Article

"So, We Can't Play": Limitations to Play at School in Periods of Educational Transition in Chile

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Abstract: Based on a reflection on the tensions between play, education, and learning in early childhood, this article aims to identify and analyze the factors that limit or negatively condition the possibilities for play at school during the transition between early childhood education and primary education in Chile. The study was conducted in four Chilean schools, with the transition levels of Chilean early childhood education (children aged 4 and 5) and the first two levels of primary education (children aged 6 and 7). Based on an ethnographic approach, we combined 22 ethnographic observation days spread over two consecutive years and 59 interviews of various types with children, educators, and parents. The results show structural and material limitations on school play that mainly affect children in primary education. Beyond, factors associated with routines, indications, and statements governing functioning and participation in this level tend to limit or prevent play, often considered a "non-legitimate" activity. Conclusions highlight the potentialities that children's restricted or resisted play can present in terms of learning.

Keywords: early childhood education; play and learning; educational transitions; educational setting; research with children; visual methodologies; qualitative research

1. Introduction

1.1. Context: Tensions between Play, Education, and Learning in Early Childhood

Play has been widely highlighted as a privileged support for early childhood learning. In addition to being considered a fundamental activity for children [1], there is extensive documentation of its benefits in stimulating children's cognitive, social, and emotional development [2,3].

Various traditions and disciplines have addressed the relationship between play, education, and early childhood learning. Educators such as Fröbel, Dewey, Pestalozzi, and Montessori have become classics for their proposals about educational environments structured on a playful basis or centered on children's free exploration and initiative [4]. They are linked to Romantic thinking and its tendency to conceive play as a "natural" and educational activity for children [5]. Indeed, with Romanticism and its revaluation of the child, play appears as something positive, not as a futile and even harmful activity, as it had previously been considered in much Western thought [6].

Biological and, in particular, psychological perspectives related to child development have developed theories and systematizations regarding the contribution of play in different domains [6,7]. In early childhood education (ECE) practice, various relationships have also been established between play, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, seeking to promote different types of learning or ways of learning [8,9].

The centrality of play in ECE seems undeniable since its origins. Various analyses and interpretative traditions insist on the historical relationship between play and the development of a relatively transnational "preschool culture", based mainly on the Froebelian

model of kindergarten [10]. This results in the idea of a distinctive "hallmark" of ECE [11]: an education based on play.

However, within this discourse, different points of view coexist: play can be seen as educational in itself, or indirectly since it is only aimed at informal learning, or as a necessity in the child's life without being conferred the least educational value [12]. According to these different visions, play practices and materials offered to children vary [10]. Moreover, specific reflexive logics inherent to the professionalization of staff at this level can lead to a distancing attitude toward children's play culture or a disregard for their perspectives and preferences [13]. Thus, in parallel to a discourse that tends to idealize play, in ECE we can note a play resisted or rejected by adults [14].

The paradox is that "preschool culture", relying on play when it is thought of as specific, contributes to generate a "preschool play culture" that may be quite different from the play culture of children as such [13]. "Behind the idea of play as a unifying element of preschool pedagogies, we discover in reality different play cultures, marked by variable material environments, by logics of intervention from the strongest to the softest (. . .), which can go from the freedom given to the child to the exercise disguised as play, with all possible intermediate positions" [4] (p. 27).

Concerning the above and beyond structural limitations (lack of resources, space limitations) for the practice of children's play in our contemporary societies [7], the very role of play as a support for children's learning has become an object of questioning. It is increasingly being replaced by more formal pedagogical activities structured by adult teachers [15]. Moreover, this orientation disregards the evidence about the role of informal instances such as recess in children's education and development [16].

For some, the problem lies in the difficulty of establishing precisely what learning can derive from play, given the uncertain nature of its "outcomes". It is the idea of uncertainty as the driving force of play [5]. This random dynamic of playful activity clashes with our contemporary educational schemes, based on the traditional Western school model: the management and control of predefined objectives [17,18]. Thus, the pressure for children to achieve specific learning outcomes and prescriptions about how these outcomes have to be performed can reduce the possibility for teachers to apply a play-based pedagogy [15,19–21].

Another element of the debate has to do with the position or role of the adult concerning play in an educational situation. As opposed to so-called "free" play, in which "children are invited to play on their own initiative without the adult's intervention, beyond an indirect intervention in the arrangement of space and the organization of time" [12] (p. 51), we find so-called "guided" games, considered a pedagogical method in which the adult takes the initiative, "initiates the play context but does not direct play" [9] (p. 106).

These authors emphasize the benefits of guided play in terms of "achieving educational outcomes" for disciplinary school learning. This perspective clashes with that of those who advocate for a non-instrumentalizing view of play in the ECE context [22], also marked by "schoolification" [23].

1.2. Aim of the Study

Similar to a major international approach, ECE in Chile (children up to 6 years of age) has adopted the "principle of play" as a fundamental curricular component and privileged educational strategy for this educational level [24]. However, explicit mention of play as a pedagogical strategy decreases significantly in later levels of primary education (PE).

In practice, ECE itself is increasingly subject to pressures and questions regarding the role of play and its relationship with learning [25]. However, social and structural limitations for play in educational settings have yet to be studied in the Chilean context.

Our aim in this article is to identify and analyze the factors that limit or negatively condition the possibilities for play at school during the educational transition between ECE and PE in Chile. This, as part of a broader research project about children's perspectives (4 to 7 years old) regarding play and playful practices at school, contrasting and complementing

these perspectives with the observation and analysis of different educational settings, as well as with the opinions of adults (educators and teachers, and parents).

In addition to structural limitations (institutional, related to lack of resources), we are particularly interested in attitudes, indications, and statements that tend to refuse play. That is to say, factors that restrict play by referring it to the sphere of "non-legitimate" activities, not corresponding to the expected behavior in a given educational context or configuration.

We understand this configuration, as well as the "legitimacy" or "illegitimacy" of play in school, following the propositions of Layder concerning "social settings" as the "immediate environment" of the "situated activity" or practice we observe. A set of rules that govern the "legitimate" use of space-time in the social institutions we frequent [26] (p. 280). These are, in other words, the implicit or explicit norms, routines, dispositions, and behavioral expectations that organize the participation of the actors, establishing what it is appropriate or not to do in a given time and place.

We were particularly interested in identifying "illegitimate" play: practices that might not conform to the behavior expected from the child in an educational context or to the activities proposed in a given setting, as well as the specific reasons for this mismatch.

As we will see below, our results confirm significant differences between ECE and PE in the play activities proposed, allowed, or rejected. The more or less intense incidence of these differences in limiting or conditioning play at school is mainly due to a general configuration of school time/space: the opposition between classroom and playground or between work and recess.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Overview of the Methodology

Our research, ethnographic in nature, was designed under a qualitative approach with a descriptive scope and based on the experience of similar international research [27–29]. Generally speaking, we draw on Joseph Tobin's "polyphonic ethnography" design [30–32], as well as some components of the "mosaic approach" [33–35], combining field observations, video-recording, guided tours and photos taken by children, and interviews with children and adults.

The advantage of our approach lies in the dense comparative description of different educational contexts. This gives us a more complex vision of how play enters, emerges, and develops in classrooms during the transition between ECE and PE.

The characteristics of each technique and instrument will be detailed below. In total, we carried out:

- Twenty-two ethnographic observation days, spread over two consecutive years;
- Thirty-five semi-structured individual interviews with children;
- Twelve group interviews with these same participants;
- Four group interviews with parents;
- Four group interviews with teachers and educators;
- Four individual interviews with the principals of each establishment.

