RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY AND MOVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE GAME'S INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION

ATTIVITÀ LUDICA E MOVIMENTO: UN'ANALISI QUALITATIVA SULLA DIMENSIONE EDUCATICA INCLUSIVA DEL GIOCO

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ABSTRACT

This contribution, through the observation of the game, explores the relationships between organized play and the improvement of children's behaviour. These, in primary school, were divided in two groups: the experimental group A, which was entrusted with the structured game and the control group B, to which the free game was assigned. The focus of the study is to address the theme of assessment of motor learning and the relationships with the training processes based of the game.

Il presente contributo, attraverso l'osservazione del gioco, esplora le relazioni tra l'attività ludica organizzata e il miglioramento nei comportamenti dei bambini. Questi, nella scuola primaria, sono stati suddivisi in due gruppi: il gruppo sperimentale A, al quale è stato affidato il gioco strutturato e il gruppo di controllo B, al quale è stato assegnato il gioco libero. Il focus dello studio è quello di affrontare il tema della valutazione degli apprendimenti motori e le relazioni con i processi formativi basati sul gioco.

KEYWORDS
Game, Education, Movement.

Gioco, Educazione, Movimento.

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Introduction

The game's formative role finds in the last century an important help in numerous theories and scientific studies that validate the educational value for the development of the young learner (Fromberg, 1999; Cohen, 2006; Lipoma, Napoli, Paloma,2008; Whitebread, Basilio, Kuvalja, &Verma, 2012; Athey, 2018).

With the term game we want to identify an ideal form of motor activity for the child, which in its practice manages to affect multiple value aspects of the child's growth phase such as to positively influence the overall of personality development (Travaglini, 2021).

The playful movement represents an opportunity for emotional, cognitive, moral, motor and social growth, and for this reason it is necessary that educational and training contexts must use the game, with its playful proposals, as a source of promotion and interest to involve and orient students towards a total training (Valentini, & Cirigliano, 2022). Through an attractive playful-motor proposal that orients and brings the child closer to the school context, it is possible to use teaching methods and inclusive forms of direct involvement that are mainly based on the ability to solve the problem through mixed paths and games to which all children can participate by having fun (Lovecchio & Borgogni, 2022).

When it comes to gaming it is necessary make a distinction between free and structured play. In the first case, vitality and joy are manifested without any constraint from practical ends, therefore it occurs with spontaneity, inventiveness, creativity and imagination. In this context the child plays in a reality of his own, and is totally involved in it. In structured play, however, unlike the first, an orientation to the achievement of an educational purpose prevails more. The address of the educator or teacher is evident, therefore there are rules, norms and provisions (Frank, Flynn, Farnell, & Barkley, 2018).

Specifically, the games' categories imitative and role-playing are useful for structuring the children's social identity because it accustoms to see themselves from the perspective of the outside (Khosrumiya & Ismaya, 2022).

Differently is the participation in organized games, through them you can understand the rules' functioning, grasp the values that underlie them, regulate your behaviour not by mechanical acquisition but anticipating the conduct of others (Yuldoshev, 2021).

Moving into a more specific motor and sports activity investigation field, the author Pierre Parlebas (2023), places in the motor game different levels from communicative to relational, finding the existence of nine categories, of but play

reducing sports motor activity to only two fundamental relationships, such as "pure" competition in the symmetrical duel, and mixed competition collaboration between opposing teams (obviously the collaboration is between partners, the competition between opponents).
In Particular, we wanted to focus on primary school, to focus on the child's readiness to undertake the basic school learning path (Valentini & Cirigliano, 2022). Therefore, we wanted to experiment with the implementation of playful-motor intervention through structured games, to stimulate creativity, fantasy, imagination, for the improvement of basic motor patterns and general dynamic coordination, as irreplaceable in the individual development and in the knowledge of the surrounding environment (Chistolini, 2022). The body, especially in primary school, is the mediator between the environment and the child, in fact allows you to collect information, process theme and elaborate an adaptive response, through the corporeality of equals. In addition, motor activity not only stimulates to the expression of emotions and feelings, communication and relationships with others, orientation in time and space, but it also promotes the linguistic, articulation logical-mathematical and artistic-expressive skills, within a happy combination of movement and intelligence(Chan et al.,2022). The question we asked ourselves for this survey is whether recreational motor activity brings benefits social, emotional and relational skills in children attending primary school. In particular, the research aims to demonstrate the positive influence of motor activity, especially structured play on the improvement of social, emotional and relational skills.

