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Articles

Educational discourses on digital play: disciplinary mechanisms and new configurations of docility

Discursos educacionais sobre o brincar digital: mecanismos disciplinares e novas configurações da docilidade

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Abstract

This article investigates educational discourses on children's play with digital technologies, based on the analysis of dissertations and theses produced in Graduate Programs in Education. Grounded in Michel Foucault's theoretical contributions, the study highlights how digital play practices are articulated with disciplinary mechanisms, not to abolish the subject, but to reconfigure it into new forms of docility. These practices combine surveillance and control with discourses of freedom and autonomy, creating an ambivalence in which children's cooperation occurs through voluntary submission, thereby reinforcing disciplinary power under the appearance of autonomy. In late modernity, control ceases to be rigid and begins to operate in subtle and adaptable ways, using the idea of freedom as a strategy of governance. In this context, digital play becomes a central space for understanding how education shapes subjects that self-regulate and adjust to the social and technological demands of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: education; play; digital technologies; discipline; docility.

Resumo

O artigo investiga os discursos educacionais sobre o brincar das crianças com tecnologias digitais, a partir da análise de dissertações e teses produzidas em Programas de Pós-Graduação em Educação. Fundamentado nas contribuições de Michel Foucault, o estudo evidencia como práticas lúdicas digitais se articulam a mecanismos disciplinares, não para abolir a disciplina, mas para reconfigurá-la em novas formas de docilidade. Essas práticas articulam vigilância e controle com discursos de liberdade e autonomia, criando uma ambivalência em que a cooperação infantil se dá pela submissão voluntária, reforçando o poder disciplinar sob a aparência de autonomia. Na modernidade tardia, o controle deixa de ser rígido e passa a operar de forma sutil e adaptável, usando a ideia de liberdade como estratégia de governo. Nesse contexto, o brincar digital torna-se um espaço central para entender como a educação forma sujeitos que se autorregulam e se ajustam às demandas sociais e tecnológicas do século XXI.

Palavras-chave: educação; brincar; tecnologias digitais; disciplina; docilidade.

INTRODUCTION

This study forms part of a broader research project that examines how discourses in dissertations and theses on children's play in the digital age, defended in Graduate Programs in Education (Habowski, 2023; Habowski; Ratto, 2025; Habowski; Ratto; Henning, 2025), generate and shape understandings of children's interactions with digital technologies during play. The primary objective is to investigate, through enunciative analysis, the mechanisms these

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discourses employ to establish systems of truth and how these systems influence behaviors and perceptions related to digital play, particularly through disciplinary strategies. Rather than merely describing or debating digital play, these academic works construct norms and frameworks that determine what can be scientifically explored and prioritized in relation to children's digital experiences.

Within this framework, genealogy is understood as a historical approach that investigates the constitution of knowledge, discourses, and academic fields without centering on a specific subject (Foucault, 2001b). By privileging exteriority, the analysis shifts focus from the individual who speaks to the content of what is said, while also considering the position from which the utterance is made. Consequently, it is unnecessary to provide detailed descriptions of the dissertations that facilitated the analytical exercise presented here. Rather than emphasizing the irrelevance of the enunciating subject - who is itself constituted and traversed by regimes of truth - the analysis prioritizes the potential for problematization that emerges from these works, rather than their quantity or scope.

Thus, the analysis follows Foucault's (2006, p. 34) question regarding the discussion about the author: "Who cares who speaks?" More important than identifying the author is paying attention to what is said, to the discourse itself. Here, "the author, not understood, of course, as the speaking individual who uttered or wrote a text, but the author as the principle of grouping discourse, as the unity and origin of its meanings, as the focus of its coherence." It is, therefore, a matter of giving visibility to statements that go beyond the author himself, but which are consumed and assumed as legitimate in the discursive field of Education.

Accordingly, for the writing of this text, we designated the documentary corpus circumscribed by enunciations concerning the disciplining of the child subject, drawing on two doctoral theses (defended in 2014 and 2019) and eight master's dissertations (defended between 2007 and 2018). For identification purposes, we assigned ascending numbers to each work, using the letter T for theses and the letter D for dissertations. The studies analyzed here were defended in Graduate Programs in four states of the country, namely: São Paulo (6); Bahia (4); Rio Grande do Sul (1), and Amazonas (1). A thorough examination of this material enables an exploration of the discourses surrounding play in relation to digital technologies.

It should be noted that, although this study focuses on two doctoral theses and eight dissertations, the overall project analyzes 14 academic works - five doctoral theses and nine master's dissertations - defended between 2010 and 2019. These were identified through the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), emphasizing works that address play and digital technologies in education. Analysis of these 14 studies highlights how discourses construct digital play and the disciplinary mechanisms that shape it as a new form of docility, which is the core of our reflection.