However, as explained below (Sections 2.2 and 2.3.7), not all of this corpus of information was considered for the specific analysis presented in this article.

2.2. Schools

The overall research sample was purposively constituted. We were interested in addressing both the transition levels of Chilean ECE, usually called "NT1" and "NT2" (but denoted as "pre-Kinder" and "Kinder" in this analysis; children aged 4 and 5), as well as the first two levels of primary education ("Prim1" and "Prim2", children aged 6 and 7). At the same time, we sought a certain representativeness of the different administrative types of schools in our educational system. These are municipal public schools (Publ), private-subsidized schools (Priv-Sub), and private-paying schools (Pay). The invitation to participate in the study, which was open and voluntary, was addressed to schools of these three types, which included the educational levels of interest. Finally, the total

research sample consisted of four schools from different socio-economic and cultural contexts: two schools from Valparaíso (Valpo), one public (Publ-Valpo) and one private-subsidized (Priv-Sub-Valpo); and two from Santiago (Stgo), one public (Publ-Stgo) and one private (Pay-Stgo).

However, as Table 1 shows, some of these schools had variations in the composition of the levels of interest, bringing together children of different ages in a single group. For example, in Priv-Sub-Valpo school, pre-Kinder and Kinder are merged into a "Kindergarten" (JI). However, this configuration is relatively standard in our educational system, so it did not present significant inconveniences for the fieldwork or the subsequent information analysis.

Table 1. Schools and levels addressed in the overall research fieldwork *.

Schools/Levels	Publ-Stgo School	Publ-Valpo School	Priv-Sub-Valpo School	Pay-Stgo School (Montessori)
ECE levels	pre-Kinder (4 years) and Kinder (5 years) working separately		pre-Kinder and Kinder (4 and 5 years) merged in a "Kindergarten" (JI)	Group 1 (G1): 3 and 4 years-old Group 2 (G2): 5 and 6 years-old Group 3 (G3): 7 to 12 years-old
PE levels	Prim1 (6 years) and Prim2 (7 years) working separately			

* Prepared by the authors.

The case of the Pay-Stgo school, which works with a Montessori-type curriculum approach, was different. This school works with educational cycles whose age separation does not correspond to the traditional educational divisions in Chile. In particular, Group 2 of this school brings together children aged five and six, who are usually separated into levels Kinder (ECE, five years) and Prim1 (from PE, six years). Thus, the transition from ECE to PE (from Kinder to Prim1, at the age of six) does not exist as such.

However, even more importantly, this school presented curricular particularities that strongly distinguish it from traditional Chilean educational configurations, both at the ECE and PE levels. Beyond the variations we observed between the different groups or levels, in all of them, we noted the presence of very distinctive common elements: a total absence of instances of expository classes; scarcity of activities led or directed (although eventually guided) by adults, as well as moments of group meeting as a whole; preponderance of moments of work in which each child defines for him/herself the use of time according to his/her interests; and finally, a widespread collaboration of children in the daily life activities, related to the maintenance and arrangement of the shared space (order, cleaning, food preparation, watering of plants, among others).

Thus, because of its peculiar characteristics, we decided to exclude the Montessori school (Pay-Stgo) from this analysis, which we will examine in future works. Table 2 shows the configuration of the sample considered for this article, in terms of schools and levels (Tables 3–6 refer to the information collected only from these three schools).

Table 2. Schools and levels considered for analysis *.

Schools/Levels	Publ-Stgo School	Publ-Valpo School	Priv-Sub-Valpo School
ECE levels	pre-Kinder (4 years) and Kinder (5 years) working separately		pre-Kinder and Kinder (4 and 5 years) merged in a "Kindergarten" (JI)
PE levels	Prim1 (6 years) and Prim2 (7 years) working separately		

* Prepared by the authors.

2.3. Fieldwork Design, Techniques, and Instruments

2.3.1. Observations

Our interest in analyzing children's play during educational transition resulted in a longitudinal design in which the levels considered were approached in two moments.

At first (Year 1), we began observing levels corresponding to children aged 4, 5, and 6: pre-Kinder, Kinder, and Prim1. The following year (Year 2), we returned to the schools to work with the same groups of children, now a year older (5, 6, and 7 years old): Kinder, Prim1, and Prim2.

In both years, and in line with our ethnographic approach, participant observations were carried out, with field notes and video recordings, during a full day at each level or group considered. This, to measure the presence, centrality, and general characteristics of play situations in which children were involved, considered the following elements: the types of play practiced or referred to; its participants and gender; the location of the play activity; the roles played by both children and adults; and the resources used. Likewise, we were interested in tracking specific discourses, indications, or attitudes regarding the play activity or particular types of games, both by children and adults.

Table 3 shows the details of the observations made.

Table 3. Detail of observations and children (ch) in each group.

	Schools/Levels	Publ-Stgo	Publ-Valpo	Priv-Sub-Valpo	Totals
Observation Days Year 1	pre-Kinder	1: group of 15 ch	1: group of 19 ch	1: group of 15 ch *	8
	Kinder	1: group of 17 ch	1: group of 17 ch		
	P1	1: group of 38 ch	1: group of 22 ch	1: group of 22 ch	
Observation Days Year 2	Kinder	1: group of 15 ch	1: group of 19 ch	1: group of 14 ch *	9
	P1	1: group of 17 ch	1: group of 17 ch	1: group of 20 ch	
	P2	1: group of 38 ch	1: group of 22 ch	1: group of 22 ch	
Total		6	6	5	17

* "Kindergarten" (JI) grouping pre-Kinder and Kinder.

2.3.2. Recognizing Play

Our field observations focused on situations recognizable as "play" or "playful". With this framing, we have quickly confronted an epistemological problem: conceptions of what activities constitute 'play' may differ significantly between children and adults [36]. The literature further indicates that while children may have highly formed views about play [37], they do not share a single dominant perspective among themselves [36].

There are studies that address how children perceive play in terms of the level or modality of adult involvement, guidance, or imposition [4]. For many, a key criterion relates to the absence of adult participants [38]. In the context of ECE, children aged 3–4 years have described play as an activity involving active participation in 'doing', being with their peers, and having agency and ownership of the ideas put into practice. They do not always identify those elements as part of the curricular activities they engage in [15]. For his part, King [39,40] found that kindergarten children used as a criterion whether or not the teacher imposed an activity as a criterion. Fein and Wiltz [41] observed that children who talked about their role-play mentioned experiences at home or in their neighborhood but not at school. That suggests a rejection of the idea of conceiving certain activities as play depending on the school context in which they occur.

Taking this background into account, for both the note-taking and the videotaping, we focused on moments in which the actors themselves could explicitly use the term "play" ("let's play", "we are playing", "can I play", "stop playing", etc.). But at the same time, we considered situations in which the presence of playful components was evident to us from a theoretical point of view, without it being necessary for their "playful" character to be made explicit by the actors. In other words, we combined an inductive/deductive approach in which we understood "play" to be what children or adults called "play", although without completely disregarding the definition and categorization of certain "types" of play in the literature.

We follow here the proposals made by Guzmán-Valenzuela [42] in her reading of the dialectical process of "double hermeneutics" [43] at the origin of the construction of knowledge in qualitative research. This is "the dynamic relationship generated between the researcher's frameworks of understanding and those closest to the participants in a given educational reality". This dialectic points to the distinction between commonly called "etic/emic" perspectives in qualitative research: the first one, concerning descriptions and interpretations about reality from an external point of view (the interpretative frameworks of the researcher); and the second one, about the vision that subjects have of a given cultural reality in which they participate, "their social practices and everyday dialogues in unique contexts from which created and negotiated meanings emerge" [42] (p. 19).

