the same time that they develop biologically and appropriate human culture.

In early childhood (1 to 3 years old, approximately), children develop mainly through focused *brincadeira* — the main activity is the object activity — which needs to be mediated by the teacher so that they learn the concepts and functions of the objects that surround them at the same time that they understand human relations and develop psychic qualities that will not emerge without the systematized teaching and learning processes. Thus, the fundamental role of *brincadeira* with objects is to trigger the psychic development of babies in the first year of life and early childhood at school. In this way, the term *brincadeira* is broadened and integrated into the two main activities from 0 to 3 years — emotional relationship with the adult and object activity —, also becoming the main activity, which, by presenting a playful aspect, becomes the trigger and generator of the motive, the sense and the meaning of the child's activities. From this, the term *brincadeira* in Brazil needs to stop being translated from Russian texts as the main activity of preschool children (4 to 6 years old) and then focus on children from 0 to 3 years old.

The play, especially role-play, is the main activity of preschool children (in Brazil, children from 3 to 5 years and 11 months), corresponding exactly to the Russian texts.

This does not mean, in any way, that we are modifying the Cultural-Historical Theory about *brincadeira* as the main activity of children. On the contrary, we are reaffirming, through the discussion and analysis of the units that integrate our study object, that the lack of differentiation between the terms *brincadeira* and game in Brazil, caused much damage to the understanding of the importance of what Cultural-Historical Theory calls game as well as of both terms for the pedagogical practices, generating consequences, such as the use of games in a little mediated way and the disregard of role-play in all its stages: the object, the action, the word (symbolism), rules of *brincadeira*, according to Elkonin (1998), confusing it with a decorated dramatization of ready-made texts in graduation parties at the end of preschool.

Nevertheless, *brincadeira* as the main content from 0 to 3 years old highlights its importance as an auxiliary way for teachers to identify that the child's apparent limitation reveals their dependence on the teacher's knowledge about their needs to develop new learning, about the need to change different environments in order to overcome limitations related mainly to "the fusion of impulses and perception. [...] All perception is a stimulus to activity" (VYGOTSKI, 2006, p. 176).

Thus, if the teachers only provide toys and objects for the children to manipulate "freely" but do not play with them in order to broaden the children's perception through oral language, acquisition of concepts, and movement of the child in the spaces with the objects, etc., then these children are doomed to remain only at the threshold of perception development. Teachers need to know how to use the perceptual characteristic of children from 0 to 3 years old, which is their current activity, to motivate them to perform motor, musical, manipulative, etc. For example, for a baby to learn to crawl,

the environment in which they are sitting needs to provide security and motivation to challenge them to get out of the comfort of the sitting position. Novoselova (1987) relates the qualitative development of babies' visual thinking to manipulative activities with objects.

Zaporózhets (1987) presents another type of development related to object activity: the formation of new movements that evolve into conscious mastery of the new movement. Thus, the role of *brincadeira* from 0 to 3 years gets more complex according to the children's cultural learning needs. Through the teacher's mediation in the school social environment, based on the social situation of individual and collective development, children move from involuntary to voluntary activities, which will be the basis for the development of volitional activities as *brincadeira* evolves into role-play.

If we invert the vector that normally qualifies *brincadeira* as a means of children's learning, we will see that *brincadeira* is not the means of children's learning but the very source and essence of knowledge and development for children. In contrast, for the teacher, *brincadeira* is the means of knowledge for each child (social situation of development) and of providing different ways of learning for all children — not at the same time and not in the same activities, but as the teacher takes ownership of each child's way of playing and of showing her that she is learning and developing.

The social role that the child develops during the role play is the structure and the center of the game because the child not only plays the role, but becomes it, lives the character, believes it to be true, and also takes the essentials out of the character so that he can play it. Yadeshko and Sojin (1983, p. 313) exemplify the situation of role play: "When, for example, it represents the captain of a ship, it does not reflect all his activity, but only those traits that are necessary for the development of the game: the captain gives an order, looks through the binoculars, cares about the passengers and the sailors."

Children must establish the rules, at first, with the collaboration of the teacher. As they understand and become more autonomous, the teacher's collaboration tends to fade away in the *brincadeira* process, depending on how much experience they have according they go on playing Four-year-olds, for example, will need more help from the teacher than children from 5, 6, and 7 onwards, who may do so without any specific help from the teacher as they play. Finally, this is the essential purpose of the role-play : that the child, by experiencing the social roles, can learn to self-control their behavior in collective experiences and individually.

In role-play, as opposed to *brincadeira*, the child has infinite possibilities to create, imagine, and be what he cannot be in real life. In it, the rules are determined by ideas so that the action will be subordinated to the rules and not the objects themselves. This represents a huge leap in the child's development regarding their relationship with the situations their experiences since they must renounce desires and impulses and submit to the rules (VYGOTSKI, 2006).

*Brincadeira* is related to imagination and to the performance of roles consciously chosen by those who play, that is why it is the main activity of children from about 4 years of age on, because they already have a broader conceptual repertoire necessary for the development of motives, sense, and meaning in participating in the activity of playing. We understand that the divisions by age are not rigid but flexible because they depend on the type of mediation and mediators in the children's *brincadeira* and role-play activity. Thus, 3-year-olds may start to perform the initial role-play activity in simpler situations and with more teacher mediation in their zone of proximal development, which may also trigger, more quickly, the development of the collective relationship skill in role-play.

