

Pode a Educação Física contribuir para o Desenvolvimento Emocional?

Uma investigação-ação em crianças da educação pré-escolar

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Resumo

A escola desempenha um papel crucial no desenvolvimento das crianças por meio da Educação Física, que utiliza o corpo como principal ferramenta de aprendizagem. Nesse processo, decorre uma interação constante entre o cérebro e o corpo, evidenciando a conexão entre o desenvolvimento emocional, cognitivo e motor da criança. O presente estudo visa aferir o contributo da Educação Física no desenvolvimento emocional das crianças, através da análise das emoções expressas em contexto de jogo motor ao ar livre. A metodologia adotada é de natureza qualitativa, com características de investigação-ação (intervenção prática em contexto real) e desenvolveu-se numa instituição pertencente à rede pública de Educação Pré-Escolar localizada na periferia da cidade de Viseu, envolvendo crianças com idades compreendidas entre três e seis anos. Consistiu em intervenções focadas na promoção e no desenvolvimento de competências emocionais através de jogos ao ar livre. Posteriormente, realizaram-se entrevistas semiestruturadas com as respetivas educadoras de infância. Através da interação com o grupo de amigos, as crianças desenvolveram capacidades para controlar e expressar as suas emoções. As educadoras atribuíram importância significativa ao desenvolvimento emocional das crianças, mencionando que é a base da aprendizagem e que exploram as emoções de forma contínua e transversal, integrando-as em todas as áreas de conteúdo. Reconheceram a relevância da Educação Física para o desenvolvimento emocional das crianças, por meio do jogo. Salientaram que, no brincar ao ar livre, as crianças fortalecem laços emocionais entre si, o que promove um ambiente de aprendizagem saudável e colaborativo.

Palavras-chave:

Crianças; Desenvolvimento emocional; Educação Pré-Escolar; Educação Física.

Can Physical Education contribute to Emotional Development? An action-research study with preschool children

Abstract: School plays an increasingly central role in children's development, reinforced by Physical Education, which involves the body as the main working tool, where there is continuous communication between the brain and the body, highlighting the symbiosis established between emotional, cognitive, and motor development. This study proposes a didactic approach through Physical Education, linking play and emotions, investigating the contribution of this field to children's emotional development. The adopted methodology is qualitative in nature, with characteristics of action research (practical intervention in a real context), and was carried out at a public preschool institution located on the outskirts of Viseu, involving children between three and six years of age. It consisted of interventions focused on promoting and developing emotional skills through games. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respective preschool educators. Through interaction with their group of friends, children developed the ability to control and express their emotions. The educators attributed significant importance to children's emotional development, mentioning that it is the foundation of learning and that they continuously and transversally explore emotions, integrating them into all content areas. They recognized Physical Education's relevance for children's emotional development through play. They emphasized that outdoor play helps children strengthen emotional bonds with each other, promoting a healthy and collaborative learning environment.

Keywords: Children; Emotional Development; Preschool Education; Physical Education.

Est-ce que l'Éducation Physique peut contribuer au Développement Émotionnel? Une étude-action auprès des enfants en maternelle

Résumé: L'école joue un rôle central dans le développement des enfants, consolidé par l'Éducation Physique, qui implique le corps comme principal outil de travail, où une communication continue existe entre le cerveau et le corps, mettant en évidence la symbiose établie entre le développement émotionnel, cognitif et moteur. La présente étude propose une approche à travers l'Éducation Physique, en établissant un lien entre le jeu et les émotions, en investiguant la contribution de ce domaine au développement émotionnel des enfants. La méthodologie choisie repose sur une approche qualitative intégrant des éléments de la recherche-action et s'est déroulée dans un établissement public d'éducation maternelle situé en périphérie de Viseu, impliquant des enfants âgés de trois à six ans. Elle a consisté en des interventions axées sur le développement des compétences émotionnelles à travers des jeux. Par la suite, des entretiens semi-structurés ont été réalisés avec les éducatrices de la petite enfance. Grâce à l'interaction avec leur groupe d'amis, les enfants ont développé des capacités à contrôler et à exprimer leurs émotions. Les éducatrices ont attribué importance au développement émotionnel des enfants, mentionnant qu'il constitue la base de l'apprentissage et qu'elles explorent les émotions de manière continue et transversale, en les intégrant dans toutes les matières. Elles ont reconnu la pertinence de l'Éducation Physique pour le développement émotionnel des enfants à travers le jeu. Elles ont souligné que, grâce au jeu, les enfants renforcent leurs liens émotionnels, favorisant ainsi un environnement d'apprentissage sain et collaboratif.