2.3.3. Individual Interviews with Children

In addition to observations, during Year 2, we conducted interviews with children, parents, and teachers. Concerning children, numerous informal ethnographic interviews [44] were conducted during the observations. In addition, in each of the three higher levels (Kinder, Prim1, and Prim2), we purposively selected (with the intermediation of teachers or educators) a total of three children, requesting their consent as well as the agreement of parents. In this way, we formally interviewed twelve girls and fifteen boys. Except for one missing case, and as Table 4 shows, the distribution was nine children per school and three children per level in each school.

Table 4. Children interviewed *.

	Schools	Publ-Stgo	Priv-Sub-Valpo	Publ-Valpo	Totals
	Kinder	3	3	3	9
Levels	Prim1	3	3	3	9
	Prim2	3	3	3	9
	Totals	9	9	9	27

* Prepared by the authors.

The interviews with children were carried out in two different formats. On the one hand, individual mobile interviews allowed the child to explore the different spaces of the school freely. The interview design was inspired by the "mosaic approach" model [33–35], inviting children to conduct a kind of 'reportage' about their experience at school, seeking to bring out play-related themes. Supporting this was the option of making a camera available to them, which they could use at any time (the photographs taken were also part of the information collected but will not be considered for this analysis).

This activity was carried out after the observation days of Year 1, lasting about 25 min (on average) per child. We filmed these interviews to capture the dynamics experienced by children and help us identify objects, places, or people that had been photographed with little clarity.

The protocol for the individual interviews can be found in Appendix A. It included five moments, with various guiding questions to be taken into account and applied flexibly, depending on the answers that children could spontaneously provide:

- General explanation of the interview dynamics, request for assent, and collection of general data.
- Questions about typical activities at the school, current and previous year: explanation, participants, location, preferences.
- Games played at school: same elements.
- Non-play activities: description, who decides what to do, preferences.
- Closing: forgotten elements, emphasis, free final comments.

2.3.4. Group Interviews with Children

As shown in Table 5, the same children were then interviewed in groups according to their level, in each school, for an average of 35 min. A comprehensive group interview

model was adopted [45,46], semi-structured, and video-narrative [47,48]. The interview was supported by viewing a short audiovisual montage (five minutes on average), which collected visual records of each group's first and second observations (Years 1 and 2).

Table 5. Group interviews with children (ns) *.

	Schools	Publ-Stgo	Priv-Sub-Valpo	Publ-Valpo	Totals
	Kinder	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	3
Levels	Prim1	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	3
	Prim2	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	1 (3 ch)	3
Totals		3	3	3	9 group interviews (27 children)

* Prepared by the authors.

The protocol for the group interviews with children can be found in Appendix B. It was designed to address different topics, with similar criteria to those of the individual interview, particularly in terms of its flexibility and semi-structured nature.

2.3.5. Interviews with Adults

Finally, and as a way of deepening the triangulation of information typical of qualitative research [49,50], children's perspectives were also contrasted and related to those of adults, educators, teachers, and staff in general, as well as parents. For this purpose, and as shown in Table 6, we conducted eight group interviews (each lasting approximately one hour): in each school and separately, with the parents of the children interviewed (all levels), as well as with the educational teams of the groups considered. Again, this used a semi-structured interview model with visual support, in which we relied on the visualization of segments of audiovisual material.

In addition, interviews were conducted with principals to delve deeper into the reality, background, and history of the schools that made up our research sites.

Table 6. Interviews with adults *.

Schools	Publ-Stgo	Priv-Sub-Valpo	Publ-Valpo	Totals
Interviews with directors	1	1	1	3 (3 directors)
Group interviews with parents (all levels)	1 (n = 4)	1 (n = 4)	1 (n = 3)	3 interviews (11 participants)
Group interviews with teachers (all levels)	1 (n = 5)	1 (n = 4)	1 (n = 4)	3 interviews (13 participants)
Totals	3 (n = 10)	3 (n = 9)	3 (n = 8)	9 interviews (27 participants)

* Prepared by the authors.

2.3.6. Ethical Considerations

To conduct this study, consent or assent was sought from all participants, including children, according to agreed ethical codes in the literature [51,52]. We sought to safeguard their anonymity, well-being, and voluntary participation at all times.

2.3.7. Analytical Procedures

Our inductive/deductive approach to the research fields mentioned above was translated into a process of information analysis inspired by the constant comparative method [53], with the following stages or concurrent dimensions:

- An iterative process of condensation, through constant comparison with the data, which led to the emergence of categories that could explain the phenomenon studied. In particular, the refinement of dimensions and questions to be addressed to children in the interviews were nourished by the findings from our observations.

- The data visualization process established relationships [54] between the information collected in the observations and that gathered in the interviews with children. A CAQDAS (computer assisted qualitative data analysis) allowed us to work online as coders, facilitating the triangulation process.
- Conclusions were drawn through an inter-subjective consensus within the research team (three researchers and four assistants) in search of plausibility and robustness of the findings.
- The criteria of rigor that guided the entire process were those of credibility, originality, resonance, and utility [55].

Considering the objective of this article, for the presentation of results, we will rely primarily on the perspectives expressed by children in the interviews, complementing them with the information gathered in the observations. Given that they deal to a lesser extent with the limitations of play in an educational context, we will only incidentally draw on what adults have said in interviews.

We organize this presentation using the following conceptualizing themes or categories of analysis [56]:

1. Playful practices: We will begin by briefly presenting, by way of introduction, playful activities most commonly reported by children in both ECE and PE;
2. Opposition between classroom and playground and between work and recreation: We will continue with a preliminary analysis of this general configuration of school time-space and its incidence in the limitation of play practices in school, particularly in PE.

Based on the above, the following four categories of analysis are derived, crossing between levels or settings (PE/ECE) and differentiated spaces/times: classroom/playground and work/recreation:

3. Limitations and constraints to play in the playground or outdoor spaces in PE: Here we will present an overview of the most frequently evoked themes in interview situations and observed during fieldwork on this topic.
4. We will continue with an analysis of the limitations and constraints to play, at this level (PE), indoors and outdoors.
5. Thirdly, in the case of ECE, we will begin with a brief description of indoor play, followed by an analysis of its main limitations.
6. Fourthly, for this same educational level, we will address the limitations and constraints that weigh on its implementation outdoors.
7. Finally, we will conclude the analysis by presenting a series of examples observed in both outdoor and indoor spaces, which reveal complexities and tensions of uncertain resolution concerning the conditions imposed on playing; or, more precisely, the reconsideration of an initial prohibition or limitation imposed by adults.

3. Results

As a first contextual approach, it should be noted that the games that children preferably report playing at school stand out for their physical nature and for the presence of what the literature calls "rule games" [57,58]. In PE, children talk mainly about soccer and chasing and catching games. In ECE, the so-called "socio-dramatic" games [11] and games with objects [57,58] have a higher frequency of mentions.

Regarding the presence of limitations or conditioning factors imposed on play, and as a first general finding, most of the references came from children in PE. Those who were in ECE at the time of the study referred much less frequently to factors that could limit or impede play.

In order to account for the main limitations and conditioning factors of children's play at school, we will begin by presenting their perspectives, complementing their analysis with information gathered in observations (and incidentally, in interview situations with adults). Nevertheless, we are alluding first to the opposition between classroom and playground

and between work and recess. This general configuration of school time/space significantly impacts the limitation of play practices at school, particularly in PE.