Discourses not only describe realities but also create, govern societies, shape cultures, and define subjects (Foucault, 1995). As vehicles of particular truths, they establish knowledge, determine norms, and influence power relations by indicating which actions are possible, desirable, acceptable, and necessary (Foucault, 2002a). Thus, this analysis goes beyond simply seeking "truth"; it examines the conditions that enable such discourses and their effects on how childhood, play, and digital technologies are discussed in the contemporary context.

DISCIPLINARY MECHANISMS AND THE "NEW" CONFIGURATION OF DOCILITY

For the functioning of what Foucault (2001a; 2002b) called the "great disciplinary functions," disciplinary instruments require classification, temporal and spatial organization, extraction of forces, and composition of skills. By articulating with these functions, ensuring their economic gear-like nature, these instruments enable discreet execution, yet with a major impact on the population, operating efficiently and with low energy consumption. Thus, it is not only the operators who ensure the successful exercise of disciplinary power; it is equally necessary to strategically use the space, time, and forces of individuals - in this study, with an emphasis on children - so constituting the basis for the effective application of disciplinary mechanisms.

To govern a given population, it is necessary to conceive of it as a specific sphere of reality, endowed with its own characteristics and dynamics. Such a conception requires the adoption of

explanatory frameworks that make its features observable, articulable, and analyzable. In this sense, governing implies not only knowing, but above all, confining. Knowledge plays a central role in this context, making certain aspects of existence thinkable and calculable, expanding the possibility of political interventions in people's lives. At the dawn of modernity, the creation of hospitals, prisons, educational and military institutions highlights the importance of confinement operations for the implementation of disciplinary tactics. Concerns about populations began to expand not only due to numerical growth, but also to the inclusion of new social segments and strata.

Between the power that affects the body of the individual subject and the power that acts on the body-species, Foucault (2010) identifies modes of control and surveillance of life that are not limited to mere circumscription, but also enhance it. In this sense, training (political anatomy) and concern for the population (biopolitics) stand out. These two axes converge in the governmentalization of the state, directed at both the individual body and population regulation.

By focusing on the child population, which is growing in number and simultaneously becoming more individualized, the government is increasingly concentrating on early education, backed by clear legal mandates. The definition of formalized educational spaces, although distinct from the family and with specific demands, seeks to promote the well-being of the population and improve their living conditions. Discourses focused on children and their education guide initiatives for transformation, exercising control, and promoting cognitive and social development.

According to Foucault (2002b), practices that aim to act on bodies for disciplinary purposes, directed at both individuals and populations, require a series of power procedures, among which confinement stands out. However, this study focuses on another indirect effect of this process: confinement as a tool not only to act directly on the child, but also to establish closer control in conjunction with the family. The following excerpt illustrates how spatial organization can influence children's behavior, functioning as a governance tool by anticipating and guiding the actions expected of children in the defined space of action. In this context, it is observed that families face difficulties in dealing with children's demands related to the use of digital technologies. In this context, the school takes on significant importance as a potential redeemer:

> (...) **We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the lack of monitoring by families, as well as the absence of other playful experiences provided to children, offering them only the option of interacting with technologies, without proper mediation of the amount of time the child spends immersed in digital environments, can indeed cause isolation**. Therefore, we always emphasize **that children alone do not have the maturity or "responsibility" to discern all the dynamics provided by digital culture. In this child-technology relationship, family mediation can be a differentiating variable** (Thesis 1, 2019, p. 222, emphasis added).

The excerpt shows the capillarity and solidarity of disciplinary operations. By acting in various segments of the population related to childhood, control seeks to achieve greater efficiency in dealing with families who also face difficulties in dealing with their children and their relationship with digital technologies. The processes that occur with children attract the attention of other segments, becoming the target of interventions. Different alliances are formed when it is realized that technologies "also offer families the opportunity to monitor everything their children have learned during the day" (Dissertation 8, 2018, p. 29). Even though the family is a private institution, it must fulfill its social obligations by promoting the personal aspirations of its members. Accordingly, adults see maximizing their children's physical and mental well-being as the best path to their own happiness.

However, disciplinary mechanisms are not limited to confining children as a way of establishing productive relationships with digital technologies, but are also reinforced by other operations that accompany or even replace them. According to Foucault (2002b, p. 131), "the principle of enclosure is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary apparatuses." To this end, "they work the space in a much more flexible and subtle way. And first and foremost,

according to the principle of immediate location or grid. Each individual in their place; and in each place an individual" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 123).

As institutionalized initiatives take on the role of observational laboratories, it becomes essential to highlight what is visible and directly measurable in order to ensure that the knowledge produced from observations can be effectively used to understand and improve interventions. Each individual must occupy their place: for this reason, in schools, practices such as segmentation by subject, the use of uniforms, the formation of groups, and the organization of classrooms by age group are widely recommended, explicitly establishing responsibility for each group.

