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**O RECREIO: A ORGANIZAÇÃO DE OUTROS ESPAÇOS PARA OUTRAS APRENDIZAGENS**  
**RECREATION: THE ORGANIZATION OF OTHER SPACES FOR OTHER LEARNINGS**  
**RECREACIÓN: ORGANIZAR NUEVOS ENTORNOS PARA PERMITIR NUEVAS EXPERIENCIAS DE APRENDIZAJE**

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## RESUMO

**Introdução:** O brincar está profundamente ligado à aprendizagem, principalmente nos primeiros anos de vida da criança. Através dos brinquedos e das brincadeiras, a criança descobre e explora o mundo que a rodeia. O jogo assume uma componente pedagógica fundamental, uma forma inata de aprender, permitindo à criança desenvolver a sua capacidade de experimentar e apropriar-se do que a rodeia, de forma simples e, por conseguinte, tão formadora.

**Objetivos:** Construímos o corpus deste estudo, cujos objetivos foram: (i) conhecer as perspetivas dos participantes sobre o lúdico e o recreio escolar nas aprendizagens das crianças do 1.º CEB; (ii) identificar as atividades preferenciais das crianças nos tempos de recreio; (iii) perceber como as escolas concebem os espaços de recreio.

**Método:** O instrumento de pesquisa utilizado foi a entrevista individual semiestruturada, organizada a partir de um conjunto de dezasseis questões efetuadas a professores do 1.º CEB de dois agrupamentos distintos do distrito de Viseu. Participaram do estudo seis professores com experiência profissional, situada entre 10 e 30 anos, no Ensino Primário. Posteriormente, procedeu-se à análise de conteúdo para tratamento dos dados, desenvolvida em três fases.

**Resultados:** A perceção dos participantes revela que brincar está fortemente associado a aprender, sendo que a criança descobre o seu papel na sociedade e no mundo enquanto se envolve em diferentes atividades e brincadeiras. O recreio é um espaço privilegiado e um dos mais valorizados pela criança, na medida em que oferece oportunidades de alegria e prazer social. Constitui um contexto no qual a socialização assume extrema importância, quer através da interação entre pares, quer da interação que a criança estabelece e desenvolve com os adultos responsáveis por ela.

**Conclusões:** O recreio e os momentos de brincadeira beneficiam a criança e arcam um papel decisivo no seu desenvolvimento global. No contexto específico do nosso estudo, os professores reconhecem esta importância e fazem uso do espaço exterior para implementar atividades para as suas classes, especialmente as que envolvem contacto com a natureza, de modo a facilitar as aprendizagens das suas crianças. Atualmente, o peso e relevância de tais atividades têm vindo a ser gradualmente reconhecidos pelos especialistas.

**Palavras chave:** criança; tempo livre; brincar; recreio e aprendizagem

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Play is strongly related to learning, especially during the early years of a child's life and evidence shows that the child discovers and explores the world that surrounds him as he uses his toys and takes part in different types of games. Play assumes then a fundamental pedagogical function and represents an innate way of learning that allow children to develop their own ability to explore and master their surroundings in such a simple and formative way.

**Objectives:** We designed the corpus of the study that included the following objectives: (i) to learn more about the participants' perspectives on the role played by playful activities and school recess in the learning of primary education children; (ii) to identify the activities that children enjoy the most during recess; (iii) to understand how schools conceive their recreational spaces and facilities.

**Methods:** The research instrument of choice was the semi-structured individual interview. This instrument was based on a set of sixteen questions given to primary school teachers who were teaching in two school groupings located in the district of Viseu. The target population of our study is composed of six primary school teachers whose career span ranges between 10 and 30 years of professional activity in this particular educational stage. A three phase content analysis was then carried out to process the amount of data obtained.

**Results:** The participants realize that playing is strongly connected to learning and that the child discovers the role he will play in the world as he engages in different playful activities. School recess is one of the children's favourite school settings as it offers them moments of joy and social pleasure. This is a place where socialization takes on great significance, both through peer-to-peer interaction and through the interaction that the children will develop with the adults who are responsible for them.