3.1. General Structural Constraints in PE: Time and Space—Classroom Versus Playground, Work versus Recreation

In terms of the places most frequently associated with play at this level of education, outdoor spaces (playgrounds) clearly stand out. Children emphasize the importance of having large spaces with adequate infrastructure, access to nature, and various materials and resources. Participants also note the relative freedom of playing in these spaces, as they have different rules from other places in the school, such as classrooms, where teachers are perceived as agents that control the activity. The "playgrounds" are clearly identified as relevant spaces for group play and movement without adult direction.

From the above, we can highlight the clear perception children develop regarding the organization of routines and temporalities in the educational context. They tend to see recess as a privileged time for play and the playground as a place where things are allowed that are not in the classroom; if they play in the classroom, *"then the teacher will scold us"* (girl, six years old, Prim1, Publ-Stgo).

This sentence shows a clear understanding by children of what adults themselves express and reiterate. Some PE teachers explicitly state, for example, that the classroom is an unsuitable space for play, even during recess. During an observation, when a researcher noticed that the classroom was closed, the teacher explained: *"Otherwise, the children play inside"* (Publ-Stgo, Prim1).

3.2. Restrictions to Play in the Playground or Outdoor Areas in PE

Although identified as the place par excellence for play activities, not all play is allowed in the playground. On the other hand, many constraints are imposed on playing effectively in the outdoor space.

3.2.1. Transformation of Spaces and Limitation of Access to External Structures

From the children's references, a critical limitation has to do with progressive transformations in the distribution of spaces and places or play structures. Those changes limit the possibilities available to them in previous years or levels: *"That is a cradle that you pass underneath and jump over (. . .). And now they have taken it out, and put it where the little children are"* (boy, seven years old, Prim2, Publ-Stgo).

Children notice that specific resources they liked are no longer available to their group: *"Last year (. . .) there were more games, some things that were like iron, that you could do somersaults (. . .). I liked them a lot. [Now] they don't let me pass (. . .). Over there are all the games that I liked"* (boy, six years old, Prim1, Priv-Sub-Valpo).

Some children also underline the attractiveness of activities that could only be practiced in certain areas—playing soccer—and the presence of equipment in spaces they are not allowed to enter.

3.2.2. Security and Physical Integrity

Concerning the above, there are also restrictions that, according to children's accounts, emerge from the adult's intention to protect the safety and physical integrity, for example, in consideration of climatic factors. Some children say that they cannot go to a soccer pitch *"because we might get hit by a ball"* or because *"it's too sunny"* (boys, six years old, Prim1, Publ-Stgo). The children also mention rain: it can limit going out to the playground and, therefore, the development of games during recreation. When it is raining, they have to stay indoors; otherwise, they would be reprimanded:

Researcher 1: (. . .) Is that where they use it to run?

Girl: Yes, or to play, but not if it rains . . .

Boy: Because it's going to fill up. It's going to fill up with water.

Girl: We make little boats on . . .

Boy: Paper . . .

Researcher 2: (. . .) And who decides to make these boats on paper? Is it the teacher's idea or yours?

Both: We

Girl: Yes, but the teacher scold us . . .

Researcher 1: And why?

Girl: When it's raining, she doesn't let us.

(Group interview Prim2—seven years, Publ-Valpo).

3.2.3. Lack or Scarcity of Resources

Children also refer to the lack of specific play resources, particularly in the playgrounds (such as the systematic absence of balls in the soccer tables). This forces them to provide their own resources to make some games possible. Indeed, as they grow up, children's references tend to focus on the relative lack of availability of objects, materials, and resources to develop their games, as well as on the strategies developed to overcome these insufficiencies: *"We play soccer with a bottle"* (boy, six years old, Prim1, Publ-Stgo).

3.2.4. Adult Mistrust: Agitation and Violence

We also noted, on the part of teachers, a certain mistrust of recreation, sometimes with warnings about its "abusive" use. For some, according to what we observed in some situations, not even recess is a privileged time to play, and in any case, not to play "violently", which can lead to children having an inadequate predisposition to work:

When they are already in the room [after recess], the teacher reminds them that recess is for relaxing (eating and resting) and "if there is time left, to play (. . .). But not for pushing and shoving or hitting each other" (Observation Publ-Stgo, Prim2).

The teacher: "It seems that recess is bad for you, instead of being good . . . Please, we all want to finish (the work)" (Observation Publ-Stgo, Prim1).

It is interesting to note how some children (boys, PE) underline the appropriateness of playing certain "violent" games in the absence of educators precisely because of the latter's interpretation of this activity as a form of actual violence. In making this point, the children also show that they know the difference between "playing to fight" and a "real" fight.

Child 1: (Referring to a scene in the video) Do you remember that we were doing physical education there and arrived first? Then we started fighting (. . .).

Researcher 1: Hey, but . . . Why do you have to play that when the teachers are not there?

Child 1: (. . .) Because otherwise the teachers later (. . .), "You're hitting him angry" (. . .)

Child 2: (. . .) And then they tell us, "Come on, stop fighting" [laughing].

Child 1: "Stop fighting!" (. . .)

Child 2: But we were just playing!

(Group interview Prim2—seven years old, Publ-Valpo)

3.2.5. Recess as a Reward, Not Recess as Punishment

For children, adults may also limit recess as time for play in the playground, as a way of sanctioning inappropriate behavior or non-compliance with work: *"The bell is already ringing for recess, but we can't go out, because of some misbehaved children"* (boy, seven years old, Prim2, Priv-Sub-Valpo); *"When we are doing homework, when the bell rang [the teacher] says, "Those who finish go out for recess, and those who don't finish, don't" (. . .). And we were doing a very long homework"* (boy, seven years old, Prim2, Publ-Stgo).

Conversely, "behaving well" can be rewarded with extra time or space to play, such as in physical education classes: *"The teacher lets us play soccer when we behave well"* (boy, seven years old, Prim2, Priv-Sub-Valpo).

Several situations observed in our fieldwork correspond to the children's accounts. In particular, play as a "reward" can operate as a condition for moving between classroom and playground or between work and recess:

> *The teacher: "Whoever is sitting properly in his seat will go out (. . .). Whoever is not seated, there is no recess". She walks around, saying out loud, "Whom am I going to let out? (Observation, Publ-Stgo, Prim1).*

3.2.6. Gender Segregation between Boys and Girls

A final example shows the existence of limitations related to gender factors that are explicit among boys and girls themselves.

Regarding the practice of soccer, often reported by boys, some mentions suggest the presence of obstacles imposed on their female peers. Indeed, while some of them argue that girls "do not like" soccer (group interview Prim2, Priv-Sub-Valpo, seven years old boys), others insist that girls do not play because they do not master the game—"they don't know how to do it" (group interview Prim2, Publ-Stgo, boy, seven years old).

For girls, some dismiss the opinion of their male peers in the same group interviews, or point out in individual interviews that sometimes it is the boys themselves who do not allow them to play this sport: *"Boys won't let me"* (individual interview Prim1, Publ-Stgo, six years old girl).

> *Researcher 1: And what do boys play alone? And what do girls play alone?*
>
> *Child 1: Like soccer (. . .)*
>
> *Researcher 1: And why girls don't play soccer, do you think?*
>
> *Child 1: They don't like them that much . . .*
>
> *Girl 1: Me, a little bit.*
>
> *Researcher 1: Do you like it a bit?*
>
> *Researcher 2: Yes?*
>
> *Girl 1: [Slightly nods her head].*
>
> *Researcher 1: And do you play sometimes?*
>
> *Girl 1: Yes.*

(Group interview Prim2—seven years old, Priv-Sub-Valpo).