1. The right to play and its inclusive educational value

The game appears as part of the human's life, whose social changes have seen him protagonist also to convey messages, values and social roles(Vinci et al., 2023).
Ensuring the right to play to the child (*Investing in children, EC* 2013) means allowing him to build his ability to socialize through privileged situations created by the movement, improving consequently the relational modalities towards the comparisons with his companions and triggering processes of knowledge, sharing of space and tools, which inevitably implies also availability, collaboration, trust and responsibility. Therefore, recreational-motor situations can represent an effective educational setting for discovery, knowledge, definition, control and emotional self-control, so it is necessary that the child can use this educational tool to know himself and everything around him, so that he can be perfect citizen of a future society (Wang, Stebbins & Ferdig, 2022).

Safeguarding the right to play (*European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 2021)* to the child means, guaranteeing him a fundamental and powerful life's teacher, as everyone has to deal with heterogeneous groups by age and also by sex, in which the older ones exercise their authority by teaching the younger ones without abusing their power because under the control of the group itself, and therefore of the rules of the game (Colliver, & Doel-Mackaway, 2021).

Guaranteeing the right to play to the child means being able to use the movement as an "educational vehicle" to reach the inner self and therefore, being able to involve his emotions and feelings in the process of building identity in order to accustom him to face the surrounding reality with security and mastery. It is on these occasions that the child is able to manifest his body-kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 2000), and then relate to the environment and be able to use the perceptual-motor function to coordinate the body movements both for expressive and productive purposes. In this way, the child becomes used to not always using convergent thoughts and behaviours, but begins to try to plan and use new solutions to new situations that can be preseted, thus managing to find new and creative solutions (Berbets et al., 2021).

When we talk about the right to play, we must also consider the deprivation that children with disabilities had to endure in the past (International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ICF-CY version of the World Health Organization, 2007). These limitation or deprivation situations of the right to play, have shown the need for a reflection on the importance of formal educational contexts so that this ideology is eliminated altogether.

Every child has the right to play, even those with disabilities; He must not be excluded for this reason or "identified" for that disability, indeed it is necessary to recognize the dignity and right of each one in a process of inclusion in which the right to play must be present (Mepham, 2010).

So through the game the child is able to overcome the difficulties or barriers that he may encounter during the playful-motor moment, experiencing the success or failure feeling, and consequently analyze in the best possible way the action's decision-making process towards the various situations of everyday life (Zulić, Hajkova & Brkić-Jovanović, 2020).

Unfortunately, giving value to the right to play does not only mean giving spaces and times to ensure that a child can play, as with the latter term we mean the possibility of experimenting with their abilities, to compare themselves with others, and highlight their weaknesses or strengths of their ego (Fordham, 2018).

Through playful motor activity, the child experiments and acquires new habits in interpersonal relationships, improves his communication skills, both verbal and

non-verbal, discovers playful skills that he did not know he possessed and at the same time experiences and develops greater adaptation to emotions(Vieira, 2016). The play's educational value is now recognized as an indispensable tool for child's healthy and harmonious growth, and it is for this reason that it is considered as an irreplaceable and inalienable right. (Rico & Janot, 2021). Motor games possess a unique essence: when we play, we know very well that we do it and we develop a craving for additional challenges, obstacles and battles to be faced, creating a process of action and learning (Kündig, 2022).The game is also playful attitude as a free, separate action (fixed times and spaces), uncertain (unpredictable development and result), unproductive, regulated and fictitious (awareness of a different reality)(Prodan,2022).

