OBJECTS WITHOUT SPECIFIC LUDIC SIGNIFICANCE IN PLAY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of post-doctorate research with the objective of verifying whether the presentation of objects without a specific function articulated to the gradual removal of toys creates a circumstance in which the use of the former potentiates psychological processes in a child's development. The theoretical framework is Historical-Cultural Psychology, more precisely D. Elkonin's theory of playtime. The methodology is inspired by pedagogical experimentation: a similar condition to the pedagogical context is created and actions are performed in order to know its effects. Children aged between 4 and 5 years participated in the research. The results show that the removal of toys leads to the use of objects with no specific function and enhances the use of the words in situations in which the child seeks a substitute object for the missing toy. This behavior is an indication that the child is taking steps towards conceptual thinking.

Keywords: early childhood education; play; historical-cultural psychology.

Los objetos sin significación lúdica específica en el juego de niños

RESUMEN

En el artículo se presenta resultados de investigación de post doctoramiento con objetivo de verificar si la presentación de objetos sin significación lúdica específica articulada a la retirada gradual de juguetes crea una circunstancia en que el uso de los primeros potencializa procesos psicológicos en desarrollo en el niño. El referencial teórico es la Psicología Histórico-Cultural, más precisamente la teoría de D. B. Elkonin sobre el juego de niños. La metodología se inspira en la experimentación pedagógica: se crea una condición semejante al contexto pedagógico y se realizan acciones con vistas a conocer sus efectos. Participaron de la investigación niños entre 4 y 5 años. Los resultados apuntan que la retirada de juguetes provoca la utilización de objetos sin significación específica y potencializa el uso de la palabra en las situaciones en las cuales el niño procura un objeto substituto para el juguete ausente. Esa acción del niño es indicio que está dando pasos rumbo al pensamiento conceptual.

Palabras clave: educación infantil; juego; psicología histórico-cultural.

Os objetos sem significação lúdica específica na brincadeira

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta resultados de pesquisa de pós-doutoramento com objetivo de verificar se a apresentação de objetos sem significação lúdica específica articulada à retirada gradual de brinquedos cria uma circunstância em que o uso dos primeiros potencializa processos psicológicos em desenvolvimento na criança. O referencial teórico é a Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, mais precisamente a teoria de D. B. Elkonin sobre a brincadeira. A metodologia inspira-se na experimentação pedagógica: cria-se uma condição semelhante ao contexto pedagógico e realizam-se ações com vistas a conhecer seus efeitos. Participaram da pesquisa crianças entre 4 e 5 anos. Os resultados apontam que a retirada de brinquedos provoca a utilização de objetos sem significação específica e potencializa o uso da palavra nas situações nas quais a criança procura um objeto substituto para o brinquedo ausente. Essa ação da criança é indício que está dando passos rumo ao pensamento conceitual.

Palavras-chave: educação infantil; brincadeira; psicologia histórico-cultural.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010) highlighted the need to ensure practices in connection with the way young children learn and develop, suggesting play interactions as cornerstones of pedagogical practice for Early Childhood Education, which is undoubtedly a breakthrough. According to this proposal, pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education should take into account creative and imaginative processes in everything that is proposed to children (Gobbi, 2010) and, also, provide children with spaces, times, objects, and suitable contexts so that the children can take full advantage of play at school.

However, in Brazil, the typical framework of early childhood education schools still presents anticipation of content, spaces, routines, time organization, and relations that are the same used for older children in elementary school, ignoring the ways younger children learn and develop (Marcolino & Mello, 2015). Therefore, the debate and research on play need to be assumed as a priority with regard to pedagogical practice in Early Childhood Education.

Researchers in the area identify important contributions by the Historical-Cultural Theory to the theoretical-methodological debate on play in Early Childhood Education. For Aquino (2015), vigotskian elaborations on play and its relations with thought and speech provide theoretical elements to affirm play and its interactions as guidelines for pedagogical approaches aimed at children, because they point out that, at this point in life, children learn by means of experiments and experiences. Play is the activity in which children build up their own knowledge of the world with the use of imagination.

Marcolino, Barros and Mello (2014) emphasize Elkonin's (2009) contributions and consider that, when children build imaginary situations to interpret social roles, psychic and personality processes gain new quality.

The same authors suggest the creation of spaces and times to play, which must be managed by the children themselves. In this sense, the role of the teacher focuses on the organization of space and materials for children to play at school (Teixeira & Alves, 2008; Marcolino, 2013). Marcolino (2013) argues that teachers should interfere in the organization of time, space, objects and relationships, highlighting that all activities that enable children to increase their knowledge of the world and culture (storytelling, study visits, theater, aesthetic experiences, relationship with written culture, research projects) influence the content of play, because they serve as material so that children can create highly imaginative situations.

Taking the research works above as a reference, it is possible to affirm that the school, the teachers, and all professionals working with children need to commit themselves to the development of the children's knowledge of the world and to the improvement of their play elements: such as duration, environments, relationships, and objects. This research is part of the set of issues concerning play in Early Childhood Education and, more specifically, it cares about the objects provided for children to play.

In the 1990s, the use of so-called unstructured objects was the focus of studies, especially in the field of Psychology. For Mcloyd (1983), such objects contrast with toys, possessing high symbolic value. