

PLAYFUL ARTISTIC INVENTIVENESS: the use of mobile phones by children in the daily life of early childhood education

INVENTIVIDADES ARTÍSTICAS BRINCANTES: o uso de telefones
celulares por crianças no cotidiano da educação infantil

INVENTIVIDADES ARTÍSTICAS LÚDICAS: el uso de teléfonos móviles por
niños en el cotidiano de la educación infantil

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Abstract

In this article, we seek to understand the meanings that children aged four to six attribute to mobile phones in the context of Early Childhood Education, based on their interactions and playful inventions in times of cyberculture. The research was conducted in 2023 at a Municipal Early Childhood Education Unit in Niterói/RJ, with the participation of fifteen children. Inspired by the ethnographic methodology, the investigation used conversations, participant observations, photographs, videos, and a field diary. The study is connected to contemporary debates on childhood and technology, especially in light of Law No. 15.100/2025. The results indicate that the mobile phone is re-signified and transformed into a symbolic artifact of expression and creation, being integrated into fictitious games, drawings, simulations, and fabulations, and incorporated as a language of play and of contemporary digital childhood. Such performative practices challenge regulatory discourses on the use of mobile phones in childhood, pointing to modes of subjectivation and sensitive experiences that involve pedagogical mediation. We conclude that, far from a passive relationship with technological artifacts, children develop expressive, social, and cognitive uses that reconfigure pedagogical bonds and ways of existing in everyday school life.

Keywords: Cyberculture. Early Childhood Education. Ethnography. Inventiveness.

Resumo

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Neste artigo, buscamos compreender os sentidos que crianças de quatro a seis anos atribuem aos telefones celulares no contexto da Educação Infantil, a partir de suas interações e invenções brincantes em tempos de cibercultura. A pesquisa foi realizada em 2023, em uma Unidade Municipal de Educação Infantil de Niterói/RJ, com a participação de quinze crianças. Inspirada na metodologia etnográfica, a investigação utilizou conversas, observações participantes, fotografias, vídeos e diário de campo. O estudo articula-se a debates contemporâneos sobre infância e tecnologia, especialmente à luz da Lei nº 15.100/2025. Os resultados mostram que o celular é ressignificado e transformado em artefato simbólico de expressão e criação, sendo integrado aos jogos fictícios, desenhos, simulações e fabulações, sendo inserido como linguagem do brincar e da infância digital contemporânea. Tais práticas performativas tensionam discursos reguladores sobre o uso do celular na infância, apontando para modos de subjetivação e experiências sensíveis que envolvem mediação pedagógica. Concluímos que, longe de uma relação passiva com os artefatos tecnológicos, as crianças elaboram usos expressivos, sociais e cognitivos que reconfiguram os vínculos pedagógicos e os modos de existir no cotidiano escolar.

Palavras-chave: Cibercultura. Educação Infantil. Etnografia. Inventividades.

Resumen

En este artículo buscamos comprender los significados que los niños de cuatro a seis años atribuyen a los teléfonos móviles en el contexto de la Educación Infantil, a partir de sus interacciones e invenciones lúdicas en tiempos de cibercultura. La investigación fue realizada en 2023, en una Unidad Municipal de Educación Infantil de Niterói/RJ, con la participación de quince niños. Inspirada en la metodología etnográfica, la investigación utilizó conversaciones, observaciones participantes, fotografías, vídeos y un diario de campo. El estudio se articula con los debates contemporáneos sobre infancia y tecnología, especialmente a la luz de la Ley nº 15.100/2025. Los resultados muestran que el teléfono móvil es resignificado y transformado en un artefacto simbólico de expresión y creación, integrado a juegos ficticios, dibujos, simulaciones y fabulaciones, e incorporado como lenguaje del juego y de la infancia digital contemporánea. Tales prácticas performativas tensionan discursos reguladores sobre el uso del teléfono móvil en la infancia, señalando modos de subjetivación y experiencias sensibles que implican mediación pedagógica. Concluimos que, lejos de una relación pasiva con los artefactos tecnológicos, los niños elaboran usos expresivos, sociales y cognitivos que reconfiguran los vínculos pedagógicos y las formas de existir en la vida escolar cotidiana.