Thus, game situations help children control their impulsiveness based on the rules while satisfying their desires through experimenting, exploring, interpreting, imagining, deciding, trying, etc. Thus, the game assumes importance in the child's psychic development regarding the development of the relationship between the internal and external actions that integrate the motives present in the activity of playing towards and the development of voluntary activity in the child.

If, through *brincadeira*, the child demonstrates its psychic development by separating the meaning from the real object in a transitional relationship from involuntary activity to voluntary activity, through role-play, the child's actions also evolve from meaning-action to meaning-action, according to Vygotski (2006, p. 181, our emphasis). For example, when the child taps their feet on the ground or moves their arms, slightly bent, up and down, to represent in role-play that they are riding a horse and

holding the reins, they already demonstrates to have appropriated the meaning of the action they wants to represent.

Mujina, Cherkes-Zade, and Rechetnikov (1981, p. 117) state that in the game, all participants relate to each other and have spaces to put their opinions, impressions, and fantasies, while the role assumed by each involves a behavior, a rule. Thus, in *brincadeira* “Conditions are provided to develop collectivist feelings, only in the game is the principle of child humanism manifested: “all for one and one for all.”

However, when they enter the role-play, the child is not behaving in a strictly symbolic, imaginary way but is drawing on their already acquired experiences. In their little experience, they produce desires that are realized when they play the roles. In contrast, their knowledge about these experiences expands her relationships with the other game members. Thus, they are developing toward volitional actions through the initial voluntary activity of role-play . External and internal actions are inseparable (VYGOTSKI, 2006).

When adolescents learn to organize and control their daily activities, they can enhance the development of voluntary attention and volitional activity in the face of the challenges they encounter without the need for external controls. Hence the importance of working with role-play in early childhood education. From infancy on, promoting volitional activity throughout human development means appropriating the consciousness of freedom of action and taking responsibility for one’s actions (PETROVSKY, 1980).

For Vygotski (2006), the play is not proper and predominant in childhood, nor is its main characteristic, but the primary factor of child development by the quality of internal transformations that it triggers in the human psyche by creating zones of proximal development of children’s learning. Thus, the function of role-play in school education is to allow the child to develop theoretical, conceptual thinking about the social relationships they experience in everyday life towards intellectual autonomy, always with the necessary mediation of the teacher.

Vygotski (2006, p. 183) clearly expresses the role of *brincadeira* in the teaching and learning processes for 4 to 6-year-old children in Early Childhood Education: “Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary purposes and the formation of real-life plans and volitional impulses appear throughout *brincadeira*, making it the highest point of preschool development” (VYGOTSKI, 2006, p. 183).

Thus, the hypothesis we raised at the beginning of this study is confirmed because, although *brincadeira* and game activities are fundamental for the psychic development of children in kindergarten, they are different and have different roles and functions in the teaching and learning processes in this stage of Basic Education. In the same way, we answered the research question that *brincadeira* and games are not synonyms if we take into account the role of each one in the development of children.

In contrast to the way that school contents are inserted in Kindergarten schools through the teaching and learning processes of children, in a very similar way to the contents of Elementary School, even if through *brincadeira*, this study has shown that *brincadeira* is not a means of learning for the child, but the very process of learning and psychic development of children from 0 to 3 years old. However, we must emphasize not only *brincadeira*, but also role-play with a fundamental function in advancing the thinking of children aged 3 to 6 towards theoretical thinking.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study confirmed that the activities in this stage of Basic Education must be systematized, intentionally programmed, based on a curriculum that integrates *brincadeira* activities for children from 0 to 3 years old and role-play activities for children from 3 to 6 years old, so that it fulfills the function for which we fought for its integration into Basic Education (i.e., no longer just child care but mainly education).

From this perspective, *brincadeira* and role-play have a primordial function in the teaching and learning processes. Our research involved differentiating between them, highlighting the criteria for

when teachers use *brincadeira* or games in kindergarten based on identifying the children's motives, needs, and specificities.

Based on the research results, we propose that *brincadeira* is the main activity of children from 0 to 3 years old, along with object activity and emotional relationship with the adult, and, therefore, they cannot be performed at school without any intervention from the teacher. The development of autonomy in Early Childhood Education is usually confused in pedagogical practices with letting the child do the activity alone or do what they like best. However, the appropriation of autonomy by the child requires the passage from involuntary activities to voluntary ones as a development of this higher psychic function. *Brincadeira* and role-play are key pieces for transitioning between one activity and the other. The development of both activities in the child must become volitional activities, which means freedom of thought and action, with responsibility and consciousness, that is, the appropriation of autonomy.

Another important aspect that the results revealed refers to the source of the contents to be worked in Early Childhood Education, that is, the children's cultural learning needs, which can be diagnosed through their feelings, emotions, perceptions, experimentations, and social experiences. Furthermore, these cultural learning needs are related to the social situation of development, that is, how each of us appropriates the knowledge we experience. Therefore, *brincadeira* and games as the main activities in Early Childhood Education are fundamental for identifying by the teacher of the children's social situation and, also, they are important content for the cultural development of all children.

Thus, this study contributed to filling the theoretical gap in Brazil regarding the Cultural-Historical Theory's understanding of the role of games in children's education, confusing their relationship with *brincadeira* in practice and academic research. Future research will be important to investigate the objectification of these concepts in pedagogical practices deepening the distinction between them based on the learning and development of higher psychic functions of children in Early Childhood Education.

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## **DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with this article.

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