Mots-clés: Développement émotionnel; Enfants; Éducation maternelle; Éducation Physique.

Puede la Educación Física contribuir al Desarrollo Emocional? Una investigación-acción en niños de educación infantil

Resumen: La escuela asume un papel central en el desarrollo de los niños, consolidado en la Educación Física, que involucra el cuerpo como la principal herramienta de trabajo, donde existe una comunicación entre el cerebro y el cuerpo, resaltando la simbiosis establecida entre el desarrollo emocional, cognitivo y motor. El presente estudio propone un enfoque a través de la Educación Física, vinculando el juego y las emociones, investigando su contribución para el desarrollo emocional de los niños. La metodología adoptada es cualitativa, con características de investigación-acción (intervención práctica en un contexto real). Consistió en intervenciones centradas en la promoción y el desarrollo de competencias emocionales a través de juegos. Posteriormente, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con las respectivas educadoras de infancia. A través de la interacción con su grupo de amigos, los niños desarrollaron habilidades para controlar y expresar sus emociones. Las educadoras atribuyeron una importancia significativa al desarrollo emocional de los niños, mencionando que es la base del aprendizaje y que exploran las emociones de forma continua y transversal, integrándolas en todas las áreas de contenido. Reconocieron la relevancia de la Educación Física para el desarrollo emocional de los niños a través del juego. Destacaron que, al jugar al aire libre, los niños fortalecen los lazos emocionales entre sí, lo que promueve un ambiente de aprendizaje saludable y colaborativo.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo emocional; Educación Preescolar; Educación Física; Niños.

Introduction

The concept of Emotion

The definition of “emotion” continues to be the subject of much debate among researchers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who have not reached a consensus on this concept. Several authors have offered different definitions. Damásio (1999), for example, defines emotion as a complex set of chemical and neural responses that form a pattern; all emotions play a regulatory role that leads, in some way, to the creation of advantageous circumstances for the organism that manifests this phenomenon, as these emotions are related to the maintenance of the organism's life.

Emotions encompass both a psychic and physical variation, triggered by a stimulus, subjectively experienced and automatic, which places the individual in a state of response to the stimulus. In other words, emotions are a natural way to assess the environment around us and react adaptively to it, as it may influence us (Damásio, 2013, 2000).

From another perspective, Magalhães (2013) states that emotions are the most significant experiences of human beings and are a psychological construct in which complex cognitive and physiological components interact. Their functions are related to adaptation and expression, acting as a catalyst between behavior and the external environment. Moreira (2010, p. 23) mentions that “an emotion is a response the body gives to what happens around us,” functioning as a kind of compass that guides our decisions. Although abstract, emotions clearly manifest in our bodies, and they are felt and expressed visibly. Goleman (2012) notes that emotions are typically accompanied by physical behaviors, being the face one of the most expressive parts of the human body. Thus, emotions appear as temporary states triggered by biological responses to situations and are inseparable from reason.

The difficulty in providing a clear and consensual definition often leads to the use of the term “feelings” when addressing “emotions.”

Emotional Development in Children

During the developmental period, between the ages of 0 and 6, the foundation of our psychic functioning is built. This period is often referred to as the “golden years.” This is a phase of intense desire to grow and learn, encompassing the stage parents often call the “why age”. Being with and accompanying a child during these moments, according to Strecht (2003), brings a mutual joy of viewing life from its most creative side, in the astonishing adventure of living everyday life with always unique and impactful episodes.