Palabras clave: Cibercultura. Educación Infantil. Etnografía. Inventividades.

Introduction

Children, especially those in large urban centers, experience situations daily that are marked by the significant presence of cell phones, which enable playful artistic inventiveness. To understand these interactions, it is necessary to engage with the multiple dimensions of contemporary childhood within digital culture.

Santaella (2013) discusses the ubiquity of digital technologies and argues that we live in an era of pervasive communication where information circulates in multiple networks and is accessible at any time. This context requires schools to be more

open to children's cultural repertoires, as children already live among screens, sounds, icons, and digital gestures.

In this socio-technical scenario, the cell phone functions not only as a device but also as a language processor and a sensory and cognitive extension of the child in the world. Children's playful and spontaneous appropriation of devices show that they are producers of culture, not just receivers (Barbosa, 2014). Their use of cell phones — recording videos, inventing narratives, exploring apps, and taking photos — is legitimate forms of cultural expression (Girardello, 2005). In this context, childhood is characterized by the creation of signs and meanings, even when adults do not fully comprehend their language (Barbosa, 2014).

Through the observation of these practices in everyday school life, this ethnography aligns with the concept of an educational space in which knowledge emerges from lived experience and where everyday life becomes a place of creation, invention, and social practices that produce meaning (Kramer, 2006). Rather than threatening childhood, cell phones are part of children's daily lives as tools for creativity and language, extending into the realm of pedagogy (Goularte; Carvalho, 2025; Goularte; Carvalho; Couto Junior, 2025). Couto (2013) illustrates this point by showing that the idea that children who are immersed in screens (computers, tablets, and smartphones) do not know how to play is incorrect.

Their fascination with these devices and screens stems from the fact that they use them to establish contacts and relationships with other children, young people, and adults, create communities, make and maintain friendships, and tell their stories. In other words, they play all the time to (Couto, 2013, p. 910).

Another key to understanding these practices is play as a transitional space (Winnicott, 1975). Play occurs in an area between reality and fantasy that is essential for creativity. When a child turns on their phone's camera and acts out a news program or creates a cooking video, they experience the world and themselves through symbolic play. The phone acts as a transitional object and a support for expressing subjectivity.

Meaningful learning, especially in childhood, occurs when school knowledge is linked to children's interests, desires, and cultural practices (Kenski, 2003). When

used pedagogically, digital technologies can expand possibilities for expression, authorship, and meaning construction (Carvalho, 2022). The question is not whether to use technology without planning or care, but rather, to recognize that its potential in children's formative and inventive processes requires consideration of aspects such as the type of adult mediation, the context of reception, and the quality of content consumed on the internet (Girardello, 2005).

In this context, listening is paramount, as children think, play, and speak in many ways (Mallaguzzi, 2016). By observing how children use cell phones, we can understand their language in action. We recognize recording, pausing, filming, narrating, and clicking as ways of expressing and constructing knowledge because listening actively to children with cell phones is also listening to a childhood that produces digital, affective, and political narratives.

Law No. 15,100/2025 (Brazil, 2025), which regulates cell phone use in schools, contributes to this debate. While the law acknowledges exceptions for educational purposes under teacher supervision, its ambiguous language can lead to prohibitions and hinder legitimate learning experiences for young children (Maddalena, 2025). While discussing this law is not the text's main focus, the research offers counterpoints to this policy by listening to children's inventive uses of cell phones. Rather than prohibiting, the research proposes understanding and cultivating an expanded listening that embraces the multiplicity of children's languages and their technological creations.

Based on these theoretical concepts and legal tensions, this ethnographic research sought to develop a sensitive and committed approach to listening to children's ways of being and behaving in their everyday school life. The methodological approach was therefore designed to embrace the complexity of gestures, sounds, and languages that emerge when a child holds a cell phone, not as a spectator, but as the author of experiences. Below, we detail the methodological approach that underpinned this perspective.