The relevance of this distribution is based on the strategic perspective of surveillance operations. Such operations are designed to immobilize individuals and make them instantly accessible, allowing their presence and absence to be identified, determining where and how to find them, regulating the flow of communication, and monitoring behavior, whether to apply sanctions or evaluate their quality (Foucault, 2002b). At the same time, other operations aim to structure and optimize this grid-based organization, creating conditions that position individuals in such a way as to enable continuous monitoring.

Schools, like other institutions, were initially responsible for manufacturing what Foucault (2002b) called filters, that is, devices that fix and grid. It is a matter of managing an individualizing grid so that everyone becomes an object of observation and information. Playing with digital technologies is one of the possible means of scrutinizing ways of exercising power over children and the truths implied in these strategies, which operate as a means of maintaining and implementing the devices of government. The law, as a norm, needs to be accompanied by the selection of materials and the organization and application of activities involving children. This manifests itself through subtle coercion and appeals to freedom, since individuals participate and cooperate more when these choices are linked to the idea of voluntary submission.

> We found that **the playfulness present in the activities led to greater interest in the content among the children and, consequently, greater involvement and commitment to the tasks**. The presence **of immediate feedback, an inherent feature of games, helped children improve their autonomy and self-confidence in performing the activities** (Dissertation 8, 2018, p. 105-106, emphasis added).

> **By experiencing playful situations, children develop their self-control, because during games or play, they have to respect the rules and roles imposed by the group for these activities to be carried out successfully** (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 59, emphasis added).

Paradoxically, it is in the realization of the claimed freedom to play that one of the conditions for intensifying control over those who are subjugated will be found. Voluntary submission and immediate feedback are examples of this. Control activities can become more economical and have a greater impact on children, giving them free will and self-determination. It seems to us that this economy takes place in a kind of credit-debit system, a mechanism set in motion so that those who become free are given the responsibilities of self-control.

The exercise of power identifies education as a favorable field for producing normalized subjects, insofar as educational determinations point to practices of subjectivation of children. It is through education that the desired behavior in relation to playful experiences with digital technologies is established, since it is possible to stimulate and reproduce, in this context, the capacity for persuasion and acceptance:

> **Education must be seen as something that gives pleasure. One must learn by "playing." It is not playing for the sake of playing, but playing in order to learn. Schools (and by extension, teachers) cannot remain stuck in time. If their goal is to integrate students into modern society, they must make intensive use of the resources that technology offers**. And young people want this (Dissertation 2, 2007, p. 18, emphasis added).

Digital technologies are considered indispensable and promoters of development, with the freedom to influence individuals, since they have scientific and institutional support to promote

such changes. In short, education is conceived as a work of calculated thought and technical action in processes that are conceived as areas of possibility. A technical practice in which results must be produced based on a prediction. Gradually, the guidelines will form habits, while meticulous and cautious work will impress minds and stimulate children's memory, achieving this result through a constant commitment to obligations. Playing with digital technologies will gradually come to be considered essential for development. Therefore, digital technologies should serve conscious teaching projects and actively link them to children's development, while at the same time making it possible to govern them. And thus, pedagogical practice must build a healthy and balanced subject, which is achieved through the complex articulation of discourses and practices.

It is important to note that educational institutions are spaces for teaching, as well as spaces for reward, surveillance, and restriction, configuring themselves as spaces for producing bodies and improving them morally and intellectually. Under this logic, the suggested occupations that represent activities with objects would need to be regulated in order to standardize them and ensure that they were internalized. Through this internalization, children would self-regulate, resulting in what Foucault (2001b) characterizes as self-government: discipline and control that first come from outside and are then internalized.

Through this internalization, children would self-regulate, resulting in what Foucault (2001b) characterizes as self-government: discipline and control that first come from outside and are then internalized. That is, *"[TDs] need to be employed for educational action that promotes substantial changes in subjects and contributes to qualitatively redefining their possibilities for social development*" (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 30). To this end, the categories of space and time are of fundamental importance in describing the functioning of power relations, since subjects are also managed and their actions controlled through the organization of space and time in the educational environment.

The proposed practices suggest modes of interaction that aim to subjectivize individuals, a detailed pedagogical prescription for the referral of moments involving play. Education would serve to internalize basic conformities, as it conveys and operates power relations using strategic means, skilled abilities, and different mechanisms to ensure different effects that are productive. In these situations, adults act as privileged interlocutors and have the power to direct children's activities. To this end, *"[e]ducation must keep pace with the changes taking place in society itself. Teachers cannot ignore the use of new technologies in the teaching-learning process [...]"* (Dissertation 2, 2007, p.16). Therefore, childhood would be a favorable time for educational intervention, so that institutions and adults working with children should make the most of this opportunity. Moral regulation is implemented in educational spaces through physical exercises as well as by stimulating the development of the intellect, behavior, and emotion management.

Time management establishes durations, reduces irregularities, and optimizes efforts, configuring a virtuous and strategic conception of time. In this context, time acts as an agent of social forces, while the duration of actions should enable action in the sphere of influence of others. Space is also part of the institutional regulatory apparatus, being segmented by age groups and types of activity. Also, time and space function as instruments of calculated coercion, imposing limited standards that organize power and make it effective. Regulated practices, structured through the distribution of activities and the organization of schedules, shape individuals capable of submitting to norms, developing habits, and following instructions. When these practices are constantly directed at children, an environment is created in which they are permanently exposed to objects, habits, and commands, promoting their socialization and conformity within institutional norms.

In this sense, the control of activities, actions, and the division of time characterize a space in which practices of control and discipline prevail, always with active surveillance. Based on Foucault (2002b), we can understand that discipline is the link between power and knowledge, which constitutes a kind of political economy in which manifestation is conditioned and the subject is constituted. "Discipline manufactures individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that takes individuals at the same time as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power (...)", but "it is a modest, distrustful power that functions like a

calculated but permanent economy" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 153). Strict and orderly external routines also correspond to intimate life, to the improvement of inner control that aims at moral regulation, self-control. It is, therefore, a gradual and slow action that would ensure that a certain goal is achieved and subjectivation is effective.

Activities involving the use of digital technologies would provide training and encourage manipulation. It seems that playing with digital technologies in education is seen as a kind of controlled educational support, in which children's initiatives are rejected on the grounds of the need to provide scripts and content to achieve certain teaching objectives. Dissertation 1 (2013) uses an excerpt from Revista Pátio (apud 2011, p. 5) to say that children are living in a time of rapid change, particularly in childhood. Here is the quote:

> Many teachers experience the fact that today's students demand new approaches and teaching methods in order to maintain attention and motivation in school. We hear many of them say that students pay attention to activities for a short period of time, and that they cannot listen to someone speak for more than five minutes. Teachers say that children cannot concentrate on a single task, doing several activities at the same time, and that they expect instant answers when they ask a question.

Based on this, the author of dissertation 1 (2013, p. 79, emphasis added) comments that:

> In this sense, **working with games would provide children with stimulation for attention, concentration, cooperation, and the exercise of rules that require self-control, altruism, etc**. According to the above report, what hinders this attention is the fact that children perform more than one task at the same time.

Here, it is possible to identify the use of directive guidelines on the use of play, in which the teacher's supervision and guidance are fundamental, leaving no room for children to navigate freely. Daily activities are organized in advance, in a fixed sequence, aiming to control everything that happens during the child's stay at the institution. It is a matter of capturing, producing, and pedagogically adjusting the child's relationship with themselves and having their transformation as a stated goal. According to Foucault (1988, p.47), these behaviors are extracted from bodies through various devices of power, constantly "[...] requested, installed, isolated, intensified, and incorporated." The norm establishes habit, regularity, and is productive, relating to knowledge and power insofar as it establishes rational criteria that are expressed as objectives and, at the same time, is rooted in power because it constitutes the principles of conduct regulation in which social practices of discipline operate.

Some normative and disciplinary aspects experienced by children in educational institutions can be highlighted, since few actions occur spontaneously in this space. The environment is carefully defined, time is strictly marked by precise, regular, and regulated schedules, and the learning process is structured in stages so that specific skills are practiced in each period. In addition, a set of regulated forms of communication is established - consisting of commands, warnings, and coded signals of obedience - as well as pedagogical practices such as questionnaires, lessons, and assessments. Added to these practices are mechanisms of power, expressed in exams, rewards, and punishments, which shape the field of what is possible to think, say, perceive, and accomplish in educational institutions.

It is mainly in educational institutions that power operates to produce corrections and training in human behavior in the bodies and souls of children. In the words of Foucault (2002b, p. 158), in disciplinary operations, power "does not stand still like a thing, it does not transfer like a property, it functions like a machine." Thus, such pedagogical principles make it clear that occupations aim to guide children toward harmony, regularity, and control of movements, and to adopt a rational education guided by the spirit of order. In this case, even if children appear insubordinate, they will be constantly monitored by the teacher. Foucault (2002b) tells us that this type of investment in the individual's body spread to various institutions and, especially from the 18th century onwards, occupied children in institutions dedicated to education.

