

## Intercultural education and the role of play in Brazil and Portugal in Early Childhood Education analyzed through teachers' perceptions and children's experiences

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### RESUMO

Este artigo, realizado no âmbito do Mestrado Erasmus Mundus Play, Education, Toys and Languages - PETaL, investiga o papel do brincar na promoção da interculturalidade em dois contextos de educação de infância em Lisboa e São Paulo. Através das percepções das educadoras de infância e das coordenadoras pedagógicas, e da observação de brincadeiras das crianças, é analisado o impacto da Educação Intercultural, que surgiu como resposta à globalização e à crescente diversidade cultural. A pesquisa destaca que as pedagogias precisam abordar o multilinguismo reconhecendo que o respeito às culturas das crianças melhora o desempenho escolar e fomenta o respeito mútuo. O referencial teórico baseia-se nos conceitos de cultura, interculturalidade e brincadeira. Pertencer a uma comunidade cultural é essencial para a formação da identidade, e a educação deve evitar a marginalização das identidades etnoculturais. A brincadeira, como ferramenta de comunicação, auxilia as crianças a navegar pelos significados culturais e a se adaptar a contextos diversos. A pesquisa analisou entrevistas e observações em sala de aula, destacando o valor educacional do brincar como força integradora em duas cidades culturalmente diversas, Lisboa e São Paulo. Os resultados indicam que a educação intercultural pode mitigar desigualdades, promover o diálogo e reforçam a necessidade de currículos flexíveis e da formação docente.

**Palavras-chave:** Interculturalidade; Identidade cultural; Papel do brincar; Práticas pedagógicas; Multiculturalismo.

### ABSTRACT

This article, conducted under the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree in Play, Education, Toys, and Languages, explores the role of play in promoting interculturalism in two preschools in Lisbon and São Paulo. Through teachers' and pedagogical coordinators perceptions and children's play experiences, it examines the impact of Intercultural Education, which has emerged in response to globalization and increasing cultural diversity. The research will deal with what educational pedagogy should do, to address the complex heterogeneity and multilingualism in classrooms, such as recognizing children's cultures to improve their performance and may foster respect for others. The theoretical framework draws on the concepts of culture, interculturalism, and play in Early Childhood Education. The paper will work on belonging to a cultural community, and what education must avoid or attract. For example, play, as a tool for communication, where children navigate cultural meanings and could adapt to diverse contexts. Using an interpretive paradigm, the research analyzed teacher interviews and classroom observations, emphasizing the educational value of play as an integrative force in two culturally diverse cities, Lisbon and São Paulo. The findings suggest that intercultural education can

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reduce inequalities and promote respectful dialogue, and advocate for flexible curricula and teacher training to support intercultural pedagogies in early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Interculturalism; Cultural identity; Role of play; Pedagogical practices; Multiculturalism.

## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, there is a growing recognition that societies are not isolated and mono-cultural, leading to tensions between cultures. Intercultural dialogue is highlighted as a key socio-political priority by global institutions like the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Rodríguez García & Roldán Tapia, 2014). Brazil has seen a significant increase in the enrollment of immigrant and refugee children in schools, with a doubling of registrations over eight years. Similarly, Portugal has experienced a rise in immigrant children attending public schools in two years, with a diverse mix of nationalities represented (A Voz Do Operário, 2022).

The paper discusses the importance of Intercultural Education (IE) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Brazil and Portugal. It highlights how children learn through interactions with others and how teachers' perceptions influence educational practices. The study aim is to unravel the Intercultural Education reality in the cities of Lisbon and São Paulo according to the Early Childhood Education period through teachers' perceptions and children's toys and play experiences. The research methodology involves a cross-cultural study using qualitative methods to analyze teachers' and pedagogical coordinators perceptions, and children's experiences in two ECE preschools, one in Lisbon and the other one in São Paulo.