The game phenomenon has the ability to represent a tool for learning, experimentation and acquisition of knowledge of self and the world, in fact playing is like a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles, as a free act to overcome oneself and test oneself, voluntarily complicating life, accepting rules that do not indicate the easiest way to achieve the goal(Pombo et al., 2023). The play's educational value is therefore to guide you to explore spaces of unexplored possibilities, free creativity and encourage strategic thinking. An instant feedback system that serves as a promise to achieve the goal and provides the motivation to continue playing with participation, which requires acceptance of the goal, rules and feedback system, creating a common ground that allows more people to play together (Lovecchio & Borgogni, 2022). The game offers freedom, involvement and sharing. That's why we live in a world full of games and players. You always play at the limit of your skill level, always on the verge of failure. A good game is simply an unnecessary obstacle that increases self-motivation and generates interest and creativity, offers a sense of security in one's abilities thanks to clear objectives and an immediate response system that helps to accept failure. It is an extremely powerful tool to foster participation and motivate work. A tool whose values and ideas guide us towards inclusion and self-efficacy (Caione, 2021).

2. Play at school

"Play is one of the main ways of children's expression and, as such, represents one of the most important activities for their culture and identity's construction"(Cebalos, 2011).

In school, the game, also understood as an educational medium, has undergone a gradual growth over time. Initially, the recreational activity was little considered or used compared to its potential, for a mere conception of school whose task is not to make children play but to teach disciplines that were well different from physical

culture. As time progresses, play in the school takes on a role of body-sports movement (ball, running, jumping, etc.), whose purpose was to strengthen the body and form a good citizen. Finally, we have come to a game's conception as a knowledge's builder and basic experience of all life; the game's pedagogical value is therefore recognized and for this reason it must be aimed at teaching (Staccioli, 2011).

Playing contributes and simplifies the learning moment, as the child faces difficulties with the enthusiasm and motivation dictated by the playful moment, so in addition to the cognitive aspect, the emotional one also comes into play. In this phase, of course, the error is also contemplated and generates a totally different effect in the child, as imprecision becomes a moment of reflection and then an aspect from build their own knowledge base and to restart (Belcher et al., 2021).

The inclusion of the figure specialized of teacher of motor education (in the fourth and fifth classes of primary school) contemplated by Law no. 234 of 2021, testifies how motor activity should not be perceived only as a simple declaration to the movement of the body, but as an added potential for the personal, cultural and educational growth of the learner, therefore capable of helping and simplifying research for learning and for achieving knowledge.

In this perspective, the school, as an educational institution with a strong cognitive, emotional and social value, must enjoy the game's potential for the construction of the student's identity, becoming, therefore, an important training tool in the person's training process, whose skills lie not only in the practical-motor aspect, but also emotional-social(Krug, 2009).

With the game it is possible to provide the educational institution with a tool capable of offering the skills and competences necessary for everyday life (Raudsepp & Päll, 2006). With it the playful moment becomes a reality's imitation, in which the child can express his feelings towards the social world. In this context, the physical education teacher becomes a recreational-cognitive activities mediator, and as such must:

- Interact and interface with other subjects to search interdisciplinarity;
- Stimulate the child with concrete material, games, so as to make him manage, reflect and reorganize his knowledge;
- Facilitate and stimulate learning that takes place naturally, almost without being conscious;
- Enrich the dynamics of social relations in the classroom.

All this allows learners a global development's form, where by personal, social and cultural (Valduga, 2011).

The recreational motor practices use at school, arouses greater interest, develops reasoning skills to find solutions in problematic situations and motivates the student to carry out the activity proposed by the teacher through greater competitiveness generated by the game, which allows to overcome the presence of any cognitive and emotional obstacles (Spiridonov, Loginov, Ivanchei & Kurgansky, 2019).

It is for this reason that the game in the scholastic contest should not be understood as a simple pastime, but as a teaching process's educational method. With play, children as well as developing fundamental skills such as autonomy and identity, can also improve their ability to relate to others, eliminating the sense of insecurity or shyness. Through the educational motor games it is possible to create spaces and environments where promote the acquisition of new knowledge and a training that is not limited to simple scholastic notions but that is continuous and long life learning.

3. Methods and materials

The research activity was conducted on 26 children sample, their age is included between 7 and 8 years and it lasted 6 months, characterized by two weekly meetings of 60 minutes. In this first phase, parents were involved for the administration of a questionnaire for the collection of socio-personal data and who were asked to sign the informed consent to the research.

Children were divided into 2 groups, randomly without taking into account their characteristics, of which the experimental group A and the control group B. The two children groups had the same social and economic background and the same age.(7-8years old); (8 ± 1 year; 124,15 ± 8,12 cm; 35,24 ± 9,12 kg).

The experimental group A (n = 13 children, including one with intellectual disability relationship), practiced the activity of structured play, while the control group B (n = 13 children, of which one with intellectual disability related), supported only the motor activity, eliminating the structured part of the game from the program.

The aim of this work is to verify whether the practice of free or structured play, at a certain frequency, intensity and duration, promotes the development of motor skills, cognitive, socio-relational emotional processes in equal measure or with substantial differences. Specifically, in the class characterized by free play, children can play for 60 minutes independently as programmed by the teacher.

In the class whose peculiarity is structured play, children practice 60 minutes of structured play, followed by the teacher(Tab. 1).

Structured physical activity			
Duration	**Affected area**	**Ability/Competence**	**Methodology**
10 minutes	General activation	Emotional Socio-relational	Increasing difficulty. Activities in proximal development zone. Collaborative activities, self-regulation
15 minutes	Manual skills: games path / tools that develop manual and breech oculus coordination.		
15 minutes	Balance: games path / tools that develop dynamic balance		
10 minutes	Mobility: obstacle course with different height.		
10 minutes	Cool-down		

Table 1: Structured physical activity scheme example

The teacher's role in structured play takes two forms:

1.Enrichment of the child's play context by providing experiences or games that promote it;

2. The adult can "build" with the child a scaffolding by participating in the game as a co-player through the use of questions and / or commenting on discoveries and / or encouraging new explorations.

The objective was to observe whether through structured play it is possible to improve effective socio-relational behaviour, entrusting the inclusion, integration and equal opportunities value to structured play. All the children of this project had the opportunity to benefit from the opportunities and benefits of motor leisure, physical well-being and development of logical and intellectual skills that the game itself allows. Thanks to the children knowledge, the research design was elaborated establishing the tools to plan an educational, motor and sports intervention, to structure actions aimed at enhancing the needs and developing the potential of each individual.

The tests were carried out before motor activity and after, through the systematic card for observing analysis of the created behavior specifically for this research (Table 2). In this research we used a qualitative data collection methodology, using a descriptive statistical analysis of the same.

Objectives	Learning level		
Partecipation	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Rules' respect	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Individual Responsibility	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Accept and respect the role entrusted	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Can manage conflicts	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Manages to communicate effectively	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Collaborate positively in the group	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Contribution to the achievement of the group's objectives	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Motor Area	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Autonomy	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Motivation	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base
Self-esteem	o Advanced	o Intermediate	o base

Table 2: Behaviour Analysis Observation Card

To the two groups' children parents were given two initial and final questionnaires concerning behaviour and social, emotional and relational skills as well as cognitive and physical. Table 3 summarizes the simple questionnaire given to parents.