The school, as the guarantor of good pedagogical practices, would need to ensure the proper playful use of digital technologies. After all, "*children who live in the context of cyberculture hardly ever experience silence, idleness, lack of communication, or nothing to do, because there are so*

many possibilities for doing something from home. Standing still really feels strange" (Thesis 2, 2014, p. 135). To this end, disciplinary strategies are applied that, through coercion, exert a subtle influence on the child's body, with the school serving as a redemptive environment for the improvement of behavior. Children are not isolated, but separated. Children are placed in a context that does not extinguish their individuality, but relates them to others to enhance the usefulness of playing with digital technologies. The space serves as a means of distributing children, allowing them to be analyzed, making them usable, individually or together.

However, spatial distribution does not exhaust the functions performed by disciplinary mechanisms. In addition to covering a space that is simultaneously cellular, analytical, functional, and operational, children will have another mode of disciplinary control undertaken by the power relations in which they are situated. These are the operations of control over activities in relation to time. To achieve docility, space, time, and movement need to be codified and continuously exercised. Time needs to be fully useful in disciplinary operations. Time must be fully utilized and provide the opportunity to carry out the activities that are most characteristic and important in working with children:

> **It is impossible to prohibit children from watching TV, but it is possible to limit its use and use it in favor of programming stipulated for their age with educational objectives**. Thus, we can **take advantage of the benefits that technology offers us, always in a cautious manner, in order to select programs and with limited time** (Dissertation 1, 2013, p. 71, emphasis added).

Manipulating children's bodies in relation to activities also involves analyzing how fractions of actions relate to parts of time. This is what Foucault (2002b, p.138) called the temporal elaboration of the act: "the act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, and joints is defined for each movement, a certain direction, an amplitude, a duration; its order of succession is prescribed." It is a matter of time penetrating the body, "and with it all the minute controls of power" (Foucault, 2002b, p.138). Everything must be under control, so that all activities need to be developed in order to extract the maximum precision or usefulness from them: "*therefore, it is important to think about different ways of teaching and learning that contribute to the individual and collective production of knowledge, precisely because of the possibilities for exchanging information and sharing experiences offered by the web*" (Dissertation 6, 2013, p.19). The connection of the body to the object is one of the operations performed by disciplinary technique. This connection is made in such a way that every manipulation of an object corresponds to an action capable of performing it. According to Foucault (2002b), time can be capitalized by combining progressive and multiple series.

Operations distributed in segments, from the simplest to the most complex, can be regrouped to form new chains. Each part of a series must be completed before moving on to the next, and new series can be added to each series. Disciplinary time consists of several progressive series. "Exercise is the technique by which tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graded, are imposed on bodies" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 145). Thus, grading and repetition are significant elements of disciplinary procedures associated with the mastery of gestures and bodily manipulation. The excerpt from the dissertation below shows games as part of children's actions in which the body and objects are explored through repetition, which initially seeks learning and, ultimately, satisfaction:

> Studies on development, among which Jean Piaget stands out, have brought the understanding that there is much evidence regarding **play as part of children's actions from the earliest moments of life**, where their own bodies and other objects are explored repeatedly with the initial purpose of learning, but ultimately with **repetitions that bring satisfaction** (Dissertation 7, 2016, p. 31, emphasis added).

The propositions of playing with digital technologies also focus on the constitution of time in series, with an evolutionary duration. The insertion of levels allows power to act over time. Let's look at the excerpt below:

> In the virtual environment (Play Space), games, **play, and various activities seek to address levels of complexity from the most basic to the most complex**, aiming to

> address a diverse range of content that applies to various contexts in which the teacher can draw upon when **addressing topics ranging from simple memory games to working with concepts of art and storytelling in text, audio, or video**, seeking to present not a vast amount of activities but **options that allow students to understand the cognitive process in all its stages most simply and completely possible.**
>
> In the Play Space, the items included seek to adapt to the levels of taxonomy, and the **items produced by teachers and students should always observe these characteristic levels, also contemplating stages of increasing complexity** to allow a teaching dynamic that best **favors the understanding of concepts and themes at levels compatible with the child's development** (Dissertation 7, 2016, p. 49, emphasis added).

Disciplinary mechanisms (which allocate children in space, organize time, design and recompose activities, and capitalize on increasingly higher degrees of utility) also combine forces to maximize the efficiency of the apparatus. In order for this combination to extract all the capacities of each segmented individual, the demands made on each one are reflected in the whole. Thus, failure to comply with a request compromises the whole. According to Foucault (2002b, p.147), "discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting and accumulating their time. But of composing forces to obtain an efficient apparatus." The body becomes part of a machine composed of many parts. Similarly, the time of each one needs to be adjusted to the time of the others. The mechanism works like a gear. However, the gear operates if there is a precise command system:

> In contact with the games, **the ease and speed with which they started suggested the rapid organization of the students for the experience, in addition to their concern with stipulating rules to enable everyone to play. These children demonstrated a certain autonomy in organizing themselves to play, since on some occasions they changed the strategies used in order to improve the game experience and encourage everyone to participate**. Thus, **they demanded that the proposed organization be respected**. In view of this, **some conflicts arose, but they were resolved peacefully, which shows that these children value playing together with their classmates**. Playing with parents, siblings, or relatives at home proved to be a part of the daily lives of the sixth-grade students surveyed, and some of them even **demonstrated autonomy in managing their playtime on technological device**s. (Dissertation 4, 2017, p. 118, emphasis added).

