

**CHARACTERIZATION OF LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF PORTUGAL<sup>1</sup>****Received on:** April 13, 2025**Passed on:** June 17, 2025License: 

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study was to characterize and understand the types of leisure and recreational activities offered to pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in schools in the northern region of Portugal. The methodology used was qualitative and consisted of semi-structured interviews with six primary and special education teachers. The aim was to identify the types of leisure and recreational activities offered to students with SEN in the school context and to understand and evaluate the skills, training, experiences and practices of the participating teachers in relation to the institution in which they taught and the way in which these practices were perceived and offered to these students. The main findings of the analysis led to the conclusion that recreational activities in the school context for students with SEN are curricular in nature and that all schools meet this requirement; as regards teachers' training, it was found that it is generally based on mainstream education and deepened according to needs and demands. It was also concluded that there are possible advantages and disadvantages in offering these practices, with a greater emphasis on socialization in playful and free moments in the school environment and a lack of in-depth knowledge among teachers about the benefits of these practices in special education.

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**KEYWORDS:** Leisure and recreation. Special educational needs. School leisure.

## **CARACTERIZAÇÃO DAS ATIVIDADES DE LAZER E RECREAÇÃO PARA ALUNOS COM NECESSIDADES EDUCATIVAS ESPECIAIS NA REGIÃO NORTE DE PORTUGAL**

**RESUMO:** O presente estudo teve como objetivo, caracterizar e compreender os tipos de atividades de lazer e recreação que são oferecidos nos agrupamentos de escolas da região norte de Portugal, para alunos com Necessidades Educativas Especiais (NEE). A metodologia adotada foi de cariz qualitativo através da aplicação de uma entrevista semiestruturada a seis professores do Ensino Básico e de Educação Especial. Visou-se identificar os tipos de atividades de lazer e recreação oferecidas em contexto escolar para alunos com NEE e perceber e pontuar quais eram as aptidões, formações, experiências e prática dos professores participantes no que diz respeito a instituição em que lecionavam e a forma com que estas práticas eram vistas e ofertadas para estes alunos. Os principais resultados da análise permitiram concluir que, as atividades de lazer em contexto escolar para alunos com NEE são de cariz curricular e todas as escolas cumpriam com a obrigatoriedade; já sobre a formação dos professores, notou-se que é comumente direcionada ao ensino regular e aprofundada conforme necessidades e demandas. Concluiu-se também as possíveis vantagens e desvantagens na oferta destas práticas vistas com maior destaque na parte da socialização em momentos lúdicos e livres no âmbito escolar e a falta de conhecimento aprofundado dos professores sobre os benefícios destas práticas na educação especial.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Lazer e recreação. Necessidades educativas especiais. Lazer na escola.

### **Introduction**

Learning through play and hands-on activities during free time and leisure is being increasingly implemented in regular schools. In an educational context, recognizing students' needs is essential for seeking alternative and unconventional teaching strategies.

However, it is possible to observe a certain discrepancy in the way educational institutions, as well as their managers and teachers, administer leisure and recreation activities, especially within the context of after-school activities (extended school hours). With the aim of guaranteeing basic support and assistance to students and their families, Werneck, Isayama and Borges (1999), apud Hunger, Squarcini and Pereira,

2004) highlight that leisure and recreation are mechanisms that replace what has been lost or deprived. These moments are not limited to work, but encompass all areas of life. Observation, rest, interaction, and autonomy are also sources of school enrichment and protection, providing satisfaction, freedom, acceptance, and the improvement of skills.

With regard to the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in leisure and recreational activities or free time, it is possible to observe progress in the development of interests. The goal is to plan ways to involve them in all spaces and periods, aiming to further enhance their basic functions, their interests, and to find ways to meet their personal and family needs. (Jezine; Araújo Júnior, 2011).

Given the above, this investigation becomes fundamental and applicable to characterize and understand the types of leisure and recreational activities offered in school clusters in the northern region of Portugal for students with Special Educational Needs.

### **Concepts of Leisure and Recreation**

For healthy and active social development in the early years of primary education, it is essential to know and understand the fundamentals of leisure and recreation, and the roles these activities play in child development. These activities can influence various aspects such as the development of good habits, critical thinking, and the improvement of children's cognitive and motor skills (Silva; Gonçalves, 2017).