1 Methodology: ethnographic research

This research took a qualitative, ethnographic approach to understand how children attribute meaning to cell phones in early childhood education. According to Geertz (2022), ethnography is a practice that interprets the meanings subjects attribute to their actions and interactions within their social context. In this study, we analyzed narratives and interactions involving cell phone play.

We chose ethnography because it fosters closeness and dialogue with children and recognizes them as active participants in cultural production (Cohn, 2005). This method involves the researcher actively participating in the life and social world being studied, enabling the sharing of different moments with the research subjects. The focus is on understanding the child's perspective and how they experience and understand this social universe.

This study is part of the contemporary cybercultural landscape, where childhood is inextricably linked to the effects of digital networking (Couto, 2013). Children actively participate in constructing and reinventing everyday life. In this sense, school is understood as a space and time of multiple languages and interactions in which children produce differences and identifications, learn cultural and social practices, and create new meanings and knowledge (Goularte; Carvalho, 2024).

The ethnography was conducted at a full-time Municipal Early Childhood Education Unit (UMEI) in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro. The reference group consisted of 22 children, 15 of whom participated in the study. The children were between four and six years old. The group had diverse profiles and experiences, including children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

We incorporated and planned interactions with non-functioning cell phones during moments of play and conversation. This allowed us to observe how children redefine the use of these devices in pretend situations. These interactions revealed how children freely interact, demonstrating in their narratives and actions the meanings they attribute to cell phones. Based on these attributions, we organized and analyzed the children's narratives about cell phone use (research data).

To think about and carry out this ethnography, we mobilized multiple research resources, namely: a) participant observation with continuous insertion into daily life, valuing an attentive "close-up and inside" view (Magnani, 2002); b) dialogic mediation with children, based on conversations with sensitive listening (Ferreira, 2010; Carvalho; Pimentel, 2022); c) field diary with systematic records (Fernandes, 2002; Goularte; Carvalho, 2024); and d) audiovisual records, such as authorized photos and audio recordings, recognizing children as subjects of rights and authorship (Barbosa, 2014; Kramer, 2002).

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles that govern studies involving young children. The necessary institutional authorizations were obtained, including approval from the Research Ethics Committee, the Municipal Department of Education, and the management of the Municipal Early Childhood Education Unit where the research took place. The children's participation was voluntary, and obtaining their consent recognizes and respects their right to participate in and collaborate on the research. Attentive and respectful listening supported the ethical dimension of the study and made it an experience of co-authorship with the children.

Legal guardians were invited to sign the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), which explained the research objectives, procedures, and possible implications. Next, a dialogue was held with the children to seek their consent through the Free and Informed Assent Form (FIAF). This process was more than just getting a signature on a piece of paper; it was a way to recognize the children as subjects with rights who can participate and express opinions about decisions that affect them (Goularte; Carvalho, 2024).

Despite having all necessary authorizations, we chose to maintain the anonymity of faces and surnames to ensure respect for the children's privacy and the ethical integrity of the research. This practice reaffirms our commitment to sensitive and responsive ethics, recognizing children as protagonists in research, not just objects of study.

1.1 Emily and the Unicorn

Children are undoubtedly interested in drawing, scribbling, playing with paints, molding clay, and exploring different textures, shapes, flavors, and colors. In early childhood, children have the artistic potential to create and explore worlds with aesthetic and perceptive sensitivity. Through art, children encounter a set of symbols and meanings present in cultural repertoires that society has built over time. Additionally, artistic expression enables them to express emotions, worldviews, individual and collective experiences, spatial and temporal notions, physicality, and creativity, thereby expanding their communicative repertoire. In early childhood education, artistic activities enrich children's senses and perceptions, in addition to promoting their overall development through interaction and play.

Playfulness, drawing, painting, sculpting, photography, dancing, role-playing, storytelling, and sensory stimuli encourage the creation of experimental spaces and games in which children can explore the relationship between reality and fiction, the subjective and the cultural dimension. Through symbolism, children represent their emotional, intellectual, spatial, temporal, and social repertoires. For this reason, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Referenciais Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil - RCNEI) emphasize the importance of aesthetic education from an early age, particularly in the visual arts.