QUESTIONNAIRE		Yes	Partly	No
EMPATHY	*welcoming the other*			
SOCIALISATION	*Group membership*			
RELATION	*cooperation*			
EMOTIONS	*stress management*			
COMMUNICATION	*know how to talk or be with others*			
COGNITIVE	*improvement*			
	worsening			
ATTENTION	*improvement*			
	worsening			
MOTIVATION	*improvement*			
	worsening			
MOTOR	*knowledge and control of one's own body*			

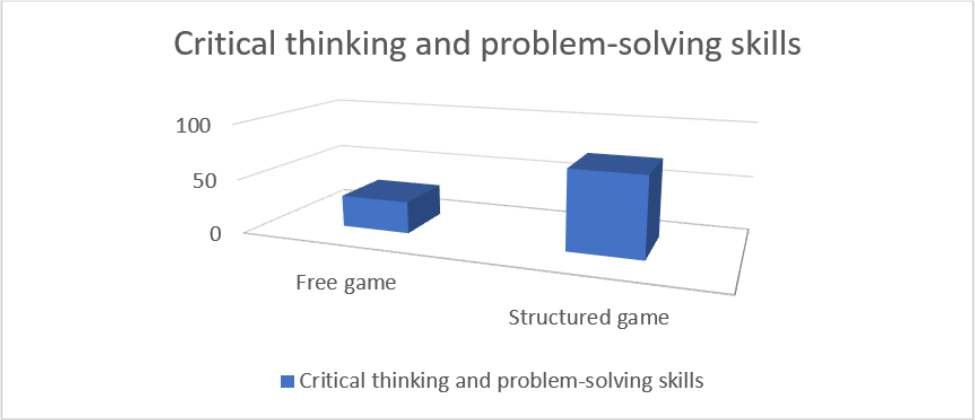
Table 3: Questionnaire proposed to parents

4. Results

From the data obtained from the comparison of the results at the beginning and end of the activity, it emerged that the children of the experimental group have a greater capacity for attention, collaboration and space-temporal orientation than the other group. The game, as mentioned, is a bearer of emotions, so whether it happens in a free or structured way, it is still a vehicle of both positive and negative emotions. Obviously in an educational context such as school, the figure of the teacher directs children towards the birth of positive emotions, and in the case of the onset of negative factors he intervenes to stem them (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Game and emotions

The first difference that emerged between these two play "modes" is that in the structured one the children developed more critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. In particular, it was observed that only 3 out of 13 pupils in the free game improved this competence compared to 10 out of 13 in the experimental group. This difference is explained by the fact that the teacher in the experimental group, through a guided path, has continuously placed the students in front of problematic situations that have forced the children to look for solutions (Graph. 2).