**Conclusions:** Recess and playful moments benefit all children and will play a decisive role in their overall development. In this case, teachers claim to know the children's favourite free time activities and use outdoors space to implement some activities for some of their classes, especially when it involves experiences in which contact with nature will facilitate the students' learning. The importance of such activities seems to be gaining more and more recognition among experts.

**Keywords:** child; free time; play; school recess and learning

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Jugar está profundamente relacionado con el aprendizaje, especialmente en los primeros años de la vida de un niño y la evidencia muestra que el niño descubre y explora el mundo que lo rodea mientras usa sus juguetes y participa en diferentes tipos de juegos. El juego adquiere un componente pedagógico fundamental, una forma innata de aprendizaje, que le

permite al niño desarrollar su capacidad de experimentar y apropiarse de lo que lo rodea, de una manera simple y, por lo tanto, tan formativa.

**Objetivos:** diseñamos el corpus del estudio, cuyos objetivos fueron: (i) conocer las perspectivas de los participantes sobre la diversión y el recreo escolar en el aprendizaje de los niños de educación primaria; (ii) ) identificar las actividades preferidas de los niños durante los momentos de recreación; (iii) comprender cómo las escuelas conciben sus espacios e instalaciones recreativas.

**Método:** El instrumento de investigación elegido fue la entrevista individual semiestructurada. Este instrumento se basó en un conjunto de dieciséis preguntas dadas a maestros de primaria que enseñaban en dos grupos escolares ubicados en el distrito de Viseu. La población objetivo de nuestro estudio está compuesta por seis maestros de primaria cuya carrera abarca entre 10 y 30 años de actividad profesional en esta etapa educativa en particular. Luego se realizó un análisis de contenido trifásico para procesar la cantidad de datos obtenidos.

**Resultados:** Los participantes se dan cuenta de que jugar está fuertemente conectado con el aprendizaje y que el niño descubre el papel que jugará en la sociedad y en el mundo al participar en diferentes actividades lúdicas. El recreo escolar es uno de los entornos escolares privilegiados y uno de los más valorados por los niños, ya que les ofrece momentos de alegría y placer social. Este es un lugar donde la socialización adquiere una gran importancia, tanto a través de la interacción entre pares como a través de la interacción que los niños desarrollarán con los adultos responsables de ellos.

**Conclusiones:** El recreo y los momentos lúdicos benefician a todos los niños y desempeñarán un papel decisivo en su desarrollo general. En el contexto específico de nuestro estudio, los maestros reconocen esta importancia y hacen uso del espacio al aire libre para implementar actividades para sus clases, especialmente aquellas que involucran contacto con la naturaleza, para facilitar el aprendizaje de sus niños. Actualmente, el peso y la relevancia de tales actividades han sido gradualmente reconocidos por especialistas.

**Palabras clave:** niño, tiempo libre, juego, recreo escolar y aprendizaje

## INTRODUCTION

### Self-education- creative moments of learning and discovery

Play time is closely related to the concept of leisure. This concept can obviously assume different values or meanings depending on the countries of origin, their distinctive cultures and on the customs or traditions of the place. Every human being wishes to use his free time to break free from his nine-to-five work routine. Free time becomes consequently the central interest in many people's lives, especially when they believe that these moments play a key role in the children's education and life.

Due to its voluntary and autonomous nature, leisure activities are considered to be a fundamental factor in the quality of life and of the lifestyle of each and every one of us and especially of children and young people. Leisure is thus connected to personal activities and is a complement to the personal realization of each and every individual (Eira, 2014).

The important role it plays in the lives of children and young people helps them question their actions and decisions and help them manage their routines and value habits and behaviors connected to personal and social well-being. It will also help reveal cases of social isolation or leisure habits that may come to endanger someone's life or individual freedom. That's why schools and families will have to pay closer attention to the kind of leisure activities in which their young people take part, as well as to the people they hang out with and to any factor that may have an impact on their development (Eira, 2014).

Consequently, leisure time seems to be as important as the pursuit of pleasure and well-being or as the promotion of personal, social and cultural skills (Matos & Sampaio, 2009).

School has had to face and overcome a few problems to become more attractive and meet the needs of its children. Schools also have to remember that hours and hours of their students' time are spent in a different kind of training, the so-called self-education or self-training, so the activities provided by the institutions have to go way beyond a set of tasks organized by adults. School is a place of life, with a wide multiplicity of meanings, a space where identities, expectations and aspirations are shaped (Vieira, 2016).