The results analysis emphasizes the need to promote intercultural knowledge and encourage cultural exchange to enhance inclusion and dialogue among different cultures. It addresses the challenges posed by cultural diversity in educational settings and the role of teachers in facilitating intercultural learning. The study aims to identify and analyze IE practices in the cities of São Paulo and Lisbon, considering the increasing cultural diversity in schools due to immigration and globalization trends.

Overall, the study underscores the significance of IE in addressing cultural tensions, promoting intercultural dialogue, and providing equitable education for all children regardless of their cultural backgrounds. It sheds light on the changing demographics in schools, with a growing number of immigrant children in both Brazil and Portugal, necessitating a deeper understanding of IE practices in ECE to ensure inclusive and culturally responsive education.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research is built on the intersection of culture, interculturalism, and the role of play in early childhood education (ECE). It explores how these concepts relate to intercultural education (IE), focusing on Brazilian and Portuguese educational contexts.

Culture is a foundational concept in this research, defined as a set of characteristics that represent how societies function, encompassing values, lifestyles, beliefs, and traditions. According to Bruner (2001), culture is central to the construction of reality, as individuals use cultural frameworks to attribute meaning to the world around them. This process is key to personal identity, as belonging to a cultural community helps individuals navigate their social and political lives (Kymlicka, 2003). Cultural diversity, in this context, is seen as enriching, promoting understanding and respect for different ethnocultural traditions (Izquierdo-Fontesad, 2021). The right to culture is recognized by international conventions, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This convention guarantees children's rights to their culture, language, and religion, emphasizing the importance of respecting cultural diversity in any country where children live. Education, therefore, plays a crucial role in helping children understand and adapt to these cultural meanings, facilitating cultural exchange and interaction (Bruner, 2001).

### *2.1. Interculturalism and intercultural education: from the global to the concrete*

Interculturalism arises as a response to the growing cultural diversity brought about by globalization. It differs from earlier models like multiculturalism, which tended to treat cultures in isolation. Instead, interculturalism emphasizes active, respectful dialogue between individuals and groups from different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. According to Martuccelli (2006), the process of internalization of culture helps individuals understand human behavior and communication in a more interconnected world. Parekh (2006) highlights the importance of cultural recognition in fostering equality, arguing that intercultural political agendas can strengthen both state identity and pluralism among citizens. Intercultural education can help manage intergroup relations and develop intercultural competence by exposing students to diverse cultures from an early age, thereby minimizing stereotypes and promoting respect (López & Küper, 1999; Olson, 1982;).

The need for intercultural education is emphasized by scholars like Parekh (2006) and Bravo and Garcés (2019), who argue that shared identities in multicultural societies necessitate intercultural political frameworks. These frameworks, particularly in educational settings, should promote cultural diversity and facilitate the coexistence of various ethnocultural groups. Intercultural education (IE) aims to equip children with the skills to navigate complex cultural environments and engage in meaningful intercultural dialogue (Banks, 2011).

The goal of intercultural education is to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have equal educational opportunities. Preschool environments should be spaces where children's diverse cultural backgrounds meet and blend, fostering mutual understanding and respect (Walsh, 2010). The development of intercultural competence, which involves knowledge, empathy, and respect for other cultures, is central to this educational approach (Byram, 2018; Gómez-Parra, 2020). This competence enables children to interact effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds, promoting adaptation and communication across various cultural contexts (Byram, 2018).

Intercultural education has evolved through various models designed to address the needs of children from different cultural backgrounds. Early models focused on assimilation, requiring children to adopt the dominant culture's knowledge and skills. However, more recent models emphasize integration, cultural pluralism, and the need to combat ethnocentrism (Izquierdo-Fontesad, 2021). Critical multicultural models encourage children to engage critically with cultural identities, while the intercultural model promotes interaction and coexistence to foster mutual understanding. Today, IE is recognized as a vital tool for managing the challenges of multicultural societies, offering a way to build bridges between different cultural groups and promote social cohesion.