From this perspective, family and school's vital roles, more specifically early childhood educators, become evident in the first years of a child's life. Goleman (2010) emphasizes the importance of various experiences in childhood, arguing that all the episodes lived during this phase define the habits that will guide a person throughout their life.

During the preschool years children begin to develop "self-awareness," primarily identifying the four basic emotions (joy, sadness, anger, and fear), associating them with expressions or events. This knowledge becomes an emotional competence (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). Vale (2012) argues that is the period where children develop the ability to distinguish their own emotions from those of others, interpreting them through both verbal and non-verbal communication.

One of the factors driving this development during the preschool years is language learning, which becomes an essential tool for children to communicate and express their emotions to others (Moreira, 2008).

According to Papalia et al. (2001), during childhood, there is a certain complexity in children understanding emotions and what they feel. This difficulty is explained by their inability to recognize that it is permissible to feel more than one emotion at the same time, as it is chaotic to comprehend this reality during childhood. In more detail, the referred authors group emotional understanding into different levels: a) Level 0: relates to the child's inability to recognize that humans are capable of feeling more than one emotion at the same time; b) Level 1: children begin to categorize emotions, e.g., positive emotions and negative emotions; c) Level 2: at this point, children can identify that they have two feelings directed at two different targets, such as being happy to go to a friend's house and excited to reunite with the friend. However, they cannot admit that they feel both happy and afraid at the same time, because of the emotions' dissimilarity; d) Level 3: children can admit that they may feel both positive and negative emotions simultaneously if directed at different targets; for example: "I am sad about my cat, but I am happy about my dad"; e) Level 4: the ability to recognize multiple emotions, both positive and negative, toward the same target or person.

In this line of thought, it is up to the educator to systematize emotions throughout Early Childhood Education. Therefore, it is necessary for the child to be taught to "recognize and accept happiness, sadness, and fear, but keeping anger under control "in order to develop empathy and prosocial behavior (Papalia et al., 2001, p. 468). To achieve this, according to Machado et al. (2008), the educator should promote three components: a) Knowledge of emotions – identifying, recognizing, and naming emotions;; b) Emotion regulation – the ability to modulate the intensity or duration of emotional states; c) Expressing emotion in social situations (p. 464).

Free Playing as a Learning Space to Deal with Emotions

One of the most effective ways to promote children's learning is through play. It is the child's natural activity that best corresponds to their holistic way of learning (Neto, 2020). The Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education (OCEPE) emphasize that play is not only for occupying or entertaining the child. As mentioned by Neto (2020, p. 53), play is not about "abandoning the child to their fate," but rather providing a stimulating activity that promotes development and learning, characterized by the child's high level of engagement, shown through signs such as pleasure, concentration, persistence, and effort (Ministry of Education, 2025, p. 11).

It is through free play in a natural space, an environment that stimulates learning, where the child relaxes and develops motor perception skills such as hand-eye coordination, balance, laterality, body and space awareness. The child perceives and acts in accordance with the surrounding environment (stimulating and challenging space), actively receiving information (acting to understand the information and understanding it in order to act). This process also involves experiencing emotions (attraction, aversion - from impressive and wonderful to indifference), processes linked to adaptation and learning (Cordovil & Barreiros, 2014; Damásio, 2017; Kishimoto, 2016).

Regarding the brain, Gerhardt (2017) emphasizes that the connections between areas responsible for emotional regulation are formed through social stimulation, which occurs through interactions that stem from free play. If these social experiences do not occur during the first three years of life, a crucial period for brain maturation, development can be impaired and difficult to recover in later stages. Thus, playing is one of the most important ways to stimulate these brain connections during childhood.

For this to happen, the child needs to assimilate their emotions and sensations, develop their identity, establish social contacts, understand the environment around them, satisfy desires, and develop skills and knowledge (Fortuna, 2025, p. 3).