Therefore, what the students learn while they are having fun in recess is of great importance since a significant part of the learning contents is acquired voluntarily by children and young people in the free time activities in which they engage individually or collectively (Herrero, 1995).

Bearing these aspects in mind, school has to accept that free time is an educational process in itself. School will then have to provide its students with the right knowledge and opportunities so that they can live and coexist and will thereby help give meaning to their lives. Today, these goals cannot be achieved when school focus is set on "education for work" alone. Instead, school should place the same importance on "Education for leisure" as well.

In this regard, Ferland (2016) states that man is a playful animal, the most playful of all animals, and that through playfulness we have the chance to combine reason and emotion, knowledge and dreams. On the other hand, playfulness also allows people to accomplish a certain sense of purification and distraction. It provides individuals with a sense of rest, relief and fun, because of its ability to mend people's fatigue and restore emotional balance and because it adds great pleasure to the child's well-being. That way, the main purpose of education for leisure is to train individuals so they can live their lives in a positive way, creating healthy habits in children that will undoubtedly have an impact on their adult life and will last forever (Garcia, 2003).

This idea is reinforced by Chapter I, Article 3, paragraph f of the Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo (the Portuguese National Law on Education) which states that one of the country's strategic priorities is to contribute to the social realization of its citizens and that such achievement will only be possible if these people are provided not only with the right training to be socially and professionally active members of society, but also to be capable of learning how to make a creative use of their leisure time.

This paragraph states that the education system should play a key role in the development of leisure time and highlights the need for a type of education that will foster not only the learning practice, but also the stimulation of creativity and the development of individual and group identities, in an atmosphere that promotes affective bonds, where the child might feel confident and in which he will be able to build a learning based on the richness of all his experiences and on all the different environments he will come to know (Formosinho, 2013).

In this study, we analyzed the leisure moments that children have at school according to three dimensions: the teachers' opinions on free play during recess; their opinions on how leisure areas should be organized in their schools; and the identification of the children's favourite recess activities.

#### **Play – the child's main activity**

Do people realize how important play is in the construction of the individual's personal development? Daniel Sampaio (1993) mentions that at this junction of the child's life, he has to deal with two development tasks; on the one hand, autonomy, and on the other, the construction of his own identity. As they play, children are mastering a set of concepts that enable them to give meaning to the world and that will play a decisive role, as acknowledged by teachers, in the process of learning different types of knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2016; Formosinho, 2013).

All the child does is play (Azevedo, Kooij, & Neto, 2003) and he has the opportunity to express what he is feeling. Through play and make-believe, the child builds his imaginary world based on lived experiences and acquires knowledge related to the experiences of others.

For the child, play is the most complete activity there is: it represents a place where multiple intelligences intersect as well as a crucial source of educational resources. The child appropriates play to build his own personal learning and explore his functional abilities. He seeks playfulness to grow up, to break free from tensions and conflicts, because it is during play that he explores new situations using his imagination and his creative self, fulfilling his innermost desires and making his own true choices (Sargento, Ferreira & Madeira, 2017; Ferland, 2016; Vieira, 2011; Pereira, 2008; Leite, 2003; Gallahue, 2002).

In that sense, a more flexible and playful pedagogical organization gives personal, social and cultural identities greater openness and responsibility; it allows the child to exercise his right to pleasure and free satisfaction while learning; and enables education to be an effective open door to culture, creating an environment that encourages the creative process of learning and discovery that will enable children to express their imagination. All those enriching experiences provided by such environment will ultimately help shape a kind of space that will be truly be educational (Fonseca, 2012; Kickbusch, 2012; Formosinho, 2011; Barros, 2010; Strecht, 2008; Marcellino, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007).

In fact, children have the opportunity to structure their body scheme, develop their creative imagination as they look for and find solutions and as they explore different worlds. They will also develop their relationship with space and time, expand their use of different perceptual systems and perceptual complementarity and also develop their affectivity. These experiences will trigger a wide range of emotions that will forever be part of their memories (Ministry of Education, 2016; Cordovil & Barreiros, 2014; Strecht, 2011).

