

## AN ANTHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S JOKS IN THE AMAZON REGION

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### ABSTRACT

This is the result of a PhD study conducted in the state of Rondônia, presenting accounts of children's play in the Amazon region. The research took place within the geographical scope of the Southern region of Rondônia. The objective is to demonstrate children's games and the ways pioneer children played, as well as their playful history, which reflects the culture and society of the 1970s-1980s. The participants, pioneer children, reported their play memories through the use of a field diary (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1994). The theoretical-methodological framework aligns with the Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 2008; Luria, 1996; Leontiev, 1998; 2021). The results present various games and the ways the first children of the region played, within native spaces such as rivers, forests, and farmlands. Within this playful childhood context, a rich ontology of games emerges in various aspects, revealing the social and cultural reality of an early period in the Amazon region.

**KEYWORDS:** Pioneer child, Play, Colonization in the Amazon region.

## UMA ANTOLOGIA DE BRINCADEIRAS DE CRIANÇAS NA REGIÃO AMAZÔNICA

### RESUMO

Este é o resultado de um estudo de Doutorado no estado de Rondônia e apresenta relatos de brincadeiras de crianças na região Amazônica. Realizou-se no recorte geográfico da região do Cone Sul de Rondônia. O objetivo é demonstrar brincadeiras e a forma de brincar da criança pioneira e sua história lúdica a qual manifesta a cultura e a sociedade no período das décadas de 1970-1980. Os partícipes, crianças pioneiras, por meio do uso do diário de campo (Bogdan; Biklen, 1994) relataram suas memórias brincantes. O aporte teórico-

metodológico aproxima-se à Teoria Histórico-Cultural, (Vigotski, 2008; Luria, 1996, Leontiev, 1998; 2021). Os resultados apresentam diversas brincadeiras e o modo de brincar das primeiras crianças da região, entre os espaços nativos de rios, florestas e lavouras. Nesse bojo lúdico-infantil, ressalta uma rica ontologia de brincadeiras nos mais diversos aspectos, revelando a realidade social e cultural de um tempo inicial na região Amazônica.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Criança pioneira, Brincadeiras, Colonização na região Amazônica.

## INTRODUCTION: SOME INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

(...) Like a star scaling the irons of servitude, a firebrand piercing the dark depths of the heart. Do I offer poetic art? Do I inaugurate a new flower? No. I deliver a course of love (Thiago de Mello, 1978).

When we look back at the history of children's play in the process of the constitution of humanity, it is clear that children have been playing since the earliest times of their existence (MANSON, 2002), whether through toys and games, through the elements of nature, in groups or in the most diverse ways. And so they have created countless ways of playing and/or cultural games transmitted orally, through gestures and movements, through objects in the most varied forms of play manifested by culture and the human-historical process of childhood. Because knowledge of the history of children as playful beings, as well as their playful manifestations, is related to the material conditions of social production and the way in which this production manifests itself in their lives (MARX; ENGELS, 2001), as well as in their historical, cultural and/or group contexts, in each time and/or place, with repercussions on the process of their human constitution.

The state of Rondônia is located in the Brazilian Amazon region. It is a state formed by the cultural and social diversity of people from all regions of the country. The actual place where the findings of this research were made was in the Southern Cone region of the state.

The geographical section of this research site alludes to the pioneer child, whose name was intended to refer to the first children who arrived in this state or those who were born during this historical period of colonization in the Southern Cone region of Rondônia.

From the accounts in the personal field diaries of the pioneer children, a veritable anthology of games is shown in the context of forests, rivers, trails through the woods, amidst the crops and agrarian plantations, between wattle-and-daub schools, moonlit nights, groups of neighbors, prayers, festivities, among other forms of cultural and social contact at the time. From this demonstration, we can see that the pioneer child has been present since the beginning of the colonization of this region. The child is a unique being, endowed with historical and cultural experiences (VIGOTSKI, 1993), since these experiences in contact with the social and cultural coexistence with other children resulted in rich demonstrations of their playful experiences, which will be discussed in this work.

## 2 PATHS OF METHODOLOGY THAT LEAD TO AN ANTHOLOGY!

We don't intend to go into detailed explanations of the methodological paths and instruments of an action research project (this one), which took three years or more to collect and analyze. However, as has been said, this section presents the unique beauty of the culture and history of the games played by the pioneer children of the Amazon, or, properly explained, in the geographical section of the region known as the Southern Cone of the state of Rondônia.

Our subjects are the children of a past in the history of the early colonization of a region - the Southern Cone region of Rondônia - from the 1970s to the 1980s. Children who are currently men and women who have agreed to take part in this research, recounting their playful memories in personal diaries.

In the light of Cultural-Historical Theory, the analysis focused on the concepts of Dialectical-Historical Materialism and Critical-Historical Pedagogy. Thus, we explored knowledge of the object under investigation - the games of the past - and the search for an understanding of the meanings of this object, constituted by the pioneer children, whose playing activities are related or interrelated with the socio-historical-cultural process, pointing to the object and the results based on it. In this sense, "the way in which men produce their means of existence depends first and foremost on nature, on the means of existence they have already found and which they need to reproduce" (Marx; Engels, 2001, p. 11).

Thus, the way pioneer children played, their play culture, the types of toys and games, their way of interacting with peers and objects, demonstrate the socio-cultural process of that period. Vygotsky (1995) presents the relevant role of a given process and its results in relation to other methods. Thus, we built reflections on the web of a methodology that analyzed the object in its temporal, cultural and social context.

The small detail from the use of the instrument called a personal field diary, used by the pioneer children to relate their memories, presented a significant methodological detail in this research and in human nature research. Because man is a being who produces, it is up to us to observe both what he produces and the conditions of his production (Marx; Engels, 2001). This diary, shown below, emerges from the pioneer children's play reports, making up an "anthology"

in this work, which followed the methodological guidelines of Bogdan; Biklen, (1994), these references consist in the field of research of this nature.

### **3 RESULTS OF AN ANTHOLOGY OF STORIES, MEMORIES AND FANTASIES!**

And so, the results present some memories of the games played by pioneer children in the Southern Cone region of Rondônia in the 1970s and 1980s.

#### **3.1 We used to swing on the vines in the trees....**

I arrived in the state of Rondônia when I was just six years old. I come from a family of thirteen siblings, 11 children at the time.

When we arrived in Colorado do Oeste, we found a place that was totally different from what it is today - virgin forest. But for a six-year-old child, everything was new, everything was fun.

My brothers and I used to play a lot. During the day, we took advantage of everything the place had to offer. We would swing on the vines of the trees, climb the trunks of the trees my father felled, jump on the rice straws when my father was harvesting, bathe in the small dam built next to our house.

We played house using as utensils the little cups that came with the worm medicine we took religiously every six months. The little pots were the measures that came in the cans of powdered milk that my younger brothers took. We used shards from broken plates, empty medicine bottles and shards from Indian pots that we found on the ground. Everything we found, we named as furniture for our little houses (...) (Report of a pioneer girl, research archive, 2022).

#### **3.2 We used to play with palm shells, in the river, in the pastures....**

In September 1978, we moved to Rondônia, and went straight to the farm. There we played with palm heart shells, in the river, in the pastures, and around our house. I played with my brothers and cousins. We didn't have any toys we bought; we used the trees, objects we found in the yard, pieces of wood, leaves, corn cobs, anything we could find, we used to play.

We made little houses in the trees, inside the pigsty, and it was a lot of fun. At night, when there was prayer at our house, we played hide-and-seek and blind man's bluff around the campfire. And we played everything! There were a lot of us children, and I don't remember any fights.

As I grew older, I started helping with the housework and playing while balancing my chores.

The years went by, and then I also divided my time between school. The games changed, such as capture the flag, pass the ring, jump rope, hide and seek and dodgeball with a sock ball. (Story of a pioneer girl, research archive, 2022).

### 3.3 We made a mixture of water and earth to refer to the chocolate cake....

We made shelves to put the little pots and pans on and everything was perfect. When it was lunchtime, in our little house, we would look for a capeba tree, take off some leaves, and that would be our pig. Capeba leaves were our pork. The flower from my mother's backyard, called the cockscomb, was our chicken. We would cut this cockscomb flower with our imaginary knife made from a twig, as if it were the chicken. We would mix water and dirt to make chocolate cake, and the dirt-soaked water would become our coffee. Of course, neither my sister nor I ate our food, but we had so much fun and imagination!

When the day was almost over, we had to put away the toys and dismantle the little house, because at night the cows would walk under the mango trees and could break our toys. (Story of a pioneer girl, research archive, 2022).

### 3.4 On the roads, especially on the way to and from school, we would take the opportunity to swim in the river....

We used to play a lot with toy cars. Since we didn't have toy cars, we improvised and used pieces of wood to make the cars. For the wheels, we would use old flip-flops and cut them into circles to make wheels.

It was common for one family to visit another, especially on nights when the moon was full. This was because they didn't have electricity. During these visits, while the adults chatted, the children would play hide-and-seek, ring toss, fall in the well, day and night circle games, circle dances, and samba crioula.

On the roads, especially on the way to and from school, we would take the opportunity to swim in the river, play throwing stones at trees, and we would also have some race bets on the roads. (Story of a pioneer boy, research archive, 2022).

### 3.5 [...] to complete the herd, I made small bulls from gherkins, zucchini, cucumber...

At our school, we studied and played. During recess, we played with balls, which we made ourselves. We played together, the boys and the girls.