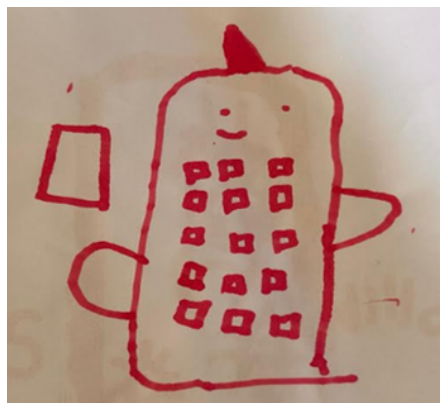
The integration of sensitive, affective, intuitive, aesthetic, and cognitive aspects, as well as the promotion of social interaction and communication, gives the visual arts their particular significance. Similar to music, visual art is a language and an important form of human expression and communication. This justifies its presence in education in general and early childhood education in particular (Brazil, 1998, p. 85).

Like artists, children can subvert the logic established by society, transcend boundaries, and use different languages to express themselves. In this sense, the aesthetic gaze dismantles traditional paradigms and meanings. Poet Manoel de Barros (2017, n.p.) emphasizes this bias: "I learned that artists don't just see. They have visions. Vision is accompanied by madness, silly little things, fantasies, and mischief". Children understand this "mischief" and therefore create art that may seem "nonsensical" to adults. They bring the inventiveness of a child's gaze — a gaze

capable of transforming sticks, leaves, stones, paints, and scrap materials into playful and artistic creations — a gaze capable of "building the foundations of a house on dewdrops" (Barros, 2017, n.p.).

Children realize that through lines, colors, scribbles, and drawings, they can tell their stories and express what they feel, think, and experience. Through these artistic expressions, they redefine their own meanings and ways of being in the world. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) emphasize the importance of immersing children in various languages to promote "diverse expressions of music, visual and graphic arts, cinema, photography, dance, theater, poetry, and literature" (Brazil, 2010, p. 26).

Figure 1. Drawing by Emily, age five, depicting a cell phone with the unicorn game.



Source: Research archive (2023).

In the drawing, five-year-old Emily uses geometric lines to depict a cell phone and one of her favorite games, the "unicorn game". Her drawing includes the phone's keys, which she can use to activate commands for the game. However, the technological device has human characteristics, evident in its eyes, smile, and arms. In a sense, Emily projects her perception of corporeality and spatiality onto her creation. A single horn drawn on the phone refers to the mythological animal with the body of a horse.

The drawing highlights the fictional and imaginary aspects that unite humans and technology, as well as the phone's functionality and playful nature. Emily refers us back to the cultural context in which she is embedded. In this context, the mobile device is present and therefore is culturally represented in her drawing. The girl's

graphics also evoke the unicorn, a mythical creature that plays a role in contemporary childhood imagination. Additionally, they express current symbolism related to fashion, entrepreneurship, and contemporary concepts.

In the digital context, there are countless unicorn-themed games. These games include puzzles, assemblies, aesthetic care, exploration of spaces, magical characters, movement, strength, competition, and the use of colors and shapes. In other words, these games help to bring fictional beings to life playfully. Emily's drawing reveals her understanding of this virtual reality and the technological and cultural experiences offered by society. Drawing reveals a child's everyday experiences and knowledge of her sociocultural space (Derdyk, 1994). According to Derdyk (1994), drawing is "the manifestation of a vital need of the child: to act on the world around them, to exchange, to communicate. The child projects their body schema onto their drawing, wanting to see their image reflected in the paper mirror" (Derdyk, 1994, p. 51).

1.1.1 Sophia and the selfie experience

Through drawing, children interpret the world around them, bringing with them their conceptions of themselves and their culture. For this reason, mobile devices appear in children's drawings. Technological artifacts, especially the internet, offer children the opportunity to build, reframe, and energize their knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. Undoubtedly, contemporary childhood is characterized by interaction with social and technological circumstances, as evidenced by different cultural experiences and various forms of graphic exploration. These forms of expression reveal "the views and conceptions of young children about their social, historical, and cultural context as they think, experience, and desire it" (Farias et al., 2022, p. 71).