Notably the attitude of those who play is not limited to simple pleasure and easy contentment. Playing involves choices, conflicts, limits, and the creation and undoing of actions and imaginations, where the child experiences balance and imbalance (Pereira, 2001). According to Nascimento (2003), the conflicts that arise during play often result from social realities and interpersonal relationships. These conflicts may involve disputes over possession and access to material goods, disagreements about preferences, or misunderstandings about order and participation in activities. In some cases, these challenges require the intervention of adults to be resolved.

In agreement, Bilton et al. (2017) highlight that when children play together without direct adult intervention, they learn important social skills such as sharing and conflict

resolution, essential competencies for building healthy relationships. This ability to act cooperatively with others to achieve specific goals, the shared knowledge, provides humans with a vast array of pleasant feelings (Damásio, 2017; Eira, 2020).

Physical Education in Preschool Education: A Space for Emotional Development

Physical Education (PE), as a comprehensive approach, enables the progressive development of body awareness and control, as well as the enjoyment of movement in relation to oneself, space, others, and objects (Silva et al., 2016).

From Lourenço's (2004) perspective, motor activities can serve as an excellent transmitter of social values due to the social relationships they foster. The author emphasizes values such as tolerance, introversion and extroversion, camaraderie, helping, cooperation, fair play, positive aggression, autonomy, hygiene, responsibility, among others.

Games have the particularity of being transversal, as they can connect with other areas. As stated in the OCEPE (Ministry of Education, 2025, pp. 44), "play constitutes an educational resource, presented in an attractive way that takes into account children's interests, motivations, and proposals." Games with rules, progressively more complex, are also opportunities for developing motor coordination and socialization, understanding and accepting rules, and expanding language. They also provide enjoyable activities that bring pleasure to children.

The child's action upon themselves and their body in motion also emerges – movements and balance, as she already possesses some basic motor skills, such as walking, running, overcoming obstacles, and manipulating objects. Building on these skills, states are created where the body's use and feel gives place to learning situations that involve voluntary movement control – starting, stopping, following rhythms, and directions. Exploring different movement forms also helps to raise awareness of different body segments, their possibilities and limitations, facilitating the progressive internalization of body schema and body awareness in relation to external space (Ministry of Education, 2025).

It also enables the child's action on objects, developing her manipulation and proficiency skills. The child should have the opportunity to refine these skills by performing different combinations of already known elements or reinventing other ways to use materials (Silva et al., 2016).

When appreciating creative imagination and its immediate response to movement tasks, it becomes clear that rhythmic and expressive activities should play an important role in children's motor activities, providing spaces for joy and emotional well-being, as well as for fluidity, harmony, beauty, and creative movement.

Methodology

The central question aimed at answering is: “Can motor activity contribute to the emotional development of children?” To guide this investigation, it was necessary to define objectives that aligned with the central research question and the work to be carried out. These objectives included understanding whether children recognize and distinguish their own emotions and those of their peers; comprehending the importance of emotional development in children and how it is addressed in preschool education; observing which emotions are evident in children during PE sessions and during free play activities; reflecting on the changes in children’s emotional behaviors following a sequence of activities related to motor skills development; and analyzing the relevance that the educators who worked in the same preschool attribute on the role of PE in children’s emotional development.

To answer the above-mentioned objectives, as well as the research question, it is relevant to fit the investigation within the qualitative paradigm. For data collection, being at the empirical study implementation stage, several techniques and instruments will be used that will allow for a more in-depth and accurate collection: participant observation, field notes, action research, and semi-structured interviews with the educators.

Regarding observation, it is important to note that it forms the research’s starting point, as this technique’s main goal was to understand the context and the group during PE classes and free play.

The observation technique allows the researcher to observe human behavior, analyzing and comparing various components simultaneously, particularly what the subjects say and their body language (Bogdan & Biklen, 2013; Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2005). After this initial stage, it is crucial for the researcher to use field notes to record what is observed, describing conversations, attitudes, and other aspects. This allows the researcher to later recall what was observed, heard, and reflect upon it.