We played shuttlecock, soccer. Even our father played with us. We played soccer with cockroaches. My sister Érica excelled in these games. I would stick little wooden blocks in the ground and circle them with string to make little pastures. I had a few plastic oxen, which I would put

in this pasture, but to complete the herd, I would make little oxen out of cucumbers, zucchini, and cucumbers. Our little oxen were like this: eggplant bodies and cucumber heads, as our mother taught us. And we did a lot of fishing around the rivers!

We also played in the spaces where trees were cut down, climbing the trunks. We would climb up the ingá trees and my sister Érica would always go first and grab the tallest ingás and guavas. We played monkey, jumping from one tree to another. (Story of a pioneer boy, research archive, 2022).

### 3.6 We used this cob to make dolls...

When we arrived in the city in 1980, there was a small population, few housing, few houses, few businesses. It was just starting out, in fact! And we, the children, had nothing to play with! Our financial situation was difficult and we had no toys to play with!

So we played with corn cobs. We made dolls out of these cobs. We could identify the dolls by the hair on the corn, saying that one was red-haired, the other brunette! We also had clay balls (my mother remembers this very well)!

We had slingshots. Even though I was a girl, I really liked playing with slingshots, because we had no other options. So we made little balls of clay so we could kill the birds. We didn't actually end up killing them, but we had fun. (Story of a pioneer girl, research archive, 2022).

### 3.7 A cultural diversity of games from the past

To illustrate or materialize in a larger dimension, the rich sociocultural content of games, a table was organized, according to the research studies (in the thesis), separated by categories (created by the researcher) to demonstrate more clearly the playful experience of the pioneer children of the Southern Cone of Rondônia.

**Table 1:** Category of games/play of pioneer children

Categories	Games/play of pioneer children
1 – Playing in the context of nature	Playing in the forest, climbing trees, bathing in the river, hunting birds with a slingshot, swinging on vines, bathing in the rain, playing in the mud on the road.
2 – Tradicional or popular games	Hatching eggs, hide and seek, hopscotch, jump rope, tag, ring games, little songs, rhymes, play house, cockroaches, blind man's bluff, five Marys, passing the ring, the cat's meow, playing ring games or ring around the clock and songs.

3 – Pretend jokes <sup>1</sup> or starring games <sup>2</sup>	Little house, doll, cooking, cops and robbers, wood stove, mommy and daughter, little farm, animal burial, birthday party with dirt cake, riding pigs, calves, hunting animals in the forest.
4 – Singing games	Hatching eggs, little songs, little verses, cat meows, playing ring around the ring (songs).
5 – Playing with backyard animals or pets	Pets, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats, parrots, monkeys, playing with chicks, burying chicks, having a cat wedding, having a birthday party for dogs with dirt cake, riding a calf, sheep
6 – Movement and/or group games	Jump rope, jump elastic, play dodgeball, hopscotch, hatched egg, capture the flag, hide and seek, cat's meow, tag, tag, ("betes", baseball), foot in the can, playing in the forest, climbing trees, cockroach, blind man's snake, bathing in the river, playing soccer, five-Marias, passing the ring, cops and robbers.

**Source:** Author, Colorado do Oeste, 2020

In this way, based on the table above, we weave our reflections, taking into account the manifestation of the meanings of games from a past time, in this case, from the beginning of the colonization of the Southern Cone of Rondônia – in the Amazon – as I treat in this work to present as a playful and rich anthology of the manifestation of pioneer children. Do you notice how many games and how many ways of playing are demonstrated in the table above? We note an abundant content of toys created by children, in which objects and forms of play intertwine with their culture of the time, between gestures and imitation of the rural daily life of that time.

It is necessary to reflect on the repercussions of past meanings on the games of pioneer children. Realizing that meanings are constituted by the process of humanization mediated by culture, transformed as the human being develops (Vygotsky, 1996). In this process, as Leontiev (2021) explains, meanings translate the context of the world through the individual's consciousness.

Thus, we conclude that the rich manifestation of games, now called sociocultural by pioneer children, was constituted as they shared their family experiences, brought from other regions and distinct cultures. Thus, we call it a true "ontology" of diversified games among the first children of the aforementioned region of the state of Rondônia, as seen in the table shown.

<sup>1</sup> Vigotski (2008; 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Elkonin (2009).

### 3.8 Reflections on the stories of pioneer children's games

In our work, we identified that the aforementioned region of the Southern Cone of Rondônia, in the heart of the Amazon, was colonized by families from different regions of Brazil. In this context, there was a sociocultural fusion (Vygotsky; Luria, 1996) among the children who began to share their games and activities in all aspects.

We found that this cultural interaction between the children enabled the creation of games based on elements present in nature, while at the same time favoring the imitation of people and animals through make-believe games (Vygotsky, 2008) or their starring games (Elkonin, 2009).

These games signified their culture and history, as well as their experiences of the time (Leontiev, 2021). It is the way they pass on or pass on their games between groups, in addition to the way they played and the objects used, which indicate the constitution and materialization of human beings in propagating their culture and the achievements of that culture (Marx and Engels 2001).

This brief anthology, as it was called, is a collection of stories about the games and play of pioneer children. It presents their experiences among the crops that grew in their backyards, the lighting provided by oil lamps, the water extracted from wells, rivers and streams, the homes and schools made of wattle and daub, the distance from commerce and industrialized products. Manual labor, as the main technology of the time, represented the greatest advance and was a determining factor in promoting change.

Thus, we note that the meanings of the games of pioneer children demonstrated the creation and recreation of toys and games due to cultural fusion. They used elements from the fields to make their toys, as was the case with the corn doll. Other times, they used vegetables and fruits to raise herds of young cattle and horses. And their games, especially pretend play, demonstrated meanings based on their experiences, as is the case with food-making games in which children imitated the gestures and foods used by their families at the time. Imitation of reality is the main characteristic of pretend play (Vygotsky, 2008); however, something leads us to reflect deeply on the playful relationships of the make-believe of pioneer children, being the main form of freedom or autonomy in which they performed their functions while playing.

On the other hand, the meanings of their games not only demonstrated reality, but a reality in which children needed to do something, build their toys and objects so that games could happen. How could they play with dolls if there were no industrialized dolls? How could they build a farm with animals if there were no little animals to do it with? Thus, the pioneering child constructed their meanings as they created their toys and exchanged dialogue with their peers. Dolls made of corn, horses made of cucumbers, and so on.

The lack of toys did not limit their games. On the contrary, supported by adults or other children, they made their toys and played. In this context of mutual exchanges between building a toy and making a stove that cooked, the children constructed their meanings through play. The meanings of this past can be observed when memories come to light, demonstrating these intrinsic exchanges of diversified games.

Many meanings developed through the games of pioneer children occurred during breaks from work. As seen in the broader research, pioneer children also combined their games with manual labor, both at home and on the farms and plantations of the time. In that environment with so many chores, children demonstrated that games were a way to rest and escape, even for a few moments, from the hard daily activities. Playing combined with work meant for children a time when they could truly be children, without worrying about the obligations imposed by adults at work or school.

The games played by pioneer children at night evoke meanings of continued play and/or a way of extending even further the games that could not be played during the day. They also demonstrate the culture of families getting together to talk while the children played. Usually at night, pioneer children played make-believe and shared songs, hide-and-seek, and passed rings. The nocturnal cultural scene at that time featured the figure of adults chatting in circles, while children ran through bushes and large yards to run, jump, sing nursery rhymes, hide and even have festive moments, such as the São João festivities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through these brief final considerations, we demonstrate, in excerpts, the cultural, social and historical richness of the first children born or coming to the Southern Cone region of Rondônia in the early 1970s and 1980s. Children referred to in this research as "pioneer children".

We present an anthological selection of stories given by pioneer children about their way of playing or playing games.

In the initial context, we identified the fundamental role of the sociocultural environment in the formation of the characteristics of play, as reported by the children. An environment based on the context of forests and tree felling, as well as the emergence of the first communities and villages. A place where the most diverse cultures of the country were populated. And there, the children socialized their games and their cultures. They imitated their parents and the form of production and colonization through playful activities. They also used materials from the context close to them, such as: fruits, objects from the environment, as toys. This brief, yet full-bodied playful culture of the pioneer children demonstrates the important role of children in the early colonization of the aforementioned State. It is worth noting that we do not show the details here of the games played or combined with child labor. Because the pioneer children performed the most varied domestic and rural tasks within the family and there, they combined their games and their studies.

The pioneering child's striking figure is remarkable. At the same time, their games and the meanings of these games are remarkable. This leads us to a reflection in which the child is the protagonist in the history of the beginning of a place. A child who is little remembered or forgotten is the child responsible for the cultural, social and historical transmission of a past and the way in which they carried out their playful experiences. Children who should appear and be studied in other research, as a way of understanding a past for a better reflection of the present. Because meanings are constituted by the process of humanization, mediated by culture, and are transformed as the human being develops (Vygotsky, 1996). In this process, as Leontiev (2021) explains, meanings translate the context of the world through the individual's consciousness.

Finally, it is necessary to think about the important role of children and their playful experiences in society, history and human culture. Reflect on the role that parents, family members and school play in the social and cultural life of children for their development in the most diverse aspects, Saviani (2003). And we know how necessary it is to deepen research of this nature as a means of reflection, knowledge and appreciation of children, their history and their games.

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