The concepts of leisure and recreation go hand in hand in the behavioral history of individuals. According to Gomes (2012), the term leisure was strongly influenced by European studies and brings with it the cultural approach to behaviors and actions. The term recreation, in turn, comes from a North American perspective and refers to a set of

diverse activities. The author emphasizes that the two-pronged approach has always generated questions regarding its use and meaning, making it necessary to promote studies that prove the function of each of the moments.

For better understanding, Dumazedier (2004) – a pioneering French sociologist in leisure studies – states that leisure can be understood as a set of occupations in which children have free access, engage in, and freely perform various activities, games, play, and even rest, amusement, and entertainment, giving them the freedom to develop disinterested actions in a social and voluntary manner.

According to the author, leisure encompasses creative and generative capacities, which are opposed to the obligations of daily life, but which can also be included in directed spaces and moments, such as in schools and learning centers, being named as “free time, recreation, pause, interval,” described as moments in which cognitive areas of development (individual and collective) can be worked on (Dumazedier, 2004).

On the other hand, when analyzing the concept of recreation, it is necessary to make a quick linguistic clarification and a correlation with the concept of recreating. The word recreation comes from Latin and originated from the term *recreo*, which refers to the set of actions that aim to renew the exhaustion caused by daily tasks, or the act of doing it again (Recrear, 2024). As Jurema and Garcia (2010) state, recreation comes from the term re-create – to recreate something, an activity aimed at repeating what is seen – transitioning to the term recreate – a moment excluded from work, dedicated to rediscovery and fun, to rethink and remake through play.

The term can also be understood as:

(...) creating, recreating and recreating oneself, which is intimately linked to man's action on the world. It thus constitutes a privileged space for the collective construction of new knowledge and, furthermore, a possibility of influencing educators who are more committed to the changes necessary for the emergence of a society based on more humane values (Brêtas, 1997),

apud (Silva et al., 2011, p.03).

However, understanding what leisure and recreation are from the perspective of human development can be a rather complex task. Bruhns (1997), cited in Werneck and Isayama (2003), points out that the term recreation is less comprehensive in the educational space, as it can be considered only as a product of leisure, or as a type of activity and experience that the child experiences within both free and sporting tasks, being completely interconnected.

Studies indicate that certain authors consider recreation, leisure, and play as products of the individual's creative process, seen as modifiers of their reality and the present, which strongly utilize imagination and creativity. It is not always easy to define whether a particular recreational activity is characterized as leisure, recreation, or play. For a correct analysis of the actions, it is necessary to observe how the activity develops, together with how the children explain these moments (Dores, 2009).

Werneck and Isayama (2003) point out that moments of leisure and recreation also serve as a self-regulation device for the child, which, unlike the spontaneity and freedom of games and play, contribute to a process of cultural reproduction. Such situations and moments of distraction will make this child an adaptable individual, learning to deal with circumstances generated in different areas of life, as well as in relationships (personal and social), contributing to the consolidation of values and strategies for different moments of daily life.

Therefore, recognizing the importance of these situations, it becomes clear that they are not merely a right or a need, much less can they be seen simply as synonyms for meaningless games and play. Recreation and leisure during the school years can and should be considered as pedagogical-social activities, determined by diverse

preferences, but strictly aimed at acceptance, reproduction, and adjustment. Often, from a critical and creative perspective, these activities in children's daily lives are understood to mean that recreation, as an activity, puts the proposals of leisure into action as behavior (Silva et al., 2011).

## **Leisure, Recreation, and School Spaces for Students with Special Educational Needs**

Considering the integration and functionality of leisure and recreation in school spaces requires further exploration, since these are effects of a cultural and historical construction, shaped by individuals in their diverse contexts and characteristics.

According to school regulations and as pointed out by UNESCO (1990 apud Lacerda, 2017), every child has the right to be welcomed and accepted by school groups, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional or social conditions. However, considering the current reality of education, many children with special educational needs are still not fully included in school environments.

Therefore, it is clear that recreational activities, leisure, and free time give children autonomy and should not be seen as belonging to a particular social class or group of people. Lacerda (2017) points out that people with special educational needs (SEN) have been the object of pity and welfare actions for many years. However, the issue takes on greater proportions, since participation in both structured and unstructured activities within the school environment is fundamentally an inherent right of all individuals.