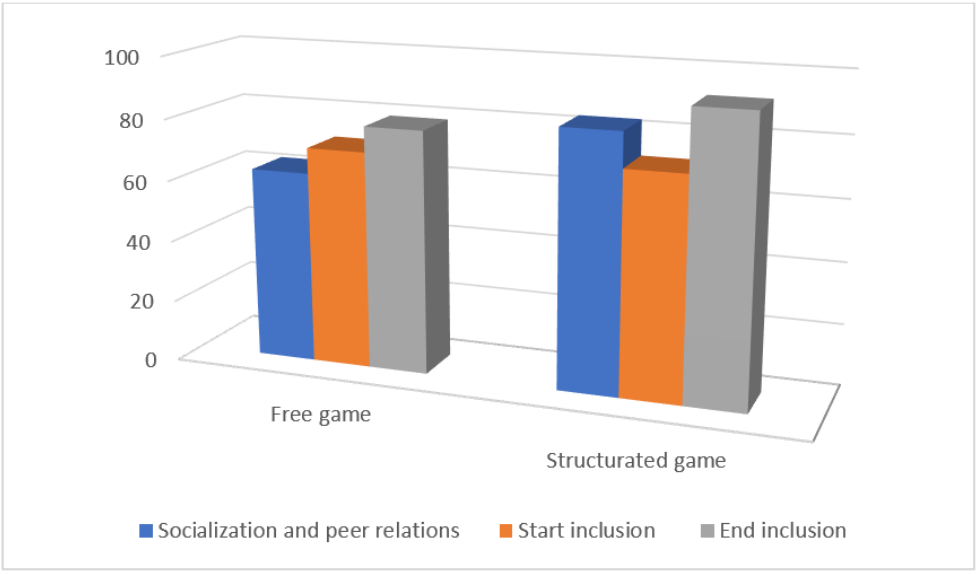


Graph 1: Critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Therefore, with the structured game the teacher has the opportunity to direct the learning phase, creating useful moments to respond immediately to the children educational development needs. Conversely, in free play student must have the "control" of his own training process, so it is necessary that there is motivation, desire and mastery of their abilities in order to acquire new knowledge correctly.
In this regard, from the results emerged from graph 3 "Resilience and ability to withstand stress" the children of the experimental group have shown to better manage anger, fear or the onset of frustrations in a particular way because in the structured play the child is continuously subjected to tests and dynamics that raise the personal level of resilience.

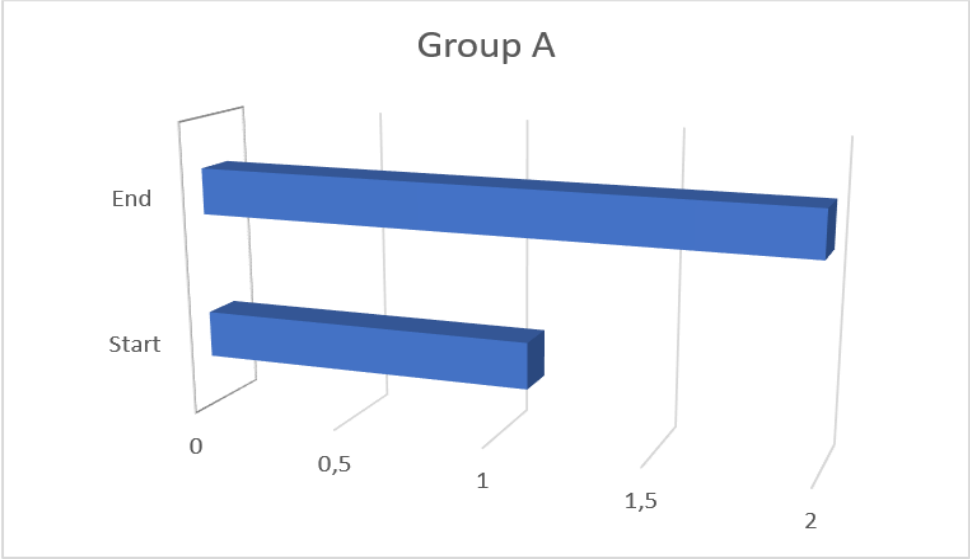
Graph3: Resilience and ability to withstand stress

From the results of the graph. 4 "Degree of socialization and inclusion" that from the game's socialization view point, both free and structured, simplifies and promotes the birth of bonds, but the difference that has been revealed concerns in particular the ability to create bonds with the students who in their eyes can be "weak". In particular, it has been observed that children at the time of group play tended to exclude their peers who knew they were less strong, including disabled pupils. In the structured game group, the teacher in the first meetings noticed this "exclusion" and intervened without distorting the game's rules or methods, but simply highlighting the potential of the excluded children and making sure that even those considered "weak" were "chosen" by the group.
Over time it has been observed that the pupils of the experimental group have begun to choose, more and more frequently, even those who were initially considered "weak" compared to the control group, an aspect that in this class occurred fortuitously and only in a few children.