These testimonies are consistent with our fieldwork observations. In all the schools, we found that soccer is played in the playground during recreation, particularly in PE; the participants are always mostly or exclusively boys, with marginal or occasional female participation.

Moreover, the practice of this sport often manifests itself as an "invasion" of the playground by boys. It relegates to the background the opportunities and spaces for playful activity in which girls can be sustainably involved.

3.3. Limitations to Indoor Play in PE: "Quiet Breaks" versus Distraction and Disorder

At this level, allowed play in the classroom corresponds mainly to activities proposed by the teacher, with relatively limited variations. We observed some "sung" or "danced" collective games (singing a song that involves a specific component of repetition or gestures to be respected) or competitive games that incorporate explicit rules.

Mostly, these seem to be games proposed primarily as a "break" from work carried out in the classroom. Although play as a break can also be accepted if it comes from the child's initiative, some adults insist on playing "quietly":

Teacher: "It's a good idea to do another activity quietly while waiting for the other classmates to finish", pointing to a child drawing. "You can't run or play with toys or make a fuss". (Priv-Sub-Valpo observation, Prim1).

In the classroom, various games initiated by children seem not to correspond to the expected behavior or the activities proposed by adults. They may therefore constitute "distractions" from what is supposed to happen in an instructional context. Children may disengage themselves from the proposed or imposed activities by playing games—exercises, micro-competitions, and small riddles among themselves. Particularly in PE, we often observe children sliding pencils, toys, small balls, or other objects on their desks with no apparent purpose. Often, practices of this kind seek to be stopped by adults.

In particular, the activity may be stifled or sanctioned when it resorts to materials other than those provided by the educator or diverts its use to non-didactic purposes. Note, moreover, in the first example, the language used: children's play (or distraction) does not contravene the child's learning interests, but the instructional interests of the adult:

A child endlessly manipulates his pencil case. Teacher: "I have no use for you playing with the pencil case". Reading continues. (Observation Publ-Stgo, Prim1).

Students at a table are spinning a pencil on the table, all attentive to its movement. The teacher sees them and says aloud, "I'm going to check . . . stop playing". (Observation, Publ-Valpo, Prim2).

A boy who has finished his work takes out some "Dragon Ball" stickers from his pencil case and recreates character voices. A teacher tells him to put away his belongings (. . .). The child puts a sticker on a glue stick and tells his classmate that he stuck it on a rocket (. . .). The educator insists on his instructions, and the child removes the stickers. His partner seeks to continue, but the educator approaches and stops the interaction. (Observation, Publ-Valpo, Prim1).

In the interviews, several adults reported an approach to play as a learning support, insisting on the cognitive and social benefits it would have for children. However, teachers also warn about the potential risks of play in an educational context, such as when it generates "disorder", making it advisable to reduce its duration. These opposing views also evoke an opposition between learning and having amusement, as the following situation shows:

The teacher, observing the general activity in the room, says aloud: "You want to play, but we also have to learn, okay?", and tells them that she knows it is hard for them to sit still, and that she knows it is boring. (Observation, Priv-Sub-Valpo, Prim1).

In relation to "disorder", the children's perception that some didactic resources are no longer available to them, given their inadequacy to what teachers expect, stands out. Viewing images from the previous year, a group of Prim1 children explains why they can no longer play with small building blocks: *"The teacher won't let us because there are too many of them, and we can make a mess"* (girl, six years old, Prim1, Publ-Stgo).

Similarly, children indicate that bringing toys or other personal objects to school can be reprimanded. Teachers do not usually allow them to use their toys during lessons either *"because we get distracted (. . .), and then we forget to do the things we have to do"* (boy, seven years old, Prim2, Publ-Valpo).

The indications of some teachers, formulated in class, confirm the children's account: *"I'm going to take away all the toys. Let's remember that we are in class now"* (observation Prim1, Publ-Stgo). If they are eventually allowed to use them, it will be at not-instruction or formal learning moments, such as snack time.

Within play recurrently stopped inside the room, we can observe "violent" content, allusions to violence, or components of "rough-and-tumble play" [7,59,60]: the presence of measured, controlled, or simulated violence (brief chases, pushing, shoving, pulling, simulated hitting and shooting).

As the following example shows, this play usually also incorporates fictional or representational components, typical of socio-dramatic play [11]: short sequences of mimicry and gesticulations, imitation of different situations and characters:

[At the back of the room, during a moment of individual work] Two boys, Alonso and Bernardo, walk down the corridor, go back and forth, meeting and separating. They simulate kicks and blows, the sound of gunshots. Suddenly, Alonso says to Bernardo: "You died! You died!" several times. For a few seconds, Bernardo remains motionless on the floor, then sits up. Alonso insists, "You died! You died!" but Bernardo does not seem to accept the indication anymore.

Suddenly Carlos, another boy, asks Alonso, "Can I help you? Alonso do not answer and simulates a shot at Bernardo, saying, "I killed you". Carlos also simulates a shot at Bernardo, at which point Alonso says, "Now I'm spider-man", he turns to Carlos and shoots; Carlos looks at him for a moment, then drops to the ground. Bernardo gets up screaming, and Alonso walks away down the corridor (. . .). The teacher approaches, asks to go and sit down to work, and stops the dynamic, which then restarts [and will be repeated similarly until the end of the class].

(Observation, Publ-Stgo, Prim1—six years old).

3.4. Indoor Play at ECE

In the context of ECE, many play situations do not seem to be a problem or lack the necessary resources to be achieved in the classroom. Moreover, playing in the classroom during recess is not a cross-cutting prohibition (as in PE) and can be allowed.

Play often involves free or undirected manipulation of learning materials, toys, or games of lace or construction (puzzles, wooden blocks, lace bars). Activities of this type are often interspersed with short stories or narratives, such as recreating a story with animal figures.

3.4.1. Avoid "Rough" Play

Violent content or behavior considered inappropriate by the adult may be a reason to stop or prevent 'rough' children's play indoors. However, those situations may be effectively observed by the adult:

A group of children move from one space to another in their classroom and at various times throw themselves at each other, there is some shouting. At times there is no explicit reprimand from the teacher. Suddenly, however, she says: "That's not the way to play", after hearing the complaint of another one. (Observation, Priv-Sub-Valpo, JI, 4–5 years old).

3.4.2. Avoid "Distractions"

In ECE, despite the centrality of play and its status as a legitimate activity, there are also situations in which playfulness seeks to be stopped. For example, when it interrupts or diverts attention from the proposed or 'formal' activity:

The teacher hands out work material: sheets of paper with letters that make up the word "eye", which must be cut out and glued on a blank sheet of paper, on which they must also draw an eye (. . .).

After 20 min, she announces that those who have finished can take out a book. In a corner, two children still need to finish: one of them takes his scissors and shows them to his classmate. "This is called a potato!" he says, bringing the scissors close to the mouth of the other. This one pretends to eat them and then takes the scissors in turn and says, "This is called a chainsaw!".

The teacher asks who is still to finish the activity. One of the aforementioned children sticks the letters back on the sheet of paper. Shortly afterward, the teacher arrives at the children's table and urges them to finish the activity.

(Observation, Publ-Stgo, Kinder, five years old).

3.5. Outdoor Play in ECE: Limitations and Constraints

3.5.1. Changes in Planning and Adult Impositions

We were able to observe situations in which, if it replaces or substitutes another planned activity, outdoor play should be designated by the adult:

> *"Since the (physical education) teacher is not here, let's go out to play. But we are going to play two games: "la guaracha" (a sung game of chasing and catching) and "chu-chu-wá" (a game of imitation and dance). Whoever plays something else or goes to the soccer tables, will have to go back to the classroom".* (Observation Publ-Stgo, pre-Kinder, five years old).