When questions arise regarding leisure and recreation during school hours for students with special educational needs, we see that these can be one of the ways to

facilitate effective inclusion. This is because the practice of recreational activities, as a pedagogical application in schools, provides an opportunity for adjustment and alignment of strategies that can encompass these students in the process of integration with their peers (Lacerda, 2017).

These activities, which can be called games and play, allow for the innovation of recreational proposals as facilitating tools in these spaces, and in the inclusion of all children in regular schools. Recreational time, as a form of leisure, can be used as a positive method for the development of students with special educational needs within their social and cultural environment. They also allow for the recognition of the school environment as attractive, and enable the development of cognitive function and more enjoyable socialization, by aligning with the moral and cultural values that each individual brings with them (Santos, 2018).

Leisure and recreation contribute to building an effective educational process. These are instruments that can be used to enrich the psychosocial and psychomotor development of a child with or without SEN, becoming a factor of integration, solidarity and cooperation among all (Santos, 2018).

It is a consensus, and a result of studies and research, that individuals with special educational needs benefit from social contact and cultural interaction in which they are involved. It is important to understand that such interactions, if developed in the best and most appropriate way, can and should be driving forces in mediating coexistence and conflicts that are necessary for development (Paiva *et al.*, 2014).

According to Vygotsky (1987), cited in Paiva *et al.* (2014), the development of basic cognitive and motor functions in students can also be improved through complementary activities and psychopedagogical tools, even during leisure and

recreation time. This is because the individuality and abstraction of each student stem from the interaction and the relationships and connections they form with their peers.

Individuals are now required not only to master the technology of reading and writing, but also to know how to use it, incorporating it into their lives, thus transforming their “state” or “condition” as a consequence of mastering this technology (Aoki, 2005), apud (Paiva et al., 2014, p. 29).

Learning opportunities can and should be present in all aspects of individuals' daily lives. Contact with peers in dynamic school environments allows them to share experiences and gain new knowledge at different levels, from different sources.

School spaces and educational institutions as a whole are a powerful tool for developing students' senses, since it is where they have their first contact with different people, and where they are also away from their family support network. It is from this interaction that they will begin to develop their creative and participatory side. It will also be possible for children with SEN to develop social skills, self-regulation of their emotions and sensations, as well as the promotion of new skills for their bodies, resulting from these relationships with peers and recreational activities such as free play (Amaro, 2017).

The use of stimulating, attractive, and diverse environments within the school space is recognized as a powerful educational tool for this purpose. In these environments, basic and special education professionals feel increasingly driven to develop work in which, according to the child's small advances, they will be increasingly closer to attitudes such as solving problems, writing (according to their details), drawing, using creativity, executing action commands, or even just better developing their senses, such as hearing, vision, etc. (Kensky, 2013).

It is important to ensure that these students also participate actively in leisure and recreational activities, even if their desire is simply to observe the world around them. Technological resources can be used as facilitators and help to find solutions in the various dimensions of teaching and learning, while respecting the child's limitations in this interaction (Kensky, 2013).

In light of this, playful, recreational, and leisure activities, such as playing, are very important, especially in the development of students in the context of inclusion, given that they acquire an invaluable contribution to social, playful, and emotional interaction. Teachers and school professionals, when they dedicate time to developing tasks that promote meaningful learning, are seen as dedicated and caring mediators between children and the world around them (Sassaki, 2009).

Therefore, in order to ensure that leisure and play opportunities are available in school spaces for students with special educational needs, it is essential that education professionals, such as regular or special education teachers, sports instructors, and even operational assistants, acquire the ability to interact and demonstrate commitment to the positive development of play-based learning. They should seek to incorporate new elements and mechanisms into applied recreational activities and school spaces, thus giving students the opportunity to socialize and entertain themselves, to the point of disassociating their differences and seeing themselves as part of the school community (Amaro, 2017).

## **Methodology**

In research, the methodological choice and data collection methods will depend on the nature of the study and the type of information desired. Thus, qualitative research

starts from the principle of interpreting the behaviors and phenomena studied, in which the researcher will be guided by a guiding thread that will direct their work, with the intention of starting the subject in a quick, structured and coherent way (Almeida; Freire, 2017). As Weber (2010) states, a researcher who follows the creative process of a professional will not describe reality faithfully and accurately, but rather will help to reconstruct it.

Thus, “(...) in any description, there is a margin of interpretation based on a selection of information and an attribution of meanings to this selection”, giving it a unique and referential character of its researcher (Weber, 2010, p.3).

In this sense, this research is qualitative in nature because its objective is to characterize which leisure and recreational activities, offered in primary schools, include and benefit students with special educational needs (SEN), in terms of school and social development, in school clusters in the Northern Region of Portugal. The study enabled the researcher to explore and move between the types of activities offered and the skills of primary school teachers in working with these practices.

To begin the investigative process based on the research objectives, it was necessary to develop a research design and define specific procedures that would be used in conducting the study. Therefore, the field research was conducted with a geographical delimitation focused on the Northern Region of Portugal, narrowing down to its school clusters. Next, the criteria for selecting participants were outlined, in an assertive manner for data collection through semi-structured interviews.

In light of the above, the research design was comprised of: Purpose of the study, definition of objectives, methodological choice, context and sample selection,

development of the data collection instrument, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation.

Given the objectives set out in the investigation, a small portion of the population of teachers was selected, whether or not they had taught students with SEN in the early years, but who could still be considered elements of the sample, in order to create conditions for the data collected and analyzed to be meaningful to the problem in question (Almeida; Freire, 2017).

That being said, some guiding criteria were established for the selection of participants, so that they could share their experiences. These being:

- a) Teachers of Preschool or Primary Education who have previously had students with SEN (Special Educational Needs) included in their classes;
- b) Special Education Teachers.

Six teachers working in preschool, primary education, and special education in public school clusters in the Northern Region of Portugal were interviewed. Their interviews provided significant insights related to the established objectives and will be analyzed and discussed herein.

Regarding the characteristics of the interviewees, initially each person was identified using the synonyms “E1, E2...” as a form of secrecy and confidentiality; their ages ranged from a minimum of 40 years to a maximum of 51 years. All participants are professors from different backgrounds, with variations in their specializations.

One is a primary school teacher specializing in special education, the other is also a primary school teacher specializing in the three recruitment groups for special education (910, 920 and 930), and worked with a classroom exclusively for deaf students. Finally, we had another primary school teacher specializing in special

educational needs, who worked at a special education institution. The other three interviewees were early childhood education teachers working in preschool, and they had some experience with students with special educational needs, but no specialized training in the field.

Regarding their length of service in the education field, participants reported having a minimum of 11 years and a maximum of 27 years of experience. It was found that all teachers had full-time employment at only one institution during the 2023/2024 school year.

Therefore, in order to verify and seek answers to the guiding questions of the project, we sought to systematically organize all the responses obtained from the participants for better interpretation. Based on this, all the data collected were presented using Bardin's content analysis method. According to Bardin (2010), one of the main functions of content analysis is critical unveiling, seeking objectivity in the exploration. The method is built upon the combination of investigative tools that are continuously being improved.

## **Analysis of Results**

The following will present an overview of the results obtained from data collection through semi-structured interviews, developed based on the relevance of the objectives of this study. Through thematic analysis, relevant and well-founded points will be presented and discussed based on the responses of the six participating teachers.

As noted, this research adopted the content analysis methodology, based on the precepts of Bardin (2010), which, following the step-by-step instructions provided by

the author, established categories and subcategories of analysis that were systematically divided and described.

The main categories of analysis to be highlighted are:

1. Experiences and practices with students with special educational needs in a school context.
2. Advantages and disadvantages of offering leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs.
3. Characterization of leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs in a school context.

In this semantic analysis, it was possible to investigate the similarities and differences between the interviewed teachers in terms of their training levels, the different educational settings in which each one works, and to observe the acceptance and provision of leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs. The advantages and disadvantages of using these practices for these students were also emphasized, and finally, the types of leisure and recreational activities offered in schools were discussed.

The following section will address the main observations and considerations obtained from the teacher interviews, based on each of the categories described above and developed through a semi-structured interview applied to the sample.