Participants

This study was conducted at an institution belonging to the public preschool education network located on the outskirts of the city of Viseu. It involved the participation of 21 children, aged between three and six years, as well as four educators, all with more than 20 years of teaching experience, familiar with the pedagogical model of the “Modern School Movement,” and who work directly with the children who participated in this study. Two of the children were covered by Decree-Law No. 54/2018, of June 6, having been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. It is important to highlight that the methodology used in the activity room was the “Modern School Movement”.

Materials

Regarding the action-research technique, the field notes were transcribed into standardized grids for each intervention (Table 1), which allowed, in the third stage, the evidence's descriptive analysis, highlighting essential elements, causes, and explanations.

Table 1.
Intervention Grid

OBJECTIVE/GOAL	INTERVENTION/ACTIVITIES
Observe in free exploration activities.	Observation + collection of field notes (emotional management).
Evaluate children's ability to identify (emotional perception) and understand (emotional comprehension) the 4 basic emotions.	Explore emotions through: "Emotions' Box" and exploration of the book " The Soul Bird " (dramatization). Diagnostic test of the children's emotional perception of the 4 basic emotions using the "Emotions' Box".
Observe the emotion of anger.	Intervention of two competitiveness and cooperation games, in the outdoor space.
Observe the emotions of joy and fear.	Intervention for the first time outdoors (outside the school) with the use of exercise machines.
Observe the emotions of joy and anger.	Intervention of two competitiveness and concentration games in the extended classroom.
Observe the emotion of fear.	Intervention of a game with movements, balance, and darkness in the extended classroom.
Observe the emotions of joy and fear.	Intervention in the forest.
Observe the emotions of joy, sadness, and fear.	Intervention for the second time outdoors (outside the school) with a movement and balance course.
Observe the emotions of anger, joy, and fear.	Intervention in a cooperation and competitiveness course in the outdoor park.

Procedure

A plan of interventions was also developed, structured in two phases: a) Phase 1 - children emotional understanding diagnosis (identifying and distinguishing emotions) through the "Emotions' Box" (Depondt et al., 2004), and the story "The Soul Bird" (Snunit, 2000); b) Phase 2 - educational intervention for exploring emotions through motor games.

To finalize the study and achieve the last objective, which was “analyze the relevance that educators attribute to the PE area and motor skills for the emotional development of children,” semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with early childhood educators. The information gathered in the interviews was recorded and subsequently transcribed so that the data could be analyzed in greater depth. The interviews’ content analysis was carried out in three stages: i) pre-analysis, which involved organizing the material; ii) exploring the material according to its classification and categorizing/coding; and iii) interpreting the data, which refers to reflecting on the planned objectives and any other discoveries that may emerge during the analysis process (Bardin, 2016).

Results

The seven interventions carried out with the children’s group were able to address the objectives: understanding whether children recognize and distinguish their own emotions and those of their peers, identifying the emotions displayed during PE classes, and reflecting on the changes in emotional behaviors following the motor activities.

In the initial phase we used the “Emotions’ Box” and the “The Soul Bird” story as starting points.

This approach allowed us to observe which emotions the children recognized and distinguished. It was also possible to verify that some of the children were able to identify and distinguish the four basic emotions mentioned in literature - joy, sadness, anger, and fear - associating them with familiar and school-based experiences.

The scale used in the study included four levels of emotional recognition: “identified,” “partially identified,” “not identified,” and “not observable.”

The data gathered from the observation table showed that the emotion “joy” was the most easily identified by the children compared to the other emotions. It was not only recognized but also associated with daily experiences and was frequently expressed.

In contrast, the emotion of “sadness” was immediately identified by all children. However, the emotions of “anger” and “fear” were more challenging for them to identify. The emotion “anger” was often associated with terms like “irritated,” “upset,” or “furious,” though some children did use the word “angry.” Still, the children only partially identified anger, linking it to behaviors such as “shouting”, “about to hit”, or “stomping their feet”.