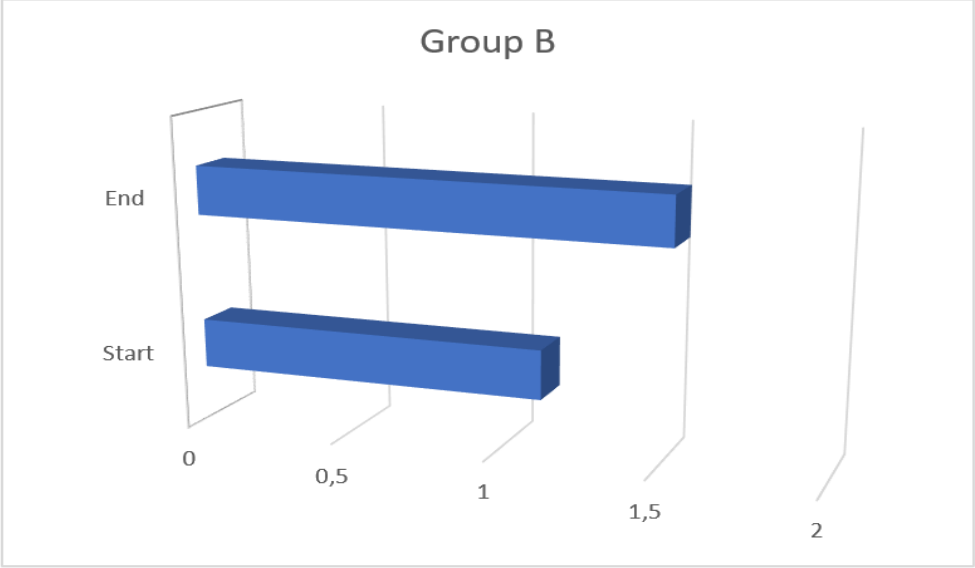


Graph. 4: Socialization and inclusion's grade

Finally, comparing the initial and final results of the tests, also confirmed by the data of the questionnaires administered to the parents of the children of the two groups (on the behaviour and social, emotional and relational as well as cognitive and physical skills of their children) we observed that the students who practiced structured play improved the average of the answers in the acceptance of the rules and in the relationship with their classmates, Group A, by 4,45 to 6,85; Group B by 7,55 to 9 (Graph. 5and 6).



Graph 5: Rules acceptance and relationship with friends experimental group A



Graph 6: Rules acceptance and relationship with friends control group B

5. Concluding reflections and remarks

The research activity carried out in the two groups has shown how the learning resulting from both structured and free play puts the student at the teaching-learning process center with his own interests and motivations, thus by abandoning a form of transmission of knowledge the pupil learned passively.
the teacher's task is to simplify the process of knowledge acquisition also using other aspects that are part of the teaching-learning process: emotions, relationships and socialization, that arise from play and stimulate the child's curiosity towards a given topic.
Motor activity must be considered a fundamental part of the overall development of the child, and it is evident that it must be built not only in the gym, but in the classroom, in the laboratory, wherever there is the possibility of creating movement (Borgogni & Agosti, 2022). Motor activities are inserted through pedagogical practices, in an interdisciplinary learning vision, which consider the student's body as a support and inseparable vector of intelligence, affectivity and all the dimensions of his person (Capra & Lovecchio, 2021). This study shows how important structured play is, also giving importance to the specialized teacher. Moving through play leads the child to develop their social skills and form a basis of appropriate behaviors and in relation to others. It will be up to the regular educator and select the game correctly according to the age of the child and what he wants to develop or strengthen. Play, and especially organized play, contributes to a healthier childhood and children's intellectual development. (Wollesen et al., 2022). Through play, children show interest in their surroundings, observing and exploring develop the ability to find solutions independently. By playing, children acquire their first life's important experiences through which they gradually understand the richness of interpersonal relationships and how the surrounding environment works, getting to know the world in a fun way (Martínez-Santos et al., 2020). The game allows you to prepare the child for future life, with the aim of reaching his full personal potential and becoming a mature person. Through play, children seek and find answers to many questions, nourish their curiosity, enrich their imagination, develop perception and motor skills.
Therefore, the right way to go seems to be the constant presence of movement and playful motor activity in primary school, so that they are not included in the extra time to "simply" do play activities but use all that playful potential in terms of learning not only cognitive but also emotional, social, relational and inclusive.

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