**Table 1:** Experiences and practices with students with special educational needs in a school context.

<b>Experiences and practices with students with SEN in a school context.</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
Training, motivation and skills	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6
Experiences and results	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6

**Source:** The authors.

Table 1 details the subcategories relating to the experiences and practices of the interviewed teachers with students with SEN and their respective academic backgrounds.

Upon detailed analysis of the information obtained, it was possible to note a diversity in the areas of training and teaching, such as: Portuguese/French teacher with a specialization in Special Education, Physical Education teacher with a specialization in Special Education. Furthermore, he is a primary school teacher with a master's degree in Special Education, an early childhood educator, and a primary school teacher with a master's degree in Sociology of Childhood and a specialization in Early Intervention in Special Education. And finally, two degrees in Basic Education.

In general, it can be concluded that professionals pursue specializations according to the needs of the groups of students they have worked with over the years, rather than at the request of the institutions where they work, or based on their individual professional ambitions.

As Campos (2016) points out, cited by Ferreira and Toman (2020), continuing education for teachers and professionals working in schools and educational spaces remains a current problem, which is reflected in daily school life through gaps in the treatment of these students. However, the author emphasizes that continuing education and specializations in various fields of teaching remain the best alternative to meet the needs of students with special educational needs and the demands of daily pedagogical work.

In order to understand the teaching experiences of these teachers with students with SEN in their respective schools, it was possible to note a variety in the responses.

Two interviewees reported having had little contact with these students and only in an integrated context, while three other interviewees, who are full-time special education teachers and have been teaching in this area for several years, said they had worked with entire groups of students with SEN, developing activity plans and lessons adapted directly for these groups.

Although there are solutions to this teaching model, there is still a long way to go before special education is equivalent to regular education. The contact of teachers with a diverse group challenges them to seek alternatives and change certain attitudes regarding their training and preparation, and motivates them to seek changes that effectively include students with SEN (Carvalho, 2011).

**Table 2:** Experiences and practices with students with special educational needs in a school context.

Advantages and disadvantages of offering leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs.	Answers	Teachers
Advantages and perspectives on development and inclusion through leisure and recreation.	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6
Disadvantages and perspectives on development and inclusion through leisure and recreation.	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6

**Source:** The authors.

Table 2 presents the subcategories relating to the advantages and disadvantages of offering leisure and recreational activities for students with SEN, complemented by the personal opinions of the interviewees on the development and inclusion of these students in these practices.

In all the interviews, a certain homogeneity in the responses was noticeable; all interviewees were able to see many advantages in the use of leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs. In many discussions, several

positive aspects were mentioned that are reflected in the children's behavior through these practices, such as: interaction, development in physical and psychological aspects, promotion of self-esteem, autonomy, acceptance, and, above all, socialization. Most respondents emphasized sport as a leisure activity, which can further reflect these advantages, as students with SEN may feel admired for accomplishing an important task within the games.

On the other hand, some disadvantages can be noted, as one of the interviewees points out, noting that these students may, in a way, feel excluded from games due to their limitations, potentially becoming isolated from their peers. The professor accurately points out that in these cases, it is up to the teachers and technicians present to intervene actively, bringing the student into the action plan. Even though recreational and playful activities are very free-flowing, the presence of a mediator is important to encourage interaction among everyone.

As Silveira (2012) points out, play activities have numerous benefits in the development of children with SEN. Both symbolic games and rule-based games can offer different stimuli that contribute to social and individual development, in addition to learning. The author emphasizes that play is not just for entertaining children; it is very common to observe students with special educational needs being set aside, with some kind of object that keeps them "occupied" so they don't require attention and intervention.

When a child plays actively, individually or in a group, in calm or boisterous activities, with or without noise, but in a way that stimulates them, they are interacting with the world and with themselves. This can be a way of expressing oneself not through words, but through actions. At these times, it is necessary for teachers or

mediators to be sensitive in order to perceive and respect the wishes and limitations of this child, who will also have the freedom to choose to do nothing (Silveira, 2012).

**Table 3:** Characterization of leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs in a school context.

<b>Characterization of leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs in a school context.</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
Types of leisure and recreational activities offered in schools.	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6
Opinion on the skills of teachers and schools in offering these practices for students with SEN.	06	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 and E6

**Source:** The authors.

Regarding the characterization of leisure and recreation activities for students with SEN in a school context, Table 3 presents the subcategories that include the types and opinions of teachers regarding the provision and use of these practices, which will be analyzed later.