3.5.2. Recreation as a Reward

We noted above, in the analysis of PE, that the possibility of going out for recreation can often be used as a "reward" for work completed. Although less recurrent in ECE, this situation could also be observed:

> *Some children get up to leave their pencil and notebook. They have finished their home-work. The teacher tells them that those who have completed the work can go outdoors.*

(Observation, Publ-Valpo, Kinder, five years old).

3.5.3. Safety and Avoidance of Harm

In ECE, the most frequent reprimands in the playground are formulated for behavior that is visibly perceived as violent or risky. Another possibility is an adult presumption or observation of harm to children's physical integrity.

For example, in JI at Priv-Sub-Valpo school, the teacher intervenes so that children who swing "don't do it so hard". While in Kinder (five years old) at Publ-Stgo school, teachers scold children who have started to throw sticks in the air, hitting a girl on the head.

Adults can also cite the outside temperature as a reason for not playing outdoors; during an observation in the JI of the Priv-Sub-Valpo school, the educator commented that after lunch, the children "play a lot, freely, but at this time of year, we don't let them go out to the playground much, because of the heat".

3.6. Between Indoor and Outdoor: Play "Tolerated" and Reconsidered

More frequent in ECE, although not non-existent in PE, we observe situations in which children's play activity, initially refused by adults, then appears to be the object of a reconsideration often implicit that finally allows it to be pursued. Play may also be tolerated or accepted when it appears during activities visibly intended for another purpose. The above, both in the classroom and in the playground, or dynamic situations observed in transit between the two spaces.

3.6.1. Short Concessions, Inconsistencies, and Group Management

Various play situations seem to be tolerated or accepted because of their brief or incidental nature or by the fact that they are situated at moments of transition between two formal activities, even if they do not correspond to what seems to be expected or appropriate in the context. However, at times like these, games that adults had accepted for some children may not be accepted for others, perhaps because of a relational or group management consideration:

> *During an activity with an assistant, one of the children finishes the work and goes to the next room. He immediately returns with a pirate hat on his head and says in a raspy voice, "I'm a pirate!". Another child, who has also finished, repeatedly asks the assistant if he can go to the playroom. With no response the first few times, the assistant eventually points out, "Let's wait for the classmates".* (Observation Priv-Sub-Valpo, JI/3–4 years old).

3.6.2. Individual and Group Considerations, Tacit Teacher Coordination, and Contextualization

Perhaps because of the concern of a particular child in a given situation, it may also happen that play continues even when it has been requested to end:

> *In the classroom, the assistant prepares a Christmas surprise; in the playground, waiting, the teacher talks to the children about Christmas. One of the children in the group ignores her speech and goes to play on the structures in the playground; the teacher does not say anything (. . .).*

> *Later, in the playground, the assistant indicates that the bell has rung, so it is time to get inside. A boy handling large building blocks starts to cry. The group goes in, and the assistant asks the group to leave the boy with the blocks alone. The boy does not put them away. He continues to assemble them.* (Observation Publ-Stgo, Kinder, five years old).

Other situations show an acceptance of games that are, in principle, rejected, as a progressive adaptation of the adult's actions according to the context or to the particularities of some children:

> *A child takes a set of giant building blocks and prepares to assemble them on the floor. The teacher warns him, "They are for the playground", but then allows the child to manipulate them (. . .) Later, after playing in the playground with these blocks, this child uses them again in the classroom without being reprimanded.* (Observation Publ-Stgo, Kinder, five years old).

Concerning the above, another play condition observed is respecting a turn system for using scarce materials or the requirement to tidy up those already employed. However, we were also able to attend episodes in which the use of certain materials may be subject to reconsideration by the educational staff. In the following scene, musical instruments are offered and then attempted to be taken away, stopping "play" (their manipulation is considered as such by some children). Consideration of the whole scene gives the impression of a process of tacit coordination between educator and assistant, in which the former seems to understand a possible 'mistake' in her colleague's initial decision, finally allowing the activity to be carried out outdoors:

> *After the teacher has left, the assistant hands out musical instruments to the children (. . .). After a few moments, she asks the children to give them back to her; their refusal suggests a kind of subversion (. . .). After a short while, the teacher arrives and calls the children outside, who come out with the instruments (. . .). There is a lot of commotion in the courtyard, and a round is formed (. . .). After a while, several children continue to use instruments, and the teacher joins in (. . .). A child approaches me: "We can't play because it makes too much noise". He seems to be referring to the instruments, to the assistant's previous request to give them back to her, and to the fact that manipulating them is also "playing".* (Observation Priv-Sub-Valpo, JI/4–5 years old).

We were able to observe a similar situation in our observations in PE. As we have already seen, in outdoor activities at this level, some children's playful practices did not conform to the behavior expected by teachers. However, play can sometimes continue, not for lack of adult supervision or reprimand, but as a result of what appears to be a tolerated reconsideration and acceptance: the adult seems to accept that the child does something other than what is asked of him. The child's action may be embedded in the performance of another activity without affecting her development too much. Some adults may even get involved, in a kind of break between activities:

> *As part of an activity in mathematics class, the teacher points out several objects and asks the children to go out into the playground to measure and record them. While some measure objects, others throw, jump, and run; one starts playing ball with another and with an assistant teacher.* (Observation Priv-Sub-Valpo, Prim2, seven years old).

3.6.3. Ensuring Child Safety by Modifying a Playful Activity

The adult's intention to protect children's physical integrity when observing play that may be considered risky, may choose to redirect or modify the activity without preventing or stopping play while maintaining the children's interest. In the following example, a Kinder teacher observes a group of children jumping off a little mound and suggests a different alternative:

> [In the playground] *several children are jumping from the mound to the ground (. . .), trying to get as far as possible. The educator approaches the children from the side and asks: "Hey, why don't you roll down?" and then turns to the child closest to the edge: "Look, lie down". The child lies down, and the educator gently pushes him down. The child laughs and screams, rolling down. The others lie down one by one to roll onto the floor and back up onto the mound. The educator continues to watch for them to do this one at a time.* (Observation Publ-Stgo, Kinder, five years).

3.7. Synthesis

We summarize our results in the following Table 7.

Table 7. Limitations and constraints according to level or setting and school space-time *.

Level	Playground or Outdoors	Classroom or Indoors
PE	- Transformation of spaces and limitation of access to external structures - Adult instructions aimed at safeguarding the safety and preventing physical integrity - Lack or scarcity of resources - Adult distrust of agitation or violence at recess - Recreation as a reward, "non-recreation" as punishment - Children's constraints: gender segregation	- Adult indications aimed at inviting to pause or commanding calmness - Adult view of play and particular objects as distracting, deviant and disorderly
PE	- Changes in planning and adult impositions - Recreation as a reward for work completed - Safety and avoidance of harm: adult counterclaims for behaviors or practices perceived as violent or risky.	- Adult guidelines aimed at avoiding "rough" play - Adult instructions aimed at avoiding distractions from the proposed formal activity.

* Prepared by the authors.

Beyond this synthesis, we were also able to observe situations that, whether indoors or outdoors, reveal complexities and tensions in which the adult reconsideration of a limiting counterclaim or imposition can be appreciated.