This sort of experience helps promote actions that are meant to give children the chance to spend their free time creatively and autonomously. And this is what play should really be, a regular and spontaneous manifestation of the children's behavior and a natural attitude that is instrumental to their development (Pessanha, 2003; Mendo, 2000).

While they are playing, children learn to cope with their frustrations because they will have to deal with defeat as well as with victory. This experience is a natural part of their individual growth. It makes them emotionally stronger and strengthens the ties they develop with others.

In this case, those environments become more and more important as the child needs to share collective moments to satisfy his desire to play. He will gradually learn to cooperate and discover the concept of team work. This ability to act cooperatively with others in order to achieve certain goals and the shared knowledge he acquires along the way give him a huge variety of pleasant feelings (Damasio, 2017).

That way, children will be capable of, through the learning process they have developed in diverse environments, making wise and informed decisions that will support everything they do, whether in their personal lives, or in their relationships, and every



decision they will have to make concerning others or their surrounding environment (Kickbuch, 2012). As such, play and playful games give the individual, and especially children, the freedom to express their inner motivations and the need to explore their physical, social and cultural engagement without any kind of constraint (Neto, 2003).

Play, as a natural activity, assumes special importance in children's lives because of its formative and playful character. Play is a recreation of human life, a symbolic and imaginary transformation of reality in which children freely choose a topic, a script, the materials, the context, and the results, in order to interpret, assimilate, adapt more easily to the world in which they live and accept reality (Fonseca, 2012; Niza, 2012; Pereira & Carvalho, 2008; Wiertsema, 2006; Kooij, 2003; Peñalba, 2001, Guedes, 1997).

That way, play can promote a high number of emotional and functional experiences, because it is basically a bonding moment of extreme importance for the child.

Damasio (2017) states that school recess, fun, playful games, body movement and everything else we can invent and experience in those spaces are behavioral aspects he calls "*play*" and that represent cornerstones of development, cultural transmission and of the evolution of human life.

The child, while performing his playful activities, has fun, investigates, creates, and evolves. Playing and engaging in games, the child grows up, integrates and develops, discovers the world, discovers the people around him, discovers himself and is recognized by others.

Play is thus an instrument that will help the child shape his personality, which will in turn help him cope with anxiety, understand what is real and communicate with others, because of its playful and therefore universal character and because of its socializing and, at the same time, individual nature that is crucial to achieve the integral education of the human being (Eira, 2014)

### **School recess – a space for further learning**

School recess is a learning space between school teaching activities that can take place outside or indoors. Those are spaces where children can build a world of their own from all their lived experiences and create physical environments where they can express all their feelings. There, children are always running around, as if their energy source were inexhaustible. Children will have the chance to explore free play which will increase their imagination and their creative capacity, give them the opportunity to organize their own games, to create their own rules and to master the right skills to solve problems in interaction with their peers (Eira, 2014; Ramstetter, Murray & Garner, 2010; Marques, 2010; Barros, Silver & Stein, 2009; Smith, 2003; Neto, 2003).

Therefore, school recess is a fundamental space for children's physical, cognitive, social, and affective development (Ramstetter, Murray & Garner, 2010; National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2006; Council on Physical Education for Children, 2001; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998).

Recess allows for a great diversity of learning opportunities. On the other hand, being a space with different characteristics and potentialities, it also gives children a sense of freedom that they can't have inside the classroom. Relationships are more spontaneous and children find it much easier to express their feelings.

Recess time/space becomes very important in the children's school life as well as in their daily lives. When people speak about school, they should not focus solely on the organized space that is meant for teaching activities, but also give due credit to the whole school environment.

All this means that schools will need better material conditions and human resources, conditions that will be implemented in all its physical spaces so it may meet the children's needs. Most of the time, school playgrounds do not have the right equipment, materials, environmental quality and supervision (Pereira & Pereira, 2012; Marques, Neto & Pereira, 2001).

School playgrounds should, more than ever, be considered areas where children can play and learn as well (Pereira & Carvalho, 2008). Therefore, there should be more and more play and recreational areas where children will be able to choose their toys and play freely. Additionally, more free spaces (natural areas) will have to be made available so that the child may have the opportunity to play freely and to interact with all the natural elements.