As for the emotion of “fear,” children commonly described it as “scared.” Children partially identified this emotion but needed more time to analyze the corresponding image. When asked why, they said it was because they might have seen a monster or

something frightening. With additional guidance, they concluded they were “scared” and “afraid.”

In the activity where the children had to link an emotion with a daily life experience, it became evident that they had an easier time discussing “joy.” Most children associated this emotion with moments shared with their parents, such as saying “when my mom plays with me” or saying, “when I go out with my parents.” Regarding “sadness,” only two children were unable to recall a specific moment, while the others mentioned experiences in the family context, such as saying, “When my brother hits me” or saying, “When my mom doesn’t take me to the park.”

The emotion “anger” proved to be the most difficult for children to link with a personal experience. Children said they didn’t know when they felt angry. One child who partially identified anger explained that they get upset when they’re irritated. Most responses related to anger were connected to the school environment, with examples like saying, “When X doesn’t play with me” and saying, “When they take my toys.” For the emotion “fear,” children most often mentioned feeling it at night, particularly when their parents left the room due to a fear of the dark. However, three children partially identified fear, describing being afraid of their room and needing additional assistance to provide a more specific response.

When it came to facial expressions, the majority was able to express emotions appropriately. However, those who struggled often used the cards for reference, showing a clear willingness to try. The children who couldn’t represent the emotions said they didn’t know how to do it, didn’t want to, or simply shook their heads. This may have been due to fear, embarrassment, or a lack of understanding of the facial expressions associated with each emotion. Notably, one child with autism spectrum disorder participated actively in the assessment but chose not to engage in the facial expression activity.

Based on the analysis of the collected data, it was evident that, while most children were able to identify emotions, there was a general lack of emotional awareness and understanding within the group. This gap in emotional knowledge leads to difficulties with emotional regulation and, consequently, affects social interactions. This was clearly observed during various moments in the day when the children showed a lack of empathy toward peers who were sad or hurt, as well as struggles with self-regulation.

At this point, it wasn’t possible to determine whether the children recognized these emotions in others.

Thus, in the six subsequent interventions, the goal was to verify whether the children recognized others’ emotions and to investigate which emotions were awakened during PE classes. Initially, regarding the observation of the children’s ability to identify their peers’ emotions before the PE classes, this was not clear, as happened in

the first phase with the emotion's box. The group was very focused on the "self" with little concern for others' feelings.

This prompted the participant adults in the study to take the responsibility of also verbally expressing feelings, allowing the children to start talking about their emotions and for the others to listen and understand that sometimes we are happy and want to play with someone, and other times, when we are sad, we need a hug or space.

However, this emotional development occurred with a greater focus during the PE games. The children began to realize that they needed others to achieve their goal, often winning, hence started motivating and cooperating with each other, which developed empathy. Consequently, a new structure was created within the group, with children becoming more sociable and friendlier toward each other. By the end, it was evident that the children cared for one another.

During these interventions, the four basic emotions were observed, with particular emphasis on joy and anger. Joy was associated with the motivation to try new activities, the activity's space, the ability to run, jump, and shout, as well as winning the game. Anger, on the other hand, was linked to frustration from losing, not being able to accomplish something, or seeing someone else not following the rules. At the beginning, the children did not verbalize their emotions, instead expressing them through body language, such as facial expressions and actions like kicking or pushing. By the end, they were able to mention the emotion and explain what had happened.

PE not only sparked children's emotions but also promoted empathy, socialization, and emotional regulation. A notable example was the development of two children who were shy and apathetic in indoor activities but became more sociable and expressive in PE classes. It was during these classes that these children smiled for the first time. Another example was a child who had a fear of dogs, but through outdoor motor activities, gradually managed to cope with this fear, showing more autonomous emotional management by the end of the semester. This was something that could not be achieved indoors with animal-themed games.

