

Let's Play Together: Deconstructing Stereotypes in School Games: The Potential of Play for Participation and Inclusion¹

Elena Pacetti – University of Bologna, IT

Claudia Baiata – University of Florence, IT

Abstract

The ways in which children engage in play, the skills they acquire, the dynamics they navigate, and the relationships they form offer valuable insights into their future development as adults. It is precisely because of this powerful, yet often underestimated, role of play in shaping their growth that children's playful activities must be carefully observed, studied, and guided by the adults responsible for their care. By actively accompanying them on their developmental journey, educators and caregivers can better support the formative processes that influence children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

We aim to offer methodological and practical guidelines directed at countering the emergence of stereotypes during the elementary school years. By engaging in collective play and deconstructing these limiting mechanisms, children can explore and identify alternative pathways that enhance their imagination and creativity. Through play, a space is created where diverse perspectives are embraced, allowing for the broadening of children's understanding and the development of more inclusive attitudes. The heuristic value of mistakes made collectively by children and teachers enables learning through play without the fear of failure or feelings of inadequacy. This process not only leads to unexpected and challenging outcomes but also encourages individuals to push their boundaries while sharing their discoveries with others.

¹ This contribution is to be considered the result of a constant and synergistic shared work between the authors. For reasons of scientific responsibility, it is specified that paragraphs 1, 2, 3 are to be attributed to Elena Pacetti, and paragraphs 4, 5 to Claudia Baiata. Conclusions were elaborated together.

1. Play in Primary School

Play is part of the basic needs of human beings. The desire to play, indeed the need to play, does not abandon us at the end of the developmental age, but remains rooted throughout our existence: the individual, in fact, changes the way he or she plays according to the different ages, but play always remains the driving force behind all psychic and social activity (Gray, 2013).

Play stimulates creativity, encouraging exploration, and imagination, bringing about a climate of security which is free of anxiety and fear, enabling the child to master external reality. Through play, the child experiences people and objects, enriches their memory, studies causes and effects, reflects on problems, builds up a vocabulary, learns to control his or her emotional reactions and adapts his or her behaviour to the cultural patterns of his or her social group. Play is therefore necessary for the complete development of the child's body, intellect, emotions and personality (Farné & Bortolotti, 2019).

The Romans defined *ludus* as both school and leisure, and similarly in ancient Greek the same term, *skholé*, was used to refer to fun, leisure and school (Staccioli, 2008). Where do we stand, then, with regard to the presence of play in schools? Play did not easily become part of the Italian school curriculum. Education promoted since the end of the 19th century was committed to combating illiteracy and to educating children in reading, writing and counting. Play was recognised in the Gentile Reform of 1923² in its free and spontaneous form and in the primary school programmes of 1955³, the intention to make playful and ludic activity *useful* for learning was also consolidated, as well as valorising it for its moral and social roles. Three functions of play emerged at the time within the school: for physical development, to support teaching, and for moral and social education.

In the 1955 programmes, a special and positive focus was manifested on daily outdoor play, thus promoting both its spontaneous expression and the bodily aspects that had characterised the previous decades.

2 R.D. 1^o ottobre 1923, n. 2185. Provvedimenti per la scuola elementare.

3 D.P.R. 14 giugno 1955, n. 503, Programmi didattici per le scuole elementari pubbliche e private.

The 1969 *Orientamenti*⁴ highlighted the importance of play in the state nursery school, moving it from a recreational tool to an essential educational element. The 1991 *Orientamenti*⁵ further emphasized the significance of play in developing children's various skills. In the 2000s, the 2007 *Indicazioni Nazionali*⁶ indicated a shift in focus from play in preschool to more disciplinary aspects in primary school. Despite recognizing the value of play in learning, its role is mostly limited to motor and sports activities, rather than being seen as a holistic pathway linked to learning, well-being, and relationships.