### *2.2. The interrelationship between culture and language*

Language plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identity and communication, particularly in intercultural settings. The mother tongue is deeply connected to an individual's sense of self and belonging, and bilingualism involves not only learning another language but also navigating between two cultural worlds (Vandenbroeck, 2004). For children in migrant or refugee situations, learning the language of their new environment can be challenging, particularly when it is forced rather than voluntary. In ECE, language is key to facilitating play, as it provides the foundation for communication, role designation, and rule establishment during play activities. Even before acquiring oral language, children use multiple forms of expression to communicate and interact with others (UNICEF, 2011).

#### *The role of play to promote interculturality*

Play is a central component of early childhood education, and it offers a unique space for intercultural exchange and learning. Through play, children can explore different cultural meanings, negotiate roles, and learn to communicate with peers from diverse backgrounds. Bruner (2001) emphasizes that it is through interaction with others that children discover cultural norms and practices, making play an essential tool for intercultural education (Kishimoto, 2008).

In both Brazilian and Portuguese educational contexts, play is recognized as a powerful medium for promoting intercultural understanding. Legal frameworks (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016; Ministério da Educação, 2010; Secretaria Municipal de Educação, 2019) in both countries acknowledge the importance of incorporating cultural diversity into educational practices, particularly through play, which allows children to express themselves, experiment with cultural roles, and develop empathy for others.

The role of play in the construction of culture emphasizes play as a universal, fundamental activity that predates and shapes culture. According to Huizinga (1971), play is not just a product of culture, but a precursor to it, providing a space for children to experiment with themselves, the world, and their social identities. Play is a cultural experience through which children express themselves and learn, using various forms of language and interaction.

Childhood is seen as a time for exploring the self and the world through play, which is imaginative, self-fulfilling, fluid, and inherently pleasurable. Philosopher Walter Benjamin (2009) highlighted that the essence of play is in its repetitive, transformative nature ("always do again"), rather than simply imitating the real world ("do as if"). This intrinsic nature of play links it closely to education, fostering learning through its focus on the process rather than the outcome (Huizinga, 1971).

Play is particularly significant in early childhood education as it contributes to cognitive, emotional, and social development. Scholars like Bruner (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) argue that play introduces children to imaginary worlds while teaching them rules, languages, and social skills. It engages the body, mind, and emotions, making it a holistic learning experience. Additionally, play is recognized as a children's right (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), essential for their development. Through play, children engage in symbolic games that reflect their cultural surroundings and social roles, facilitating the internalization of cultural norms. There are two responses to the unknown: a primitive reaction that views the unfamiliar as threatening, and a more evolved reaction where play encourages curiosity and learning about the unknown, transforming it into an opportunity for growth. Play thus becomes a means for children to confront and understand the world around them, contributing to their cultural and personal development (Kishimoto, 2008).

### *2.3. Play and interculturality in Brazil and Portugal*

In Brazil, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is recognized as the first stage of basic education, provided in kindergartens and preschools for children aged 0-5 (Ministério da Educação, 2010). The National Curriculum Guidelines emphasize play as a central component in the learning process, stating that children are active participants in their cultural environments, using toys and play to learn about their heritage, habits, and language. Play fosters cognitive, emotional, and social development and contributes to children's understanding of the world.

The curriculum for São Paulo (Secretaria Municipal de Educação, 2019) specifically emphasizes play as a medium for self-expression and learning, while also involving families to value cultural diversity. Play in Brazilian ECE is seen as a means of fostering equality, bridging social class gaps, and addressing racial inequalities, as mandated by various laws, such as Law 10.639/03, which mandates the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture. The curriculum also opposes ethnic, racial, gender, and economic inequalities, focusing on anti-racist education and integration of immigrant populations, as highlighted by initiatives like the inclusion of educational materials that reflect diverse ethnicities.

Portugal's approach to Early Childhood Education also sees ECE as a vital stage in lifelong learning, as it expressed in Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016). While play was once undervalued in the curriculum, more recent guidelines recognize its importance in holistic child development and learning (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016). The curriculum now views children as social actors and play as a natural activity that supports social inclusion, cultural awareness, and personal growth. Intercultural Education (IE) in Portugal aims to promote equal opportunities for all children, regardless of nationality, culture, or ethnicity. Laws such as the ECE Framework Law of 1997 and the National Plans for immigrant integration emphasize respecting children's languages and cultural backgrounds while fostering Portuguese language learning. Portugal also follows European Union policies that promote intercultural dialogue and diversity in schools, with specific initiatives to integrate immigrant children into the education system.