The excerpt shows that the children demonstrated autonomy and organization when playing, changing strategies and demanding respect for the proposed organization, with moments of conflict that were resolved peacefully, valuing interaction with their peers. The purpose of disciplinary instruments (surveillance, normalizing sanctions, and examination) is to produce ordinary individuals every day and everywhere. However, Foucault's (2002b) analysis of individuation goes beyond that of his predecessors. The thinker shows that individualization occurs in a double movement with homogenization. These are complementary movements that occur simultaneously. However, they do not form a dyad; they are not contradictory. What happens is that for a population to be homogeneous, it must necessarily be made up of individualized units that are equal to each other. Relentlessly involved in the game that individualizes and totalizes it.

According to Foucault (2002b, p. 171), individualization is a downward process: "as power becomes more functional, those over whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized." This individualization occurs through measures of inspection, observation, and comparison, taking the norm as a reference. Therefore, even if playing with digital technologies is collective, it is necessary to characterize individual differences. Even when playing collectively, they remain unique in their individuality:

> **Drawing up a profile of the children involved** in the research **means considering the individual differences characterized by the diverse contexts in which they are inserted**. The objective here is to present a brief **characterization of the children who participated in the research so that, throughout the analyses**, they are always

> **referred to as concrete subjects situated in a social context** (Dissertation 3, 2014, p. 103, emphasis added).

To address this trend toward individualization, it is necessary to focus on children and the processes that occur with them [in this regard, academic research takes on great importance]. In order to devise pedagogical practices to capture children, it is essential to have a fixed object as an individual and known in detail. Thus, it is worth noting that such pedagogical operations have the individualizing function of classifying, differentiating, and fixing the particular characteristics of each child. The body becomes the surface for these marks.

The possibilities are endless in the ways of conjecturing children in their individualities. Classifications, which operate through ordering operations, make it understood that what happens to children is natural and that such categorizations represent these processes. Institutions as disciplinary spaces and spaces of will based on order consist of dividing individuals according to their individual characteristics. Identities are interesting for establishing estrangement, and subsequently the dichotomy of opposition: there is no longer identification with the other, becoming strangers. In this way, asymmetry comes into play, and identity, not just an epistemological act of distribution, is framed as an operation of power, as a frame of reference, and responsibility falls on the other of difference.

Based on this, perhaps we can understand why knowing and distributing children is included in a movement that generates the engendering of exclusion. In this way, exclusion is what marks the negative aspects of normalization, in which it defines the immature, the pathological. It therefore draws the boundaries that establish distinctions, define limits, and demarcate areas. This occurs because, as we saw in the excerpts presented above, some behaviors, when determined to be the best, suggest the exclusion of others that are not.

In Late Modernity, in institutions where traditional discipline begins to give way to control, a new approach to exclusion emerges. In this context, exclusion is no longer accepted, as everything and everyone must be included. The perspective is that nothing can be lost or wasted, and nothing should be left out. In this new paradigm, exclusion is no longer seen as a viable solution. Inclusion becomes a fundamental value, as it recognizes the importance of all people and their contributions to the functioning and success of institutions. The diversity of perspectives, skills, and experiences is valued as a source of mutual enrichment.

In this way, educational institutions gain power with the implementation of new interventions in their areas of expertise, especially those related to psychology and pedagogy. This type of understanding and practice fits into the repetitive and routine school model, in a system in which children are considered potential capital. According to Kuhlmann Junior (1998), detailed prescriptions predominated with the aim of presenting a logical sequence of activities and the ritualized use of materials, with extensive and detailed procedures to be adopted by teachers and children. The constant recommendations work to capture meaning in a way that leaves no room for misunderstanding, as the discourses enunciated take on the meaning conferred by the format of the vocabulary or glossary, which limits and reduces a certain way of being, in this case, that of the teacher.

What the excerpt below allows us to perceive is that, to a certain extent, the behaviors are already expected to be performed by children, predefined. It demonstrates the precocity of playing with digital technologies and the need to revive the experience of traditional games:

> (...) **Childhood is becoming precocious** in terms of attitudes, behavior, dress, and, particularly, **the way children play. They are not interested in traditional nursery rhymes, games, and folk games, which carry** a wealth of cultural and historical baggage, **today, what matters to them is "being fashionable,"** owning a cell phone (the most technologically advanced possible), having internet access, Facebook - recommended minimum age 13 - being a "pro" at games, and owning the maximum amount of consumer goods that are shown in the media and multimedia (Dissertation 1, 2013, p. 35, emphasis added).