Although the right to play has been recognised since 1989 by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent, in 2013 the UN Committee expressed concern about the lack of awareness of the importance of play and recreation, an importance that, when recognised, is reserved for play as a motor activity and competitive games with the idea that a useful time is an expert-driven time, and underlined that "greater recognition of the forms and locations of play and recreation preferred by older children is particularly necessary" (United Nations, 2013, p. 11). Equally, access to play by children with disabilities remains particularly critical (Bianquin, 2017), a very worrying indicator of a lack, among adults (parents, teachers, administrators, politicians), of a culture of play, too often aimed at educational, didactic or rehabilitative therapeutic purposes (Antonacci et al., 2017).

2. Factors of Exclusion and Inclusion in Play

Even when permitted, free play at school is relegated to filling the confined time of recess, and it is noticeable that teachers generally tend, during this free time, to apply the same rules that are imposed in the classroom during teaching activities, such as avoiding shouting, not running, moving in an orderly manner. This attitude, however, diminishes and does not adequately value the formative role of playful activity, which is underappreciated and not

4 D.P.R. 10 settembre 1969, n. 647, *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle Scuole Materne Statali*.

5 D.M. 3 giugno 1991, *Orientamenti dell'attività educativa nelle scuole materne statali*.

6 D.M. 31 luglio 2007, *Indicazioni per la scuola d'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione. Indicazioni per il curriculum*.

adequately planned for in the educational and didactic programming phases (Gruppo di lavoro per la convenzione sui Diritti dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza, 2023). Very often, moreover, the desire of adults to guide and protect children and young people has deprived them of the freedom they need for their own mental health, contributing to record levels of anxiety and depression: this happens because opportunities for children and young people to play, roam and participate in activities independent of direct adult control are diminished (Gray et al., 2023).

Pupils experience difficulties when they encounter barriers to learning and participation in environments, materials, relationships (at school and outside school). Inclusion must guarantee active participation and equal educational opportunities (including play) for all (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

What factors represent barriers to learning and participation in play? Gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, religious divisions, poverty, war, racism, migration ... (Slee, 2013). Teachers' awareness of biases and stereotypes in the process of teaching and learning is crucial to guarantee an inclusive environment that takes into account all learning needs and diverse students' backgrounds.

It becomes a priority to guarantee the right to play to all and everyone so that playful activities can also be experienced in the school context, taking inclusion as a transversal perspective. This means inclusive (and playful) education that values the uniqueness and singularity of each pupil and promotes the strengthening of the class group as an active and welcoming community. In this sense, the school must promote social, emotional and affective competences, peer relationships, the active participation of all and cooperative learning (Ianes & Canevaro, 2016).

Cooperative games (and play) represent an extraordinary opportunity to transform the school environment into a fun, inclusive and stimulating place of learning. It is, to all intents and purposes, an experience in which children have the chance to develop a range of social skills, such as effective communication, mutual trust and the ability to work as part of a team, thus fostering empathy, respect and tolerance for others. Regularly integrating cooperative play into curricular activities can increase the dose of playfulness that con-

tributes to improved psychophysical well-being and consequently to more effective learning.

The fundamental principle of cooperative games is shared participation, in which people do not compete against each other, but play to overcome their own limits rather than to defeat their opponents. These games are structured to offer a feeling of freedom and fun, because the key element is the collaboration of all players, no one excluded. In addition, these types of games foster mutual acceptance and a sense of belonging to a group in the context of a shared and meaningful experience (Lyons, 2022).

In cooperative games, a particularly important role is played by the leader (or facilitator). At school, this role belongs to the teacher, who is responsible for careful planning and appropriately choosing the time and place to propose cooperative games, which can be presented for different purposes:

- to get to know each other better;
- to share different aspects of oneself;
- to enhance one's own and others' abilities;
- to create greater harmony.

The main task of the teacher in this type of game is to ensure certain conditions during the game: to avoid exclusions, to promote a non-judgmental climate during dialogues and discussions, and to enforce the tasks. No less important is the observation of the groups during the game and the subsequent sharing of the observed dynamics with the children (Loos & Vittori, 2011).