Figure 2. Drawing by Sophia, age five, entitled "Me on my cell phone".



Source: Research archive (2023).

In Sophia's drawing, the mobile device (cell phone) is highlighted in red tones. She graphically represents her experience of viewing her selfie on it. Her smiling image wearing a red dress matches the cell phone's depiction of joy and fun with its attentive eyes and broad smile. The projection of the body schema is evident in the human-like facial expression on the phone. The aesthetics of Sophia's selfie are intertwined with the entertainment satisfaction provided by the technology. Thus, the graphics propose a representation of the cybercultural context experienced and desired by the child. The drawing demonstrates the child's perceptions of the world and her experience of the current context. According to Leite (1998), developing a sensitive eye and attentive ear is essential to understanding the reinterpretations of the world presented in a child's drawing.

1.1.1 Bernardo and the Team Flag

Nowadays, children are increasingly exposed to networked digital technologies, and mobile devices are incorporated into various forms of representation and reinterpretation of their sociocultural contexts. From an early age, children see cell phones as part of everyday life and artistic expression, just like other technological devices.

The children were sitting and looking for colors in the crayons and colored pencils to illustrate the drawings they wanted to make on the papers on the table. Then Bernardo sees the teacher and asks her for her cell phone to look at a picture of a flag. He said to the teacher:

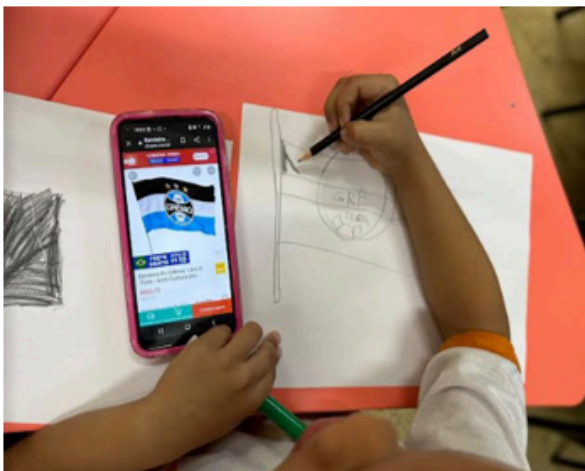
"Teacher, can you lend me your cell phone so I can look at the flag and draw it?"

The teacher lent him her cell phone. Bernardo searched for the flag of a soccer team, looked at it, and asked the teacher to write down the name of his favorite team. After this request, the child began to draw from observation, analyzing the details and colors using the cell phone. Upon completing the drawing, the boy seemed satisfied with the result (Logbook narrative – personal file).

During the artistic activity described above, we observed how engaged the children were with the colors of the crayons and colored pencils, the paper on the table, and the drawing possibilities offered to them at the moment. After all, colors attract attention and encourage children to manipulate, combine, and explore them. Additionally, Bernardo proposed using a mobile technological device, a cell phone, to develop his art. He encourages teachers to incorporate technology into artistic practices and highlights a resource that can help him create a more detailed representation of his intended drawing, the flag of a soccer team. Technology enables him to research and visualize the object to be represented and develop his observational drawing skills.

Based on his exploratory and investigative experience, Bernardo asks the teacher to incorporate the cell phone into his early childhood education routine to observe, document, and record an element of his cultural context—the flag of his favorite soccer team. In this way, he develops his perceptual, cognitive, and technical skills for reading and writing about the world in which he lives. According to Dorfman (2007), observational drawing precedes written language. Through it, children acquire perceptual and visumotor strategies of aesthetic language, "simultaneously developing visual perception and graphic ability" (Dorfman, 2007, p. 2). In observational drawing, the artist creates a mimetic representation of what they see; that is, they depict their perception of the object.

Figure 3. Drawing by Bernardo, age five, depicting his soccer team's flag.



Source: Research archive (2023).