Normalization requires the establishment of a standard as a reference. Normal is defined as meeting this reference standard criterion. The process of individualization is therefore inseparable from these rituals of observation, these normative measures, inspections, in

short, because "examination is at the center of the processes that constitute the individual as an effect and object of power, as an effect and object of knowledge" (Foucault, 2002b, p. 171).

Thus, it is worth noting that the emphasis in discourse on the importance of play and games through digital technologies can be understood as an effect of the new intervention devices created in Late Modernity to implement ways of acting on children. "*Therefore, there is an increasing need for schools to develop pedagogical activities with DT from early childhood education onwards, so that these children can expand the knowledge necessary for the development of their skills*" (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 49). Time and the body must be used to the fullest, without idleness, so that activities are efficient and carried out in an optimized manner.

Although schools have always undergone [and continue to undergo] transformations, we can still think of them as a system based on discipline, constituting a machinery that controls schedules, spaces, learning, and ways of evaluating students. However, we would like to emphasize here that the organization of space, which enabled a comprehensive and permanent disciplinary vision, is currently undergoing a process of flexibilization. That is, no longer delimited places, rows, but fabrics in motion. The rigid models of confinement and distribution of space seem to be being abandoned: we are moving away from a disciplinary society and entering a society of control, as Deleuze (2019) points out. We are moving away from confinement through constant control and immediate communication. The different spatial organizations made possible by digital technologies, from discourses that value freedom and the richness of interactions, make it possible to organize differentiated spaces and group activities to allow for greater participation and control.

However, as we stated earlier, surveillance and normalization are not diminishing. It is more a matter of inventing new forms, made possible by new knowledge built through very rigorous observation techniques, to improve them and make them economical in their application.

> **[...] although children have freedom in play, sometimes the presence of an adult mediator is necessary to facilitate appropriate interactions, bearing in mind that this role should be performed by the teacher, who is responsible for stimulating and guiding problem solving, setting limits and freedom, offering suggestions, and controlling the child's frustration.** (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 41-42, emphasis added).

We can see that this is not about the desire to end discipline. The aim is to find a different kind of structured discipline, proposing a new relational economy, but still a disciplinary economy, albeit different from previous ones because, in addition to being flexible, it promotes freedom and encourages "liberation." Docility, which in the past was often seen as a passive disposition towards the demands of the environment or the orders of authorities, is undergoing a significant transformation in the times of Late Modernity. Increasingly, the new configuration of docility is characterized by a "surrendering" to movement, which implies always being in a state of readiness to adapt to the changes and demands that life presents.

This new type of docility in playful experiences with digital technologies can be observed in the excerpts presented thus far, with notions of pleasure, freedom, and fully experience childhood. This is justified by the understanding that in a world of constant change and technological evolution, the ability to learn new skills and adopt new technologies is essential as a foundation for life: "*after all, they have been present since the birth of these children and will continue to occupy an increasingly central place in their lives*" (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 41). For this to occur, teachers must maintain an open and adaptable mindset, capable of engaging fully in the learning and change process.

In this "new" configuration of docility, it is essential that the body remains in constant motion, even if accelerated or compelled to continuously "liberate" itself from any restrictions related to spaces and educational methodologies. A flexible and adaptable body learns to respond to environmental demands without losing its capacity for free movement. Thus, it is important to note that this new configuration of docility does not imply a blind or passive surrender of the child to the demands of playing with digital technologies. On the contrary, it requires a measure of awareness and choice, as it is necessary to consciously decide where and how to invest energy, as well as when it is necessary to step back or establish healthy limits. Beyond digital technologies, "*educational institutions must also provide activities in the playground, where*

children can run, jump, interact with one another, get dirty, and, ultimately, live childhood to the fullest" (Dissertation 5, 2014, p. 42).

> We understand that, **in this relationship between prohibition and permission, the immediate response of forbidding or allowing is not the solution; therefore, we opt for the path of mediation**. (...) Beyond simply authorizing or denying the use of technologies, it is the adult's role to be a partner in the child's discoveries within this virtual environment, helping the child to understand these spaces as well as to develop new knowledge and experiences with and about them (Dissertation 1, 2019, p. 220, emphasis added).

This is, above all, a form of self - governance. Each child is "free," but on the condition of maintaining order. The discourse surrounding the mitigation of discipline seems to establish a system of sovereigns among sovereigns; all are sovereign, so that no one is more sovereign than the others. What can occur is that one sovereign may be more experienced than the others and can therefore guide/mediate/lead the other sovereigns. However, all remain sovereign, so that each sovereign is master of themselves and of their body.