One of the main problems that should be considered when promoting children's physical activity is the (im)possibility of engaging in spontaneous practice. This factor is particularly relevant during school recess or other free time moments and is usually associated with parks or public leisure areas (Mota, 2001).

Today we are well aware that children have lost their interest in physical activities and that computers and television are now children and teenagers' favourite occupation. This fact is evident during recess as well.

For recess to be a space for a self-education of excellence, people have to be familiar with the child's age, his physical and mental characteristics, and have to understand his interests.

In order to organise the recess area certain basic characteristics must be taken into account: (i) its physical characteristics that have to do with the space and the moments in which recess will take place. As far as the physical space is concerned, one must take into account the type of terrain and the type of fencing used to limit access to the area, all the elements that are attached to any moving object or structure and the new elements that can be incorporated. This sort of information has to be constantly reassessed and updated. As for the time, we must take into consideration the weather characteristics and variations as well as

their period of influence; (ii) the technical characteristics that have to do with the development of playgrounds, with their participants and with the operating regulations. Therefore, focus should be placed on the number of children and on the existing area, on the number of supervisors, on the age-groups involved, the rules, those who are responsible for the equipment and for the supervision, among other factors; and (iii) the educational objectives that focus on the global development of the children's skills (Eira, 2014).

## 1. METHODS

This is qualitative or interpretative research study based on the assumption that events have to be studied in their natural settings, i.e., where they actually take place, and that the understanding of such those events depends on whether or not we are capable of understanding the perception and interpretation of the people who take part in said events. Emphasis will be placed on the meanings, experiences, practices and points of view (Tuckman, 2012; Mertens, 1998; Cresweel, 1998; Guba, 1990).

The research instruments used were semi-structured individual interviews that included sixteen questions asked to six primary teachers from two school groupings located in the district of Viseu. The questions were organized according to three dimensions: their opinion's on free recess activities, the design of the recess area and the recreational activities and practices.

This data collection method allows for a greater number of spontaneous answers. Participants didn't have to follow a pre-established model of questioning and we could figure out, from the teacher's interventions and opinions, the importance they attach to playful activities performed in a recreational space. This method made it easier to understand how the participants feel about certain phenomena that are part of their professional lives and in which they are directly involved (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2008; Ruquoy, 2005; Silverman, 2000; Bogdan & Biklen, 1994).

The definition of the studied group had to meet certain criteria. Our aim was to identify and understand how social, cultural and political relations are organized in society. Therefore, the number of surveyed is rather small because the researcher wanted to make sure he knew the object of study as well as possible. In this particular case, the matter of representativeness, in the statistical sense of the term, is not an issue.

As for data processing, content analysis was conducted as soon as the collection, analysis and transcription of the formal documents and of the participants' answers were concluded. This procedure followed three different phases (Bardin, 2009): (i) the pre-analysis stage represents the organisational phase. It usually starts with the researcher's first contact with the documents and the preparation of the material for further analysis. Before the analysis itself, the material collected (corpus) must be prepared. This stage involves a formal preparation; (ii) exploration of the material: this stage aims at managing the decisions made during pre-analysis. Fundamentally, it involves the encoding phase that includes the following steps: the choice of the recording units; the enumeration (the choice of the counting rules) and the classification (the choice of the categories) (iii) data processing, inference and interpretation of the results of the interviews to ensure their validity and meaningfulness. We tried to keep the descriptive dimension of what was told but we also took into consideration the interpretative dimension that reflects the doubts and questions of those who are responsible for analysing any research subject. (Guerra, 2006)

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As highlighted by the 2016 OCEPE (Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education), school recess is a privileged space for children to create spontaneous activities. The teacher, or any adult who is responsible for the supervision of this recreational area, must remain vigilant and observe, interact or mediate whenever deemed necessary.

Free time activities performed at school have had a consistent impact on the improvement of the students' learning, on their school results and on their school choices (Eira, 2014).

Based on the interpretative analysis of the answers provided by the teachers that were part of the study group, we can infer that the free activities that take place in the playground are important, since this is where children can break free from the pressure caused by their classroom activities. One of the participants states that: "... many children in the classroom are often quiet and shy, but during recess they are capable of freeing themselves from the pressure imposed by the different school subjects; according to some teachers, the best way to assess their students is paying attention to the performances and behaviours they adopt in those recreational spaces".