### 3. Methodology

This research was based on field study, made through a qualitative approach (Ruslin et al., 2022), consisting of narrative records of phenomena that were studied using techniques such as participant observation of children and semi-structured interviews to ECE teachers and pedagogical coordinators from two selected preschools. This qualitative research was carried out in a structural and situational context to identify the nature of realities and their dynamic structure. This paper followed an interpretive paradigm because it was based on the author and because of the use of qualitative tools to collect and analyze data, following the line of Pervin et al. (2022). The process started with literature revision on the subject investigated, needed to establish a solid theoretical framework that allowed to know how IE worked by reviewing its origins, characteristics, and development in the chosen contexts. The process continued with research design, preparation of the instruments necessary for data collection, and search process for preschools that met the necessary requirements. The study was conducted at the field, in the natural environment territory of Brazil and Portugal. Finally, finished with the analysis of the data collected. This study followed the principles of the Code of Ethical Conduct and Research of the Interdisciplinary Education Centre of Higher School of Education, IPL.

Participants were chosen through convenience sampling. The sample size was six Portuguese teachers, including one pedagogical coordinator, and six Brazilian teachers, including one pedagogical coordinator.

**Table 1.** The profile of interviewees

Definition of the profile of interviewees		Brazilian teachers	Portuguese teachers
<b>Gender</b>	Female	6	6
	Male	-	-
<b>Academic background</b>	Bachelor's degree	2	4
	Master and postgraduation	4	2
<b>Time working as an ECE teacher</b>	11 to 20 years	3	3
	More than 20 years	3	3
<b>Experience at the chosen preschool</b>	ECE (3 to 6 years old)	3	3
	ECE (1 to 6 years old)	2	1
	ECE and coordination	1	2
<b>Training courses related to IE</b>	Yes, proposed by the school	-	5
	Yes, autonomously	3	-
	No	3	1

The research contributors were the children, being a total of 48 Portuguese children and being a total of 61 Brazilian children.

**Table 2.** Children profile - Age and gender

		Age (years)				Gender	
		4	5	6	7	Female	Male
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>Room 1</b>	14	8	2	1	13	12
	<b>Room 2</b>	5	9	9	0	11	12
<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Room 3</b>	2	13	17	0	17	15
	<b>Room 4</b>	1	9	19	0	8	21

### 3.1. Instruments and data production

The techniques for gathering data were: (i) interviews, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews that allowed the participants to speak freely but also reach the specific questions of interest. Interviews involved having a one-on-one interaction with the participants to gather relevant information about the topic. According to the research process and the study objectives these were semi-structured interviews (Ruslin et al., 2022) with open-ended questions predominantly. The questions of the interview and objectives have been through the process of validation, one template was created to gather the same data from every interview in order to achieve the objectives of the study. See Table 3 with an example of the interview questions.

**Table 3.** Example of the interview questions

Blocks of Information	Specific objectives	Formulation of questions
D- Perspectives on the influence of play and toys in the process of acquiring intercultural competence.	To understand the degree of importance that the educator attaches to play and play in the definition of intrapersonal culture.	D1. What is the role of play for children? D2. What relationship is established between play and culture in your classes? D3. What is the role of play in the development of intercultural competence? D4. How do play and toys promote intercultural competence? Do you use them in your pedagogical practice? If yes, could you give some examples? If no, could you explain why?

(ii) Observations, the record of the observations was made through a field diary template about the personal chronicles based on observation. This tool was used to support critical nonverbal content into the interviews. It served to detail the time and date of specific activities, environments, behavior, and conversations on the ground to help keep track of observations to complete research data.