In the fusion of discipline with proactivity, a docile and useful body is a living body, fully capable of initiative, even though controlled and regulated. However, this is a choice that aligns with what the teacher considers the "right" choice. This more flexible disciplining seems to camouflage the asymmetry in the teacher-student relationship under the enthusiasm of the child in making the choice.

> In Codesign, as proposed in this study, **an effort was made to construct a process as close as possible to being truly co-participatory, where the team engages in collaborative work**, whether in person or remotely, **having both the freedom to influence and the authority to make decisions about the entire project at every stage** (Dissertation 7, 2016, p. 55, emphasis added).

In any case, with more or less flexibility, disciplining is realized due to the dichotomy that positions the child on one side and the teacher on the other. Even when routine as a strategy for defining the space to be traversed is relinquished, in this disciplinary ordering, time is seized with greater intensity. Even if this relationship is harmonious, reaching a common agreement, the asymmetry is not eliminated; rather, it is camouflaged, making the power relationship more peaceful and, consequently, even more vigorous. "*It is through freedom and autonomy that education will achieve its objectives and learning will have meaning*" (Dissertation 2, 2007, p. 39).

The child is granted the freedom to choose among a series of possibilities. However, they cannot exempt themselves from choosing, because they must potentially be productive, moving through the school environment so that their time continues to be captured. Within this disciplining, the freedom granted corresponds to a strong activity of control.

> **It is therefore necessary to rethink the use of computers and other resources in schools, as well as the preparation process for using educational technologies**. It must be considered that educational technologies, like any other resource, **are merely a means to achieve learning, not an end in themselves, and that it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning environments suited to the needs and aspirations of students, providing them with an education that fosters autonomy and makes them active agents of their own knowledge** (Dissertation 2, 2007, p. 106, emphasis added).

The issue here is not to condemn or even to interpret the granted freedom as a trap designed to capture the child. What we aim to highlight is that the freedom granted is not merely regulated freedom; it enables supposed self-regulation. Ultimately, there must be freedom - appropriately - to govern the will, guide choice, and ultimately generate normalization.

Thus, the excerpts analyzed here lead us to understand that through tactics of confinement and gridding, which make constant surveillance possible, disciplining in schools emerges as a condition of possibility for the successful engagement of children with digital technologies. However, the goal is not the abolition of discipline but rather a differently structured discipline that promotes a new relational economy, which, although disciplinary, is flexible and fosters

'freedom.' This new configuration of docility is characterized by embracing movement and being constantly ready to adapt to change - an open, flexible, and adaptable mindset that enables individuals to face twenty-first-century challenges without losing the freedom to act.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, we aimed to demonstrate, through the analysis of educational discourses surrounding children's play with digital technologies, that within the same spaces coexist dynamics that transcend biopolitical disciplinary control. Digital play emerges as a privileged field for understanding not only how strategies of power are exercised over child subjects, but also how new forms of subjectivation are produced. It became evident that these practices operate through subtle coercion combined with an appeal to freedom, whereby children's participation and cooperation occur through voluntary submission, camouflaged as autonomy. Thus, even though disciplinary normalization with historical roots - marked by stability and uniformity - persists, we also observe the emergence of more dynamic and flexible contemporary strategies that reorganize discipline into new modalities of docility.

This is a hallmark of Late Modernity (or reflexive modernization), whose main characteristic is a reflection upon life as constructed in Modernity (Giddens, 1997). A reflexive society must find its own solutions to the problems produced by social modernization, particularly in the political sphere. Such a society is characterized by the rediscovery and dismantling of traditions and by the disruption of seemingly established tendencies.

However, this does not mean that the world is immune to attempts at controlling and regulating social life. These efforts at control, primarily driven by the diffuse spirit of risk, remain more active than ever, yet they are increasingly subject to various forms of flexibility. In this sense, Late Modernity suggests a shift in how relationships are experienced, based on the recognition of rationality as an ordering element that generates trust and promises to eliminate or minimize risks. It is the responsibility of the modern individual to confront this hyperbole, to see themselves as an object of reflection, and to engage in a rational critique of the system itself. The individual reflects on the world they inhabit and engages in a rational analysis of the consequences of past events, present conditions, and the probability of future risks, seeking to minimize them as the future becomes present.

The knowledge and practices mobilized are facilitated not through the abolition of discipline, but rather through a disciplinary restructuring that promotes a new form of interaction. This approach, although retaining disciplinary elements, is characterized by flexibility and fosters a "renewed freedom." The current functioning of society, oriented toward normalization, is marked by the capacity to adapt to change and to remain constantly prepared for new developments. This requires an existential disposition that is receptive, flexible, and adaptable, empowering individuals to face the challenges of the twenty-first century while simultaneously valuing and safeguarding freedom of action.

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