Discussion

Regarding the importance of exploring emotions in Early Childhood Education, after reviewing literature, particularly on emotional development, it became clear that it is in the preschool years that a child develops the ability to relate to others and to express themselves, which is also linked to language development. Through interaction with a group of friends, children have the opportunity to develop the skills to manage their emotions.

Given that Early Childhood Education is the first stage of education, it is the educators' responsibility to assist children in their emotional development, promoting

well-being both in the present and in the future, when they become adults. This is the phase where the most significant lessons for adult life are triggered, just as one's personality is formed (Papaia et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2016).

If a child learns to identify, express, and regulate their emotions early on, they will find it easier to develop emotional intelligence, that is, the ability to understand and deal with their own feelings and those of others in a healthy way. If a child grows up in an environment where their emotions are understood and supported, they can develop positive emotional habits, such as confidence, resilience, and empathy. Therefore, it is essential to explore and support children's emotions, as this helps build a solid foundation of emotional health that will guide them positively throughout their lives.

It was also possible to observe the relevance of exploring emotions with the children in this study, as many of them were going through delicate personal life phases, such as parental divorce, moving to a new country, and having incarcerated parents. In these cases, it was necessary to pay more attention to how the child was feeling about these changes around them, otherwise these children would have perceived school as an unsafe place.

Finally, when analyzing the importance that the educators attribute to PE in the emotional development of children, and considering the interviews conducted with these participants, it was possible to verify that they assign significant importance to the emotional development of children, stating that it is the foundation of learning. If the group is not emotionally well, they will not engage in activities or play. The educators mentioned that they explore emotions continuously and across the board, integrating them into all content areas, without treating them as an isolated theme, since emotions arise from daily events and require careful observation from the educators so they can properly assist the children.

Concerning PE, the educators recognize its relevance for the emotional development of children, especially through play and motor activities. They highlight that these practices allow children to manage frustration, learn to cooperate, respect rules, and develop resilience.

It is evident that, in this school, the outdoor space and the playground are highly valued, and the child's autonomy is also fostered due to the pedagogical movement of the Modern School Movement, which allows children to be freer, helping to build their confidence and autonomy and enabling them to express themselves more easily. The educators emphasize that, by playing outdoors, children strengthen emotional bonds with each other, which promotes a healthier and more collaborative learning environment.

Regarding the guiding question of the study, "Can Physical Education contribute to emotional development?" the interventions carried out contributed to the development of emotions, and the group of children began to relate to each other in a different

way. There was more empathy among the children, and they became more involved in other activities, experiencing higher levels of well-being.

Final Considerations

In the initial planned activities, it was possible to verify that the children could identify and distinguish the four basic emotions mentioned, associating them with family and school experiences. However, at that stage, it was not clear whether the children recognized these emotions in others.

The goal shifted to checking whether the children could recognize emotions in others, and during PE classes they had difficulty verbalizing what they felt, but after receiving assistance from an adult, they began talking about the emotions and experiences that triggered those feelings.

Physical Education not only triggered children's emotions, but also promoted empathy, socialization, and emotional management during the activities. Through interaction with their peer group, the children were able to develop skills to control and express their emotions. It was up to the educators to assist the children in their emotional development by providing suitable experiences and spaces.

Through interviews with early childhood educators, it became clear that they assign significant importance to the children's emotional development, stating that it is the foundation of learning. They mention that if the group is not emotionally well, they have difficulty engaging in activities and free play.

The educators affirm that they explore emotions continuously and transversely, integrating them into all content areas, rather than treating them as an isolated theme, since emotions arise from daily events and require careful observation from the educators to provide children with appropriate support.

Early childhood educators recognize PE's relevance in children's emotional development, especially through play. They highlight that these practices help them manage frustration, learn to cooperate, respect rules, and develop resilience.

The educators emphasize that, through outdoor play, children strengthen emotional bonds with each other, promoting a healthier and more collaborative learning environment.

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