This perception is in agreement with the position of Hohmann and Weikart (1997) who mentioned that the time dedicated to playful activities outside allows children to express themselves and to exercise in ways that are not usually authorized in indoor games or in the classroom. When they are engaged in active learning contexts, children are in constant movement, but in the playground their games are much more invigorating and noisy.

Hence, playful activities, and any logically related methodology, are seen by teachers as a very useful tool to develop the child's learning they often use in their classrooms, especially when they teach younger children or when they plan activities of a more exploratory and experimental nature in which students are encouraged to face situations where they are asked to read the world and act intentionally on it, in a more facilitating and meaningful way (Sergeant, Ferreira & Madeira, 2017).



The surveyed teachers attach great importance to school recess, since it is a key element to really get to know their students better. Recess allows children to reveal a wide range of potentialities they would hardly manifest in a classroom. Thus, the way recess is supervised by teachers is of utmost importance, "because children reveal their true self in the playground; there we can truly grasp the kind of relationships that bind them together, the leaderships, the interactions and the way conflicts are managed".

Marques (2001) states that playgrounds and other self-education spaces allow teachers to know who their students really are, since their behaviour in class does not necessarily coincide with the way they act when they are placed in these environments. School and its recreational areas (when they do exist) become places par excellence for children to exercise freely and to promote affective and emotional relationships.

This idea was supported by six of the teachers who took part in the study when they declare that "when they play in the playground, children can experience many things, get to know each other, create bonds, solve conflicts, make discoveries, develop creativity, imagination, cooperation, team spirit and individual responsibility and learn from their mistakes. All these skills are fundamental for their social life".

In fact, Lopes *et al.* (2006) argue that recess will have a positive impact on the child's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

However, all the teachers interviewed mentioned that it is not always possible to use playfulness in the children's educational process. Some of them claimed that the school curricula are too ambitious and too long for them to use such strategy and some others blame the lack of adequate materials and facilities.

On the other hand, all the teachers agree that they should use a lot more games and playful activities in their classrooms, because the use of such methodology would allow them to know much more about their students and to understand their difficulties and to find the right strategies to help them overcome their problems.

In Hohmann & Weikart's opinion (1997), in the playground children have the kind of freedom they don't have in the classroom, "therefore they act spontaneously and will have endless opportunities to express themselves as they engage in cooperative and creative games, in fighting games and as they figure out how to solve the conflicts they have created".

Teachers considered that during recess children have to be involved in playful activities that may bring them enjoyment and satisfaction.

School is an educational organization par excellence and therefore its primary concern should always be its students' lifelong education process that will be achieved as they run into different experiences and different contexts. That way, what everyone expects is a school where each and every student may be given the opportunity to develop the widest range of skills and competences that are essential for their global education.

Hence, school must be able to conceive an educational project that takes into account not only the curricular subjects, but also the so-called non-curricular areas and be aware of the importance played by the students' own background in which particular relevance is given to positive personal and social education (Eira, 2014; Leite, 2003).

Bearing all these assumptions in mind, each and every teacher stated that "in our schools we need experts with the right training to supervise the activities that take place in the school recreational areas; in their opinion, children need "more breaks between classes, I think the time students spend in the classroom is too long". Actually, recess time is way too short. Sá (2014) argues that in order to improve school performance, schools have to improve and expand the amount of time allocated to recess or other recreational periods. Other authors such as (Damásio, 2017; Cruz, 2013; Ramstetter *et al.*, 2010; Neto, 2008) highlight the importance of school recess. In their opinion, it is during these playful moments that children acquire multiple types of knowledge. All those considerations and all the references collected make us wonder whether or not a 30-minute break between classes is enough for children to eat their lunch and play.