The interview questions were asked and answered verbally in Portuguese. Results and quotations of the interviewees were transcribed into English. The content-analysis (Bardin, 2011) of the data collected was done manually by the researcher. The collected data was first analyzed, then coded to find out more about common aspects and finally entered a content-analysis software called NVIVO. The information obtained was first analyzed and then compared between both countries.

The application of the interviews and direct observation began first in Portugal and 33 was carried out between May 3rd and May 12th of 2023, later the process was applied in Brazil between May 24nd and June 2nd, 2023. The time dedicated to the collection of data was in Portugal from 09h30 to 15h45 having a lunch break between 12h30 and 14h. The time dedicated to the collection of data was in Brazil from 07h to 15h having a lunch break between 12h30 and 13h.

## 4. Findings

The data collection results are presented in this section. Firstly, Table 4 will be shown to summarize the data obtained from the interviews and the observations. It has been organized into blocks of information that following will be discussed by country and supplemented with observations.

**Table 4.** The research findings

Findings		
<b>The presence of culture in preschool. Concepts of multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence</b>	Most recognize the creation of belonging, inclusion and communication, although they know that it is a challenge	
	Daily routines and practices of the children of diversity groups contain projects, culture related activities, and daily elements	
	Conversation circles, including cultures, creating conditions to speak, knowing expectations, and adapting the dialogue	
<b>Perspectives on the influence of play and toys in the process of acquiring intercultural competence</b>	Play is fundamental during preschool education. Play is the way of transmitting culture, acquiring culture, and a way of showing their inner culture	
	Play influences the development of intercultural competence	
	Play and toys allow communication, more resources, and specific activities to deal with topics	
<b>Pedagogical approach to culture.</b>	Pedagogical models	Constructivist models Follow the curriculum Pedagogy-in-Participation
	To complement their practice	Adapt to children's needs Big group and small groups Intercultural moments Routines Educational materials and organization of space
<b>Continuation at the following educational levels of intercultural learning</b>	Compensate the lack of knowledge about family More contact with diversity	
	Being empathetic, create a common language, place to culture, deconstruct our ideas	

The analysis begins with the block of information where interviewees were asked about the divergences and convergences in cultural diversity over time. The initial findings show a consensus among teachers from Brazil and Portugal that there have been changes in Intercultural Education (IE) since they began working, particularly in terms of cultural awareness. Both pedagogical coordinators agree, they recognized that it is a situation which has changed over the years, which has improved and continues to progress, but which is still a challenge in their schools.

In the study, teachers from Brazil and Portugal acknowledged the presence of Intercultural Education (IE) in preschools, focusing on creating belonging, inclusion, and communication. Portuguese teachers mentioned elements like multiculturalism, religious acceptance, and respect for children and families, while a Brazilian teacher highlighted the recognition of the child's identity. Overall, both countries emphasized the importance of dialogue and appreciation of family cultures and backgrounds in preschool settings.

About how children in different contexts experience daily routines and practices related to different cultures, Brazilian teachers emphasize adaptation of foreign children, specific activities, and conversation circles. Portuguese teachers focus on identifying external aspects of cultures and supporting those not fluent in Portuguese. The results highlight the importance of respecting individualities and dealing with cultural differences naturally in preschool settings.

Teachers believe that fostering dialogue among children involves daily routines like conversation circles, embracing different cultures, and providing a safe space for expression. They facilitate dialogue by addressing challenges, understanding expectations, and adjusting communication to suit the children's language.

The results discuss the awareness of parents regarding multicultural concepts in the school environment. While half of the Brazilian teachers mentioned that parents are unaware, only one Portuguese teacher shared this view. The rest believed that parents were conscious, leading to reflections on the impact of having many children of the same origin in the school. Coordinator 1 (Portuguese) highlighted the positive aspect of a Nepalese family wanting their child to integrate with other cultures, while Teacher 10 (Brazilian) emphasized the different perspectives of immigrant parents feeling grateful for being included in the preschool.



The next block analyses the perspectives on the influence of play and toys in the process of acquiring intercultural competence. The role of play for children was for Brazilian teachers a common language to interact and help children in their development and learning. Then almost all recognized play as fundamental during ECE.