In the first photo, Bernardo uses his cell phone to help him with his observational drawing. He explores the details of the object in the digital resource visually. He observes the colors, shapes, dimensions, and movement of the object to recreate it on a blank sheet of paper. He is seeking to construct the flag of Grêmio, a soccer team from Rio Grande do Sul. Bernardo also uses letters to indicate the team's initials, signaling the importance of writing as a social function. According to Kleiman (2001), this interest in words triggers a "set of social practices that use writing as a symbolic system and as a technology in specific contexts" (p. 17). Thus, children construct meanings for writing and become familiar with written language through the social dynamics in which they are immersed.

Next, another photo shows Bernardo with the team's flag drawn on it. Note the careful attention to detail in the drawing: the team colors, the size of the soccer ball in the center, the three stars at the top, and the initial letters of the team name, including the circumflex accent on the letter E — GRÊ. This demonstrates the child's meticulous observation in his drawing. Additionally, Bernardo draws two human figures with different facial expressions. Through this representation, he highlights the competitive nature of soccer. One figure smiles and has intensely colored eyes,

expressing joy, while the other displays displeasure, suggesting the possibility of defeat.

It is worth noting that Bernardo, at five years of age, understands and uses the mobile device (cell phone) in a meaningful and attentive way when employing this artifact for research and detailing his observational drawing.

By asking the teacher to use this technology and proposing his methodology for composing the drawing, he signals that technological resources can represent a new form of contextualization, research, and creation of his artistic expressions. Technology, when used ethically and responsibly, shows us that, in a drawing and in an object, reading an image goes beyond the act of seeing, since "reading an image would be reading a text, a plot, a fabric with shapes, colors, volumes" (Pillar, 2001, p. 12).

1.1.3 Maria Luiza, Samuel, Bernardo, and the dinosaur drawing

We believe that technological artifacts can be allies of aesthetic education, presenting an interpretation of the world through a new sociocultural perspective.

Once again, the children drew from observation, seeking to portray what they saw and how they saw their surroundings. Maria Luiza picks up a cell phone (turned off) and pretends she is playing a game app to paint the dinosaur. She comments:

"I'm going to use blue and green."

At that moment, Samuel and Bernardo also express their desire to draw a dinosaur and ask the teacher for her cell phone to observe the colors and shapes of the prehistoric animal. Then Bernardo says:

"Samuel, shall we try to draw a dinosaur?"

They manipulate the cell phone screen and look for the dinosaur they would like to represent in the drawing. Samuel starts drawing, and Bernardo interrupts him. Samuel complains:

"First, I was doing this one [points to the photo of the dinosaur on the smartphone screen].

With the cell phone, they looked at the images and tried to draw them and to play with them on the sheet of paper (Logbook narrative – personal file).

The narrative refers to observational drawing and its potential to develop perception, observation, and analysis of dimensions, shapes, colors, and similarities and differences. Maria Luiza's inventiveness is evident in creating functions for a turned-off mobile device and her ability to design a fictional game called "App Game

to Paint the Dinosaur." This demonstrates that children can reinterpret the school environment and its activities playfully, even when faced with directive proposals. In Maria Luiza's play, we see her inventiveness ("app game"), imaginary function ("painting the dinosaur"), magical form ("dinosaur"), and colors ("blue and green"). She plays and rethinks the world, incorporating her experiences, sociocultural knowledge, and her desire to discover new things. This brings us back to Benjamin's (2009) idea that imagination is fundamental to child development and allows children to transform everyday objects into toys.

In the playful narrative, Samuel and Bernardo, attentive to Maria Luiza's game, show a desire to draw a dinosaur. The boys' proposal gives material form to what belonged to the fictional realm, as they ask for the teacher's mobile device and aim to use technology to observe the colors and shapes of the prehistoric animal. Guidelines for observational drawings typically include realistic elements, such as an object, picture, or photograph, whenever possible. In Samuel and Bernardo's case, the cell phone screen becomes an important resource, materializing the image they intend to draw: the "photo of the dinosaur on the smartphone screen." In addition to observation and drawing, the narrative highlights that the children wanted to "play with the images on the sheet of paper." The colors, images, drawings, and resources also become elements of play for the children. Technology in early childhood education is fundamental to enhancing playful artistic inventiveness. In this regard, it is worth noting that "screens are not play itself; they are the means by which play and connections happen" (Couto, 2013, p. 910). "With connectivity, access to information and human relationship development have become more intense" (Couto, 2013, p. 910).