When we asked the participants if, in their opinion, the resources available in their schools were suitable enough for children to enjoy recess as much as possible, the answers were all very much alike: they all declared that their schools do not have enough materials or recreational areas, nor are they capable of providing the suitable care children would need to develop their free time activities. As Neto (2008) states, playground is the most valuable space in schools, but it is also the most mistreated and the poorest, since it is the last area to get the funding it needs. The teachers that took part in our study also share this idea. The following excerpt clearly supports such position: "the spaces may be large in size, but they are poorly equipped and unattractive. What do we see when we look at most of the playgrounds? Arid areas with nothing but dirt! We can't even find a sole pebble children could use in their games"

Another concern raised by teachers is that when it rains, children have no indoors area where they can play. All they have is a closed room where they will spend their precious time playing games they have already played and that do not motivate them anymore. As we can see from the different answers given, this is really a matter of concern for teachers: "my school has two sheds that are unable to protect the students from the rain, so on a rainy day they can't even play under those sheds, they have to be kept in a closed room. When it's raining, there should be some indoors areas where they could play different kinds of games and release their energy".

Common knowledge tells us that the supervision of school playgrounds in pre-school and primary education institutions should be carried out by educators and by teachers with the support of the school operations assistants (Legislative Order 4-A/2016, of June 16<sup>th</sup> in its article 6, no. 4). When they were asked to give their opinion on that matter, the teachers' answers diverged considerably and some sort of discomfort was evident in some of them. They claimed that when the teachers' timetables are drafted, the amount of time needed for the monitoring and surveillance of primary students' activities that take place during the breaks is taken into account.

One of the teachers stated that "in our school the supervision of the playgrounds is carried out by the operations assistants and by the teachers on a rotating basis". Teachers from other schools reported that the surveillance is carried out exclusively by the operations assistants.

The children's recreational activities and practices and the way they spend their free time during recess changes from age-group to age-group and according to their interests and their social backgrounds. That way, the offers provided by society strongly influence the children and young people's decisions when time comes for them to choose their free time practices. Hence, the children's favourite recreational activities reflect their personal interests, but depend also on the local and school offers (Sergeant, Ferreira & Madeira, 2017).

The games and the toys available should be diversified and suitable for the children's levels and characteristics. Each child is a unique human being, with his own unique potential. Therefore, each one of them will react differently to playful activities and will reveal different interests.

In their answers, the teachers claim to know the kind of games and activities their students enjoy the most. "Football is the boy's favourite activity; girls prefer rope skipping, jumpsies and doing somersaults. They also often play statues or tag game, they run and wander freely around the playground".

Teachers also said that " girls talk to each other, run after each other, some bring toys from home and then sit right over there and play with the toys they bring. Boys love playing ball above all else. They try to recreate the games we teach them in the playground later".

Other answers showed that, in a different school, girls' favourite activities were rope skipping, playing jumpsies and hide and seek, while boys' favourite games were football and cops and robbers. Always in small groups, girls prefer interaction games, while boys prefer competition games. This preference is in accordance with the study conducted by Neto and Marques (2004), that showed that football games and contact and agility games were the boys' favourite kind of games, while girls' favourite activities were playing games like tag, hide and seek and other sensory games.

Ecker (1993) states that some studies related to motor activity conclude that boys are more active and usually engage in activities that require global strength and movement, while girls are more agile in activities that require coordinative abilities and fine motor skills.

The same authors state that, during school recess, children get together according to their age, gender and to the type of games they choose. They also affirm that older children are those who get to choose the best playground area and that boys have more power of choice than girls.

## CONCLUSIONS

Recess and playful moments benefit all children and will play a decisive role in their overall development. In this case, teachers claim to know the children's favourite free time activities and use outdoors space to implement some activities for some of their classes, especially when it involves experiences in which contact with nature will facilitate the students' learning. The importance of such activities seems to be gaining more and more recognition among experts. Playful activities and games can thus be used in the classroom as a major teaching resource. Similarly, playfulness and games help children share ideas and establish interpersonal relationships because they will help improve a wide range of skills and competences that will play an essential role in the child's cognitive and social development.

Through playfulness and through the games he plays the child tries to establish new friendships. Playful activities and child's games are clearly associated with positive emotions and with the concepts of personal fulfillment and self-worth. The child does not only play with his toys, he plays with his body in a constant confrontation with nature, with risk and with adventure.

Since the child builds his world based on his experiences, his learning environment must include the lived spaces, the child's spaces and their respective practices. However, further studies and additional evidence are necessary to conduct a more thorough analysis of those practices

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