3. Analysis of Best-Selling and Most Publicized Games

If we refer to the commercial world, it becomes even more evident how little inclusive and difference-respecting toys are widespread. A traditional subdivision of toys almost sets male and female toys in opposition, highlighting at an early stage how gender-specific roles and expectations exist. Concerning boys, advertisements often depict fearless superheroes and brave professionals, ready for any adventure or to save the world. These games usually have educational aspects to enhance physical and mental skills. In contrast, toys for girls tend to focus on beauty, fashion, grooming, and caring for babies or

animals. They are more about promoting traditional roles like being a housewife or caring mother, rather than developing educational skills, creativity, or competition (Smith, 2015).

Commercials play a vital role in influencing societal expectations regarding social, economic, and gender behaviours. Advertisers focus on selling products and appealing to customers, often perpetuating harmful stereotypes without considering the impact on children. Their main objective is to persuade and seize a portion of the market, aligning with prevailing societal norms (Lull, 2003).

In Italy, toys & games market is projected to reach €1,724.0m in 2024. Forecasts indicate that the best-selling categories will be “Plastic & Other Toys” (e.g. action figures, remote control toys, and model cars and planes) followed by “Toys for Toddlers & Kids” (e.g. building blocks, shape sorters, and activity tables) and “Dolls & Stuffed Toys” (e.g. dolls, teddy bears, and plush toys) (Statista, 2025).

But the way these toys are advertised among children (and their parents) can strongly condition their choices, inducing them to buy not so much what they like or might like, but what the market itself proposes as the best purchase for boys and girls. In this sense, especially in the Italian context, we can see that toy advertisements tend to maintain the differences already present in various spheres of society, in a sort of “natural” imagery in which children are genetically predisposed to such differences (Baiata & Pacetti, 2023)⁷.

Social norms, attributes, skills and competences... but how well are the differences represented in toy advertisements? How much disability is represented? Or minority cultures? And what is the impact of these representations on children’s development? Can teachers make the difference?

⁷ A detailed analysis of the influence of the toy market on the choices of families and children and the cultural and pedagogical implications can be found in the article by Baiata & Pacetti, 2023.

4. Games and Stereotypes/Games and Representation of Gender, Cultures, Differences

Children of all cultures rely deeply on play in their everyday lives to develop fundamental social skills, imagination, and resilience, as well as create connections and comprehend limits while expressing their feelings and thoughts. During play, linguistic and cultural barriers are overcome, as communication acquires a universal language of childhood that transcends cognitive frameworks (Fleer, 2010). Play, whether spontaneous or structured, promotes physical and emotional development, improves problem-solving skills, and gives a secure environment in which to experiment, imagine, and develop their identities. It is unquestionably a great organizer during childhood: children's games during social interactions often establish and shape their connections with peers and adults. Understanding each child's personal situation as well as the subtle cultural and symbolic elements that are inextricably linked to education, knowledge, and culture requires an awareness of education, family, and society (Duek, 2016). Children demonstrate their physical, cognitive, social, and artistic talents through play, which is also one of the most significant ways they learn from and develop their ability to learn about the world by experimenting with various objects and situations (Cardona et al., 2021).

In our society, there is a growing awareness about the dangers of stereotypical messages conveyed by the family, community, and school environment in shaping children's self-perception and self-efficacy from early age (Sultan et al., 2019). These influences affect students' interests and motivation to pursue certain subjects over time, often to the detriment of others (Virtanen et al., 2014). Very early in their lives, children quickly assimilate and apply fundamental gender categories to a variety of situations and activities. By age three, kids begin to recognize gender-related elements of objects and actions. Between the ages of three and six, their comprehension of activities involving children and adults grows. Around the age of five, they begin to build preconceptions about personal and social qualities connected with gender, and by primary school, they have a solid understanding of which items, activities, and traits are associated with being male or female (Trautner et al., 2005).

To help children understand and embrace personal and cultural differences, educators should be aware of how early in life stereotypes are absorbed and should endeavour to create a more inclusive and equitable play environment that prevents these differences from becoming disparities, empowering all students in their individualities and reinforcing their self-esteem. Tailoring playful activities to the needs and interests of all children not only fosters greater inclusivity but also challenges prevailing stereotypes, thereby creating opportunities for all to express themselves more fully. A playful, inclusive approach encourages diversity in participation and supports the development of individual identities within a supportive and equitable learning environment.

5. Deconstructing Stereotypes

From a young age, including in kindergarten, children are often expected to engage with certain colours, games, and activities traditionally associated with their gender (Ricchiardi & Venera, 2005; Tomasetto, 2013). A key instrument for eradicating gender preconceptions that supports gender segregation as well as gender inequality in many spheres of social life is education, and stereotypes awareness among early childhood educators (Angeli, 2020).

Several factors can act as obstacles to learning and participation. These include gender, disability, ethnicity, cultural differences, religious divisions, poverty, war, racism, and migration, among others. These issues can significantly limit students' access to quality education and social integration. Children may encounter challenges when they face barriers to learning and participation within various environments, including educational contexts and interpersonal relationships both within and beyond school contexts. True inclusion must facilitate active engagement and equal opportunities for all individuals, ensuring that everyone can fully participate in all aspects of education, including – and especially – play (Danniels & Pyle, 2023). The emphasis must remain firmly on upholding the rights of every individual, prioritizing inclusivity as a fundamental principle. Inclusion should be viewed as a cross-cutting perspective, integrated into every facet of the educational experience to ensure equitable participation and opportunity for all learners.

A board game created collaboratively with the entire class, incorporating avatars and narratives that represent all individuals, provides a wide variety of settings and scenography for all children to play with, experiment, and feel safe to express their creativity, explore diverse perspectives, and engage in imaginative scenarios. Not only does this inclusive approach foster a sense of belonging, but it also enables children to develop empathy, critical thinking, and social skills as they interact with the game and their classmates in a collaborative, supportive setting. The rules of the game can be rewritten to ensure accessibility, with careful consideration given to the diverse cultural and linguistical backgrounds, and needs of both male and female students to be represented without biases. Different levels of difficulty may be included, as well as various communicative strategies to ensure the game can be played and understood effectively by everyone. All kind of adjustments should be made to guarantee full, equitable, and inclusive participation from all students (Housh et al., 2021).

Education that embraces the plurality of perspectives and encourages the understanding of the world through the experiences of others fosters inclusivity and empathy. By promoting critical thinking, reflection, and the capacity and courage to articulate individual opinions, such an approach nurtures open-mindedness and intellectual growth. Additionally, cooperative games that ensure the active participation of all students play a vital role in cultivating collaboration and mutual respect (Collins & Griess, 2012). Games and toys possess significant potential to provide unique opportunities for teaching about diversity, challenging preconceived notions, and dismantling stereotypes, thereby contributing to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. For example, traditional gendered toys and play situations might unintentionally steer youngsters toward limited views about careers, talents, and abilities, such as associating caring responsibilities with females and building and exploration with boys. When selecting toys for their classes, educators should consider the impact that pinkwashing can have on males' choices and desire to engage with such toys. Boys may disregard pink or purple toys out of fear of social rejection, concerned that their peers will judge and mock them for not conforming to traditional gender expectations. This avoidance may restrict boys' abilities to pursue hobbies and behaviours normally associated with toys, such as caregiving, creativity, and social collaboration (Mackin, 2016).

These playful activities encourage the development of divergent thinking, problem-solving skills, and an appreciation for the positive role of mistakes, while fostering inclusion, active participation, and metacognitive strategies for learning. Additionally, through the educational benefits of cooperative play, these activities reinforce prosocial behaviours, support the internalization of democratic values, and promote collaboration toward achieving shared objectives. This approach enhances individual growth, and it concurrently strengthens social cohesion within the learning environment.

Teachers have long incorporated games into the classroom, including card games, board games, and role-playing activities, though these have primarily served educational purposes rather than simply providing entertainment (Botturi & Loh, 2009). Predominantly, a combination of embedded and direct assistance is needed to help children engage in inclusive play. Teaching methods and curricular changes pertaining to various forms of supports, such as adult assistance, peer support, and embedded learning opportunities, are all integral components of inclusive early childhood education (Sobel et al., 2015). Playing may efficiently promote learning about the world, but it also a medium to perpetuate biases and create assumptions that are rooted from childhood. When play becomes a vehicle for these prejudices, it has the potential to affect children's conceptions of gender roles, racial prejudices, cultural expectations, and social hierarchies, frequently in ways that restrict their understanding of themselves and others. These early-formed notions, if left unquestioned, can shape children's goals, sense of identity, and perceived prospects, resulting in discrepancies in future opportunities. Kindergartens and play centers often provide a diverse assortment of toys, including donated items such as dolls or action figures, brought by children's families as gifts to the school. These toys can serve as valuable learning tools, offering interesting opportunities to experiment and engage in exploratory play rather than adhering to the gendered expectations typically promoted by the toy market. Educators and teachers can use such closed-ended toys traditionally designed for specific, limited play scenarios and transform them into open-ended learning tools by having children to take them apart and explore their inner mechanisms. This activity offers hands-on experience with basic mechanical components, such as screws, wires, and motors, allowing the comprehension about how toys function, sparking curiosity about how

things work. By recycling pieces to create new toys, blending components, or even rebuilding them with extra functions, children may shift their perspective of play from passive usage to active experimentation and invention, which fosters creativity. In addition to developing problem-solving abilities, this method encourages a more profound and creative interaction with everyday objects⁸.

A familiar challenge for teachers is when young students are required to share a play area with their classmates and adhere to designated play times and locations within a school setting, they may exhibit aggressive or exclusionary behaviours as a form of social conflict toward peers they perceive as outsiders or not conforming to social norms (Varea & Ndhlovu, 2017). In the paper *What Makes You Powerful*, the educators of a Reggio inspired American preschool witnessed an ongoing conflict between girls and boys during recess in their group of children. Despite teachers' requests to include everyone in their play, the children persisted in excluding one another, maintaining their selectiveness during free play. Instead of keep trying to stop the conflicts between the two groups of children, the teachers decided to take a collaborative approach, engaging the children in discussions to explore and understand their perceptions and feelings surrounding the power dynamics they were expressing. Rather than dismissing their fights as mere disruptions, the teachers saw an opportunity to delve deeper into the children's ideas about strength, control, and influence. Together with the school's *atelierista*, they documented observations and revisited them during co-teacher planning sessions. They also encouraged children to explore power creatively via various expressive languages as part of a co-research journey. This endeavour provided valuable opportunity to learn about superheroes and their valuable impact on humanity in a constructive and collaborative way among boys and girls (Venier et al., 2022).

8 For more information, see <https://www.exploratorium.edu/tinkering>

6. Conclusions

Resnick argues that play provides an environment in which children can actively explore, experiment and learn. Through play, children can acquire important skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and creativity. Play also provides a safe space to experiment and make mistakes, encouraging children to persevere and find alternative solutions. Creativity is a crucial skill to meet the challenges of today's fast-changing world. The MIT computer scientist believes that everyone is a potential creator, and that creativity should be cultivated in all areas of life, not only in the arts or artistic disciplines. Creativity involves the ability to think in original ways, to find connections between different ideas and to turn one's ideas into reality (Resnick, 2017).

The right to play and game, to playful situations free of stereotypes and prejudices, is a right that schools must promote to ensure democratic and inclusive educational opportunities for all their pupils. In fact, it is in the school environment that the adult, as educator, can have that fundamental role in accompanying children's play. The role of the adult in children's play is to provide a safe and stimulating environment, to be present and involved, and to act as a positive role model as well as having an important responsibility in encouraging and supporting this activity. The approval and support of the adult is necessary because only in this way will the child feel empowered to explore his or her inner world and express, without fear of being judged, the wide range of feelings and emotions that run through it (Bondioli, 2002).

Ultimately, the intentional deconstruction of biases and promotion of varied, cooperative, and unstructured play experiences are the keys to establishing a more equal and inclusive learning environment. It is necessary to design research-actions that promote inclusive practices and education for differences, while providing solid initial and continuous training for teachers and awareness-raising activities with families. Teachers can foster the development and well-being of all students by allowing them the freedom to play out creative and widespread scenarios. This will equip them to become self-assured, kind, and cooperative adults who can successfully negotiate the challenges of our multicultural society.

References

- Angeli, M. (2020). Constructing and Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes Across Cyprus' Schools. *Cyprus Review*, 32(1), 175-199.
- Antonacci, F., Riva, C., & Rossoni, E. (2017). Gioco e disabilità, un'oscillazione tra limite e piacere. [Game and Disability, an oscillation between limits and pleasure]. *Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion*, 5(1), 147-160.
- Bagattini, D., & Miotti, B. (2022). *Lavorare sul genere a scuola con coding e robotica educativa* [Working on gender at school with coding and educational robotics]. Carocci.
- Baiata, C., & Pacetti, E. (2023). Toys, advertisements, and gender roles: a research on three Italian television channels for children= Giocattoli, pubblicità e ruoli di genere: una ricerca su tre canali televisivi italiani per bambini. *Form@re*, 23(3), 108-121.
- Bianquin, N. (2017). LUDI-Play for children with disabilities: l'interdisciplinarietà a supporto di un nuovo modello di intervento per il gioco del bambino con disabilità [LUDI-Play for Children with Disabilities: interdisciplinarity to support a new intervention model for the play of the child with disabilities]. *Italian Journal of Special Education for Inclusion*, 5(1), 15-32.
- Bondioli, A. (2002). *Gioco e educazione*. [Game and education]. Franco Angeli.
- Booth, T., Ainscow, M. (2011). *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Botturi, L., & Loh, C. S. (2009). Once upon a game: Rediscovering the roots of games in education. *Games: Purpose and potential in education*, 1-22.
- Collins, K. M., & Griess, C. J. (2011). It's all in the game: Designing and playing board games to foster communication and social skills. *YC Young Children*, 66(2), 12.
- Danniels, E., & Pyle, A. (2023). Inclusive play-based learning: Approaches from enacting kindergarten teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(7), 1169-1179.
- Duek, C. (2016). Contemporary games and new platforms: The construction of new spaces of play and interaction. *Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação*, 39, 193-210.
- Farné, R., Bortolotti, A. (2019). Il gioco: Dire, fare, pensare e giocare. [Play: Saying, doing, thinking and playing] *Infanzia*, 1(3), 3.

- Fleer, M. (2010). *Early learning and development: Cultural-historical concepts in play*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gianini Belotti, E. (1973). *Dalla parte delle bambine*. [Little girls. Social conditioning and its effect on the stereotyped role of women during infancy]. Feltrinelli.
- Gray, P. (2013). *Free to learn: Why unleashing the instinct to play will make our children happier, more self-reliant, and better students for life*. Basic Books.
- Gray, P., Lancy, D. F., & Bjorklund, D. F. (2023). Decline in independent activity as a cause of decline in children's mental well-being: Summary of the evidence. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 260, 1-8.
- Gruppo di lavoro per la Convenzione sui diritti dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza (2023). *I diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia. 13° rapporto di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della convenzione sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza in Italia* [The rights of childhood and adolescence in Italy. 13th update report on the monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent in Italy]. Gruppo CRC.
- Housh, K., Saleh, A., Phillips, T., Hmelo-Silver, C. E., Glazewski, K., Lee, S., ... & Lester, J. (2021). Designing for equitable participation in collaborative game-based learning environments. In C. E. Hmelo-Silver, B. De Wever, & J. Oshima (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning – CSCL 2021* (pp. 67–74). International Society of the Learning Sciences.
- Ianes, D. & Canevaro, A. (2016). *Orizzonte inclusione. Idee e temi da vent'anni di scuola inclusiva* [Horizon Inclusion. Ideas and themes from twenty years of inclusive schooling]. Erikson.
- Lipperini, L. (2007). *Ancora dalla parte delle bambine* [Once again on the little girls' side]. Feltrinelli.
- Loos, S. (1994). *Novantanove giochi cooperativi* [Ninety-nine cooperative games]. EGA.
- Loos, S., Vittori, R. (2011). *99 e + giochi cooperativi* [99 and + cooperative games]. Notes Edizioni.
- Lull, J. (2003). Hegemony. In G. Dines & J. M. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race and class in media: A text reader* (2nd ed., pp. 61– 66). Sage.
- Lyons, S. (2022). *Cooperative games in education: Building community without competition, Pre-K–12*. Teachers College Press.