Teachers highlighted the role of play in transmitting culture, acquiring culture, and showing inner culture. Play was seen as a tool for children to develop intercultural competence through communication, experiencing other cultures, and bringing cultures to children. Teachers emphasized the importance of play in children's development, learning, and socialization. The results underline the strong connection between culture, play, and toys in preschool learning, promoting respect for cultural diversity and intercultural competence development.

Play is highlighted as a crucial tool for the development of intercultural competence among children. It serves as a means for children to discover ways of communication, immerse themselves in other cultures, and experience different realities. Bringing more cultures to children through play is emphasized by introducing games, curiosities, and toys from diverse cultural backgrounds. Play facilitates interaction among children from various cultures, fostering understanding and appreciation for different cultural heritages.

About the results regarding the promotion of intercultural competence through play and toys from Brazilian and Portuguese teachers. Brazilian teachers emphasized how play allowed communication, while Portuguese teachers highlighted that play provided more resources. Both groups mentioned sharing their culture and addressing specific topics. Examples were given, such as Teacher 10 (Brazilian) mentioning the importance of diversity in toys and Teacher 6 (Portuguese) describing an interactive activity where children bring items in a bag for sharing and guessing. In general, teachers emphasized the value of incorporating various cultural elements into their pedagogical practices for a richer learning experience.

Portuguese teachers mainly followed the Pedagogy-in-Participation model, emphasizing multicultural issues and cultural diversity for children's development. Brazilian teachers vary in their pedagogical approaches, with some inspired by constructivist models and others following the municipal curriculum. Both groups organize activities in big and small groups, focus on children's needs, and reflect on their practices to improve them. Some teachers, like Teacher 1 (Portuguese), advocate for frequent intercultural moments to explore diverse cultures, including their own Portuguese culture.

The results show the importance of ensuring Intercultural Education (IE) at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level. It highlights the need to remove pressure from fixed programs, increase contact with diversity, and give space to individual cultures. Some of the teachers interviewed from both countries emphasize the necessity of integrating IE with education, addressing challenges in Brazil, and changing paradigms to promote intercultural understanding. The interviews offered opinions from different teachers regarding the status and future improvements required for IE in ECE. For instance, one Portuguese teacher said "Accepting all children as being a cultural person. Even within the same mother tongue and in the same country there is cultural diversity". The importance of promoting intercultural education (IE) at different educational levels is highlighted. Teachers emphasized the need to be empathetic, create a common language, give importance to culture, and challenge preconceived ideas. Brazilian teachers suggested initiating IE with political measures. They discussed the diversity within cultures and the necessity of activities bridging Early Childhood Education and Primary Education. One of the Brazilians teachers emphasized the need for partnerships between ECE and elementary school to facilitate the process for children.

#### *4.1. Results of the observation of the Portuguese and Brazilian preschools*

The content-analysis of the observation records of the two preschools outlines the characteristics of the day in terms of classroom dynamics, culture, and play in both settings. The observations provide insights into how these aspects influence the educational environment and experiences of the children.

The observations highlighted classroom dynamics and teacher roles in Brazilian and Portuguese preschools, regarding interculturality. Both environments fostered autonomy, with children moving freely and participating in activities. In Portugal, foreign children excelled in English sessions, while in Brazil, there was no specific foreign language program. Developmental differences among children were noted in both settings, and schedules were flexible, adapting to the children's pace. Teachers played crucial roles in conflict



resolution and adapting language to accommodate different cultural and developmental levels. In Portugal, teachers intervened to clarify misunderstandings and adapted classroom discourse. In Brazil, foreign children often sought teacher assistance during free play. Teachers in both settings adjusted their language to ensure comprehension, especially for children struggling with Portuguese. Cultural elements were incorporated through intercultural activities like storytelling and music. In Portugal, stories addressed prejudices, while in Brazil, traditional and indigenous stories reflected cultural diversity. Both contexts used these activities to promote cultural understanding and inclusion.