Although more frequent in ECE, these situations were also observed in PE. They sometimes reveal a certain inconsistency in the management of the group on the part of the adult. However, they demonstrate more broadly a capacity for reflexivity and tacit teaching coordination as a way of adapting to a dynamic context. It shows, too, the ability to combine the interest in children's safety with the possibility of continuing the playful activity, redirecting it rather than stopping it.

4. Discussion

Our results show, firstly, that there are structural and material limitations on play at school that mainly affect children in PE, negatively impacting the development of their play practices in outdoor spaces. In addition to the lack of small play resources, which constrains them to provide their own to make some games possible, there is the restriction of access to places or the change of location of play structures that in previous years they were able to frequent during ECE.

We also noted limitations related to gender segregation, as expressed by children in interviews and corroborated in fieldwork observations. The practice of soccer is a clear

example: it is almost exclusively male and pervasive in terms of the use of the available space, and it relegates to a secondary, and sometimes to a marginal space, the possibilities of play in which girls can be involved in a sustained way.

However, without neglecting these types of socio-cultural and structural or material limitations, we have been particularly interested in those associated with attitudes, customs and routines, indications and statements that tend to limit or prevent play. A large part of our analysis focuses on factors that restrict play. They refer to "non-legitimate" activities, not corresponding to the expected behavior in a given educational context.

The levels analyzed (ECE and PE) are not only different stages in the academic trajectory of children. They are also clearly different settings in terms of the arrangements that govern their functioning and organize participation, which also applies to the possibilities for play activities that are offered or allowed.

Our results do indeed show differences between the two settings. From the groups observed (pre-Kinder, Kinder, JI/children four and five years old), ECE operates according to a model that intersperses moments of activity often identified as "play" or "free play", with others of work in small groups, or with instances proposed by the adults for the group as a whole and guided by them, whether or not they are called "playful".

On the contrary, the PE groups (Prim1 and Prim2, children six and seven years old) stand out for a much more structured and rigid organization of the daily routine, the centrality of teaching exposure and individual or group exercise, the clear distinction between work and rest or recreation times, and in general the adoption of a model corresponding to the "school form" and the importance it attributes to order and discipline [18].

Within these frameworks, and based on our initial considerations about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of play, we could observe that some children's play practices do not correspond to the behavior expected by adults. While some games are favored, encouraged, recognized as an example, or proposed, others are considered a problem and tend to be rejected, questioned, and limited, if not forbidden. In other words, various constraints or conditioning factors respond to the particular configuration of a given educational setting.

Assuming that any distinction is a category for thinking about the real, we understand the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate play as a gradient along two poles that constitute ideal types, and between which we can find various intermediate situations. While it may be unnoticed, play may sometimes be tolerated or "overlooked" in consideration of the particular child, the time of the day, or its incidental nature. The activity is not what is expected, but its pursuit appears to be permitted or tolerated. However, observed from the outside, the same type of play may appear "illegal" in two different situations without necessarily being reprimanded or stopped in one of them. The boundaries are blurred, and play can go from illicit to licit depending on nuances. As we have seen, adult indications to stop such play may depend on contextual factors or differences in degree rather than on the play's content.

In the case of PE, we repeatedly observed the emergence of short playful practices in the classroom, in pairs or small groups, and in a format that combined elements of socio-dramatic play [11], of "rough-and-tumble" play [59], and the manipulation of objects for non-didactic purposes. "Illicit" play that appeared as a temporary distraction or pastime, or in moments of waiting, "free time", or transition between one activity and another. These situations are widely rejected by teachers, fearful of "disorder" or deviation from formal educational work, and insistent on maintaining tranquility inside the classroom, resorting to playing at most as a pause or individual and restful break.

The adult mistrust of play as a disorder is not only evident indoors. It is also apparent during recreation, as can be seen in the apprehensions of some teachers about the agitation and even violence that children's play can generate. It is important to note here that we are talking about the perception of a group of actors, not about "real" or objective violence. Children point out, for example, that they are clear about the difference between "playing to fight" and a "real" fight and even say that they are aware of an adult interpretation they believe to be mistaken. In any case, there are teachers for whom the children above's

agitation at playtime prevents children from continuing their formal learning in class or exposes them to risks to their physical integrity. Whether or not to allow children to go out to the playground, using play as a reward or prohibiting it as a punishment (for unfinished work, for "inappropriate" behavior), seems to be a logical consequence of this position.

Regarding ECE, some restrictions to play, although less acute and less varied, are similar in their characteristics when they occur. Differences concern intensity or degree. At this level, the possibility of "going out for recreation" may eventually be used as a reward for work completed. There are also adult reprimands for behavior or practices carried out outdoors that are perceived as violent or risky, as well as indications aimed at preventing "rough" play inside the classroom or at avoiding the distractions that play may cause for the formal activity proposed.

5. In Conclusion: Learning in, from, and with the "Illegitimate" Play

The relationship between play and learning has begun to be analyzed outside of contemporary formal educational frameworks, taking an interest in the diverse domains of today's children's 'real lives,' in their multiple play spaces [8]. Similarly, we can approach the relationship between play and learning by considering the more informal dimensions of the formal educational experience, both in the outdoor space-time of recess [16] and in the informal nooks and crannies of the "class-room". By subscribing to general postulates of the situated learning movement [61–63], here we consider playing as a profoundly social activity, socially learned and enabling in turn, as well as a variety of other human activities [64], learning by participating, i.e., by inserting oneself in spaces of practice of human groups or communities.

Assuming these perspectives, the learning that can derive from play no longer concerns only children; it can also engage adults in their informal professional learning. From one of the examples presented, we note that reconsidering prohibitions on using some play resources or materials may involve the capacity for tacit coordination among educational staff. More broadly, a complexity of situations such as the one described above lies in the fact that adults (educators) are compelled to combine their role as providers of play resources with their regulatory role as guarantors of the 'legitimate' use of certain materials in specific spaces and times. Facing this tension requires professional reflexivity, adaptation, and flexibility, and, more broadly, processes of negotiation of meaning [60] and the progressive adaptation of one's actions to the context. The above, not to mention the exercise of an inevitable loss of power on the part of the adult, if what is ultimately sought is to favor children's playful activity rather than the maintenance of the norm.

By redirecting or modifying practices initially considered risky, the adult can also teach new games [65,66], which children can learn as long as they continue to be interested.

The educator who modifies the initial rules of a game by suggesting to children to roll down the slope of a little hill instead of jumping from the top, although she transforms the activity, continues to rely on the children's interest in using a resource. Moreover, his intervention does not stop at a merely discursive indication but is accompanied by concrete gestures—showing them by her example—to introduce them to a new practice.

Greater curricular flexibility and the development of a situated teaching reflexivity, attentive to children's interests, could also lead us to take advantage of the learning potential of play that, in principle, we might judge inappropriate, such as "rough-and-tumble" play. Visibly challenged by teachers and educators in PE and ECE, this type of play is associated with developing emotional and social skills [59]. It would be a favorable instance for learning to control aggression [7]. We can also consider other potentialities when this activity is mixed with the more socio-dramatic or role-playing type of play, also called "symbolic", whose importance for children's cognitive development has been highlighted, particularly in terms of taking a reflective distance to one's action. For Rayna [67], this awareness of the fictitious character of "playing" is essential to symbolic play and requires social interaction, in which imitation and cooperation have a central role. Moreover, this play also involves an agreement on roles and actions as the activity progresses, as a convention

that organizes the relationship and interactions between players [68], which can also be seen as an instance or possibility of learning.