- Mackin, J. (2016). *Blue is for boys, science is for boys, what's for girls? A critical look at gender constructs in science toys* [Doctoral dissertation, Carleton University].
- Manuzzi, P. (2002). *Pedagogia del gioco e dell'animazione. Riflessioni teoriche e tracce operative* [Pedagogy of play and animation. Theoretical reflections and operational paths]. Guerini Studio.
- Miola, S., Meggiolaro L., Rodighiero, M. P., Lago, C. D., & Bordignon D. (2021). *Gioco anch'io. Percorsi e strategie didattiche per l'educazione fisica inclusiva* [I play too. Pathways and didactic strategies for inclusive physical education]. Erickson.
- Monaci M.G., & Sarteur, M. (2012). Alle bambine piacciono le bambole, ai bambini le macchinine... o no? Il ruolo dei giocattoli nella differenziazione di genere [Girls like dolls, boys like cars... or don't they? The role of toys in gender differentiation]. *Psicologia Clinica dello Sviluppo*, 3, 453–480. <https://doi.org/10.1449/38835>
- Muñoz Cardona, J. E., Chandra, S., Rios Rincon, A., Wood, L. J., & Dautenhahn, K. (2021, June). Designing games for and with children. Co-design methodologies for playful activities using AR/VR and social agents. In *Proceedings of the 20th Annual ACM Interaction Design and Children Conference* (pp. 662–665). Association for Computing Machinery.
- Pennazio, V. (2015). *Didattica, gioco e ambienti tecnologici inclusivi* [Didactics, play and inclusive technological environments]. FrancoAngeli.
- Resnick, M. (2017). *Lifelong kindergarten: Cultivating creativity through projects, passion, peers, and play*. MIT Press.
- Ricchiardi, P., & Venera, A. M. (2005). *Giochi da maschi, da femmine e... da tutti e due. Studi e ricerche sul gioco e le differenze di genere* [Toys for boys, for girls and... for both. Studies and research on play and gender differences]. Junior.
- Rodari, G. (1973). *Grammatica della fantasia* [Grammar of fantasy]. Einaudi.
- Slee, R. (2013). Meeting some challenges of inclusive education in an age of exclusion. *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1(2), 3–17.
- Smith, N. L. (2015). Built for boyhood: A proposal for reducing the amount of gender bias in the advertising of children's toys on television. *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, 17(4), 991–1050.

- Sobel, K., O’Leary, K., & Kientz, J. A. (2015). Maximizing children’s opportunities with inclusive play: Considerations for interactive technology design. In *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Interaction Design and Children* (pp. 39–48). Association for Computing Machinery.
- Statista. (2025). Toys & Games - Italy. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/toys-hobby/toys-games/italy>
- Tomasetto, C. (2013). Matematica per i maschi, italiano per le femmine: Stereotipi di genere e atteggiamenti verso le materie scolastiche tra genitori e figli [Maths for boys, Italian for girls: Gender stereotypes and attitudes towards school subjects among parents and children]. *In-mind Italia*, 5, 19–24.
- Trautner, H. M., Ruble, D. N., Cyphers, L., Kirsten, B., Behrendt, R., & Hartmann, P. (2005). Rigidity and flexibility of gender stereotypes in childhood: Developmental or differential? *Infant and Child Development: An International Journal of Research and Practice*, 14(4), 365–381.
- United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. UN Document, A/Res/44/23. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013). *General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31)*. UN Document, CRC/C/GC/17. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2013/en/96090>
- Varea, V., & Ndhlovu, S. (2017). Primary school games and play as inclusive/exclusive situations Situaciones de inclusión/exclusión mediante el juego en Educación Primaria. *Ágora Para la Educación Física y El Deporte*, 19(2-3), 158–176.
- Venier, A., Broderick, J. T. & Hong, S. B. (2022). What makes you powerful? *Innovations*, 29(2), 12–24.