The first subcategory describes one of the main objectives of the research, which is to identify the types of leisure and recreational activities offered in basic education schools for students with special educational needs. This category presented different contexts regarding schools with and without education tailored to special educational needs.

To illustrate, the sample was divided among three teachers who stated that their respective schools only offered the mandatory extracurricular activities required in the school plans, namely AEC, Expressions, and CATL. They reported that if the school receives students with special educational needs, the activities should be adapted by the teachers themselves in an attempt to include these children.

On the other hand, we had the participation of three other special education teachers, who were able to show different perspectives from their schools. One of the interviewees said that her organization only offered speech and occupational therapies, but that she did not see them as independent activities. Another teacher says he is unaware of specific leisure and recreational activities within the school context for students with special educational needs, mainly because he believes his students did not need or did not resort to these activities. And finally, a third teacher reported having activities such as psychomotor skills training, horseback riding, adapted swimming, and encouraging sports activities, since her institution is for special education. However, it is worth noting that the interviewee did not specify whether these practices were open to all children, or if they were private offerings.

When observing the variety in the respondents' answers regarding the types of activities offered to students with SEN (Special Educational Needs) in a school context, it was possible to note that most institutions treat this population as a minority, since practices are only rethought to meet the needs of these students when they are actually present in these contexts. But in contrast to literature, it is necessary to understand that:

(...) whatever their characteristics, capabilities and needs, schools must be prepared (even when they do not have students with special educational needs) to respond to this heterogeneity, based on a multiplicity of services and support appropriate to these same capabilities and needs (Correia, 2018, p.13)

Regarding the respondents' opinions on the capabilities of teachers and schools in using leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs, some responses revealed very unique viewpoints among the interviewees. Most of the problems cited included a lack of trained personnel to assist them in this context, a lack of specialized professionals to work with them, especially during leisure time, a lack of

investment in recreational activities, and the heterogeneity of the groups, which becomes a problem when the same group presents different difficulties within the same context.

Given these statements, it is possible to note that, as Bridi (2011) affirms, the capabilities of schools, and especially of teachers, are not yet in line with the right of use and enjoyment of all school spaces and activities for students with special educational needs. The author points out that the lack of contact between the professional and these students, or between the students and the various spaces and activities inside and outside the school, and the lack of preparation and receptiveness, can lead to certain resistances regarding work with these groups, thus resulting in certain refusals, or justifications for possible failures in the socialization and teaching/learning process of these students.

## **Final Considerations**

This paper was developed with the aim of characterizing and understanding the types of leisure and recreational activities offered in school clusters in the northern region of Portugal for students with Special Educational Needs.

Therefore, in summary, the main final considerations will be addressed, based on the objective of the work to identify and understand the opinions and experiences of primary school teachers regarding the use and provision of leisure and recreation activities for students with special educational needs, through the characterization of these practices.

After analyzing the respondents' statements, some important aspects should be highlighted, such as: the knowledge of teachers and schools regarding the benefits of

leisure and recreation activities for students with special educational needs was limited or nonexistent, since there was greater reflection on this topic only at the time of answering the questionnaires. Another point to highlight is the school's preparedness to receive students with special educational needs in their various contexts; many teachers reported a lack of investment in training, not only for teachers but also for school staff and the entire team.

It is also concluded, as already mentioned in this research and according to the sample findings, that leisure and recreational activities, whether in a school setting or not, have many advantages in terms of motor skills, cognition, and social interaction. Another advantage is the greater ease of contact between children with SEN (Special Educational Needs) and their peers, and with the spaces and different contexts in which they may be involved. When there is a difficulty that demands attention on many levels, playful activities can bring renewal, joy, and a feeling of tranquility and freedom.

Finally, we emphasize that the types of activities offered are varied, and in the view of teachers, especially those in special education, directed practices such as therapies are also seen as leisure or recreation in the routine of students with SEN.

Therefore, we conclude that the research provided us with an opportunity for personal and professional development, leading us to reflect on the importance of offering and utilizing leisure and recreational activities for students with special educational needs. These activities play an important role in promoting inclusion, development, socialization, and in supporting the educational landscape of the country and the world, especially in schools within the clusters of the Northern Region of Portugal.

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