The teacher's complicity in this process is notable; she demonstrates understanding and flexibility in her methodology regarding to the children's play and ideas. The teacher-researcher acts as a mediator in the pedagogical proposal and recognizes the technological resources that the children suggest to enhance their imaginative capacity, as well as the construction and re-signification of knowledge, sensitivity, and new perspectives on the world.

Figure 4. Drawing by Samuel, age five, based on a photograph of a dinosaur.



Source: Research archive (2023).

Five-year-old Samuel explores the cell phone using his visual and motor skills. The touch screen is familiar to him. He slides his fingers across the screen, searching for pictures of dinosaurs, and selects the one he likes best. After selecting the image, he carefully observes the dinosaur's body structure, seeking to recreate it with the details his gaze and creativity encompass. Features such as beaks, feet, eyes, colors, shapes, and dimensions take shape in Samuel's artistic creations. The observed element incorporates the observer's experiences and knowledge, while mobile technology offers the possibility of visualizing the object.

Through the cell phone, the child's observation highlights the perception of a playful and technological perspective that increasingly points to the need for new ways of learning and looking at contemporary childhood. Aesthetic, cognitive, social, and cultural exercises seem to establish the mobile device as a resource for enhancing children's potential. However, teacher mediation is essential to guide this generation familiar with technology in an ethical and responsible manner. For this reason, it is important to view the teacher as "someone who, based on the world they read and interact with critically and reflectively, begins to generate seeds for

their evolution through their actions as an individual and as an agent of social transformation" (Vasconcelos e Brito, 2014, p. 181). Through this dialogical, dynamic, and reflective practice, we can encourage children's artistic "mischief," inviting us to view the world from their perspective (Barros, 2017, n.p.).

Final considerations

In early childhood education, the presence of cell phones in children's hands does not seem strange or invasive. Rather, they are a living part of the children's daily lives, playing and communicating. These devices are cultural artifacts that support invention and the creation of gestures that transcend the body and imagination. Additionally, they constitute screen-mediated toys that remain linked to the classroom, playtime, the playground, conversations among children, and teacher-student interactions.

Throughout the research process, it became clear that children use cell phones and reinvent them. They record videos, narrate stories, make sounds, position the device, observe their reflection, laugh, show it to others, and record what they find beautiful. They transform the devices into symbolic toys and windows to worlds that blend the real and the imaginary. They are spaces for expression. Cell phones become an extension of gestures, gazes, and playful, inventive thinking.

In this context, Law No. 15.100/2025, which restricts cell phone use in schools, is a source of tension. Although the law aims to protect attention, bonding, and the pedagogical process, its broad language creates loopholes that allow for strict interpretations, which can prohibit meaningful experiences, such as those observed in this research. By failing to differentiate between contexts, purposes, or age groups, the law risks reinforcing a punitive, adult-centric logic that disregards the ways in which cell phones can enable children to express themselves. Recognizing cell phones as a language and not just a distraction requires more listening than prohibition or regulation (Maddalena, 2025).

This kind of listening transforms everyday school life. It involves listening to what children want to show when they turn on the camera, listening to the silence between clicks, listening to the sparkle in their eyes when they watch the recording,

and listening to the political and aesthetic power of childhood in the digital age. As Malaguzzi (2016) proposed, each child has a hundred ways of speaking, some of which may include short videos, the record button, the photo app, or the game of being a YouTuber. Listening is accepting the challenge of understanding these languages.

Finally, this research reaffirms that cell phones do not impoverish play when mediated by sensitive bonds and projects; on the contrary, they can expand it. Phones can be portals to other narratives, collective experiences, and the exercise of children's authorship. Schools must decide whether to ban or cultivate these possibilities. Society, public policies, and legal frameworks—such as Law No. 15.100/2025—must recognize that protecting childhood is not about prohibiting out of fear but about courageously accompanying with open eyes, attentive ears, and outstretched hands.

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