In the case of the two children who "play fight" in the back of the room during class, we could infer, beyond the inadequacy of their actions for the mandates of the setting in which they are, the development of an ongoing learning process related to the negotiation and acceptance of roles and the incorporation of the codes, practices, and rules that allow them to become part of a group and to be recognized as such. All of the above, not to mention the fundamental learning related to the management of the "second degree" of play [69], his "non-literalism". Understanding this element makes it possible for children to distinguish a "real" fight from a simulated one. It is a matter of understanding the definition of the playful situation in which they are involved, which accounts for a socio-cultural learning process regarding the meaning of specific indications in certain contexts.

We connect our last reflection with the above. Beyond particular practices that are accepted or, on the contrary, rejected, our research also shows how much the children themselves understand and learn the educational configuration—the setting that organizes their activity. Indeed, frequenting collective structures (such as a school) implies not only acquiring disciplinary or emotional learning, but also social learning, one of which, of particular importance, is the management of the constant articulation between space and time, knowing how to do "what is appropriate" (what is legitimate or socially legitimized) at each moment in each place.

Certainly, a complexity (or richness) can be derived from the fact that in settings such as ECE, it is less common for adults to make explicit what they expect or simply impose it. There is more space for children themselves to contribute to the definition and structuring of what is "legitimate". The above can serve to reflect on the construction, at levels beyond ECE, of more democratic educational models, more attentive to children's preferences and agency.

Appendix A. Flexible Guidelines, Individual Interview with Children (Guided Tour and Mobile Interview)

General data: Date, School, Level, Name of interviewer, Name of interviewee.
Instructions to the interviewer:

- Try to use the words of the child being interviewed. For example, do not assume that an activity is play if the interviewee has not mentioned it as play.
- The interview guideline should be applied flexibly. The order of the questions can be altered to suit the pace at which the child interviewee brings up issues.
- Do not "put words in the child's mouth". Prefer a broad formulation of questions at the beginning (What do you think about . . . ?) instead of immediately closing categories (Is that good or bad?).
- Ensure that intonations do not signal a preference for one answer over another. Children are susceptible to adult preferences and may modify their responses accordingly.
- Be curious and ask again if necessary. Children tend to assume that others have the knowledge they do. Feel free to go back and ask for clarification.
- Ask questions again. Children often tend to confuse the meaning of the questions they are asked. In general, they confuse "why" (causality) with "what for" (purpose).

Initial guidelines: "Hello! My name is X, and I am here to interview you. But it's an exceptional interview because we'll use this camera and microphone so you can be like a TV news reporter and do a "report about my day at school" for your parents or teachers to see. You tell the camera what things you do here at school. We can move around the school; I will follow you with the camera wherever you go. Feel free to tell us whatever you want about the things you do at school. You can also take pictures of what you tell us if you want to. Anyway, I will help you by asking you some questions. This report will not be published and will only be seen by those who want to see it. We ask your permission to share it with your family, school friends, and teachers. At the end of our work here, after a few months, you will receive a DVD with the report and your photos to watch it as many times as you want".

Start:

- So, let's start. What is your name, and how old are you?
- What things do you do at school? What things did you do last year?

General activities:

- What things do you do at school? What things did you do last year?
- Can you tell me what this is about? How do you do it?
- Who do you do this with at school? Do you prefer to do this alone or with someone else?
- Where do you prefer to do this? Can we see this place? Do you always do it here, or do you do it somewhere else? And last year, you did similar things?
- What do you think of this? Would you recommend someone watching this video to do this? Why?
- How does this compare to the other things you do at school? Is it similar or different? Why?
- Who does this at school? Is it just you, or have you seen others doing this? Who are they?

Play (when the child refers to this concept during the interview):

- Can you tell me what this game is about? How do you play it?
- Who do you play this game with at school? Do you prefer to play this game alone or with others?
- Where do you like to play this game? Can we see that place?
- What do you think about this game? What do you think of it?
- What other games do you play here at school?
- About the things you play at school, what are your favorites? Why?
- About the things you play at school, are there any things you don't like? Why?

Work/task (when the child refers to these concepts during the interview):

- Can you tell me what this task is about? How do you do it?
- Who do you do this task with? Do you prefer to do it alone or with someone else?
- Who says what things you have to do? What do you think about it? Why?
- What other homework do you do here at school?
- About the homework you do here at school, which are your favorites? Why?
- About things you do here at school, which ones do you like the least? Why?

Closing:

- Do you have a message for those who see this report?
- About all the things you showed in this report, is there anything you would like to say more about or something else?

Appendix B. Flexible Guidelines, Group Interviews with Children

General data: Date, School, Level, Name of interviewer, Names of children.
Instructions to the interviewer:

- Try to use the words of the children being interviewed. For example, only assume that an activity is play if the interviewee has mentioned it as play.
- The interview guideline should be applied flexibly. The order of the questions can be altered to suit the pace at which the children being interviewed bring up issues.
- Do not "put words in the mouths of the children being interviewed". Prefer a broad formulation of questions at the beginning (What do you think about . . . ?) instead of immediately closing categories (Is that good or bad?).
- Ensure that intonations do not signal a preference for one answer over another. Children are susceptible to adult preferences and may modify their answers accordingly.
- Be curious and ask again if necessary. Children tend to assume that others have the knowledge they do. Feel free to go back and ask for clarification.
- Ask questions again. Children often need clarification on the meaning of the questions they are asked. In general, they confuse "why" (causality) with "what for" (purpose).

Initial guidelines: "Hello! My name is X, and I am here to talk about the work we have been doing with you at school. Do you remember what we did last year? What have you liked the most, or what has caught your attention?

Today, we can talk about the videos and photos we have taken. We will show you a video of the pictures we have taken and some of the pictures you took during our previous visit. We want you to help us understand what a day at this school is like and what things are happening as you grow".
Start:

- So, let's start. What are your names and how old are you?
- What grade are you in? What grade were you in last year?
- What is the name of your teacher and last year's teacher?
- What are your friends' names? Do you have new friends, or are they the same as last year?

Classroom activities:

- What things do you do in the classroom? With whom?
- What materials do you use? Are there any that you like more or less? Why?
- Does this room look like last year's? Why?
- What is a day like in your classroom?
- And in those examples shown in the video, what are you doing?

Playground Activities:

- What are you doing on the playground? With whom?
- Is it similar to what you were doing last year?
- What is the space like? What materials do you have? Are there examples in the video?
- From the examples in the video, what do you like to do the most? Why? Are there any activities in the playground that we did not record?

Other activities:

- Is there an important activity or thing that is not in the video? Could you talk about a person, for example? What do you want to tell us about it?
- What other things do you do at school not shown in the video? Is it the same as last year?

Peer Relationships:

- Are you friends? What other friends do you have?
- In the video, who are your friends? What things do you do together? Are there any activities that are not shown in the video?

Relationships with adults:

- In the video, you see your teacher from this year and last. What are your teachers like? What things do/did they do with you?
- Do you have other teachers? What things do you do with them?

Play (when children refer to this concept during the interview):

- What is this game about? How do you play it?
- Who do you play this game with at school? Do you prefer to play this game alone or with others?
- Where do you like to play this game?
- What do you think of this game?
- What other things do you play here at school? Which ones are your favorites? Why? Are there any things you don't like? Why?

Work/tasks (when children refer to this concept during the interview):

- Can you tell me what this task is about? How do you do it?
- Who do you do this task with? Do you prefer to do it alone or with someone else?
- Who says what you have to do? What do you think about it? Why?
- What other homework do you do here at school? Which are your favorites? Which ones do you like the least? Why?

Closing:

- In closing, is there anything important we haven't talked about? Is there anything else you would like to tell us, or that you would like to communicate to your family or teacher?

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