In the observed preschools, cultural diversity and language awareness were central themes. Both Brazilian and Portuguese classrooms incorporated music from various countries and languages, enhancing cultural exposure. Children demonstrated awareness of language differences, with Portuguese children more attuned to these nuances compared to their Brazilian counterparts. For instance, Portuguese children actively engaged with foreign languages, while Brazilian children were more likely to view languages like English or Chinese as foreign but without deeper cultural awareness.

The classroom decorations also reflected cultural diversity, with elements from different cultures present in both settings, though in Brazil there was a stronger focus on indigenous and racial issues. Portuguese classrooms also incorporated culturally diverse materials brought by families, fostering inclusion visually and in learning materials. Regarding children's personal lives, both preschools had similar socioeconomic demographics, where foreign children often faced more precarious living conditions. Conversations about countries and animals highlighted a greater awareness among Portuguese children of other cultures, while Brazilian children showed less understanding of global diversity. Cultural differences impacted daily life, particularly in terms of dietary practices linked to religion. Teachers in both contexts explained cultural and religious differences, using opportunities like food restrictions to educate children on the diversity of beliefs and practices. This reinforced a sense of respect and inclusion across the classrooms.

## 5. Conclusion

This research has shown a better understanding on teachers' perceptions about IE regarding the different contexts. Teachers expressed changes since the beginning of their professional practices for the better. Concerning the perspectives on the influence of play and toys in the process of acquiring intercultural competence, teachers have unanimously said that the role of play is fundamental, as well as key, universal and a children's right, confirming previous ideas of an evolved image of child and play following the ideas of Kishimoto (2008). Analyzing the pedagogical models and practices adopted in both schools, the great weight of adaptation appears. Teachers admit that they follow an inclusive practice with special emphasis on adaptation to children's needs, following the ideas of Bruner (2001) to adapt to cultural meanings, encouraging interaction and facilitating cultural exchange.

The role of teachers is revealed as mediators of the process. Teachers have observed a transition in the past years to more diverse classrooms in all aspects. For this purpose, they have become adaptors of contexts. It has been possible to deduce that from the differences children encounter, life experience is already preparing them for a diverse society. Children are in heterogeneous stages of development, have unlike origins, languages, or home lives. The most striking contribution is that in both countries there are contexts of the most similar. From their educational system transitions towards diversity, the role of teachers as guides of learning and mediators of conflicts, children who adapt to the situation that comes, to a global idea of improvement to create a better context for children. As for play, it is crucial, it is a right included in the law being the basis of learning. Teachers know what the weak points are and do not hesitate to expose them. All teachers perceive that there are problems that should be solved but confess to be overwhelmed by too many children in the same classroom, too much pressure to achieve the goals, lack of communication with families and between schools.

Some of the limitations of this study were the short time available to analyse and live interculturality in school. Also note that two schools have been analysed in two cities, so the results cannot be generalized and must be considered in the relevant contexts.

This work opens the way to new lines of research, among them would be the search for a more accessible intercultural dialogue, training to have a better intercultural communication, the study of preschool difficulties which prevent the acquisition of intercultural competence.

Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into good practices, good intentions on the part of teachers and children. However, there is still a long way to arrive to provide quality Intercultural Education. In this way IE would cease to be education to compensate for child inequalities and could begin to be an education to facilitate dialogue between equals. Finally, to emphasize that IE in both contexts is understood as education towards dialogue based on respect. Stripping prejudices and racism towards a common path, in which a curriculum with more explicit activities is necessary. In these contexts, as proposed in the study conducted on education for refugees by Leeman (2018), IE conveys the message that cultures must have a reciprocal influence within society, for both minority and majority groups. There is a clear need for greater social coverage to help and equip children to build on the same foundation. Intercultural Education began many years ago but there is still a long way to go towards inclusion. Today's children are exposed to cultural diversity at an early stage, both in a social context and when starting preschool. The intercultural aspect of preschool education constitutes a space where children can come together, make contact and interact with difference and otherness. It also contributes to their preparation for community life, their development as democratic citizens and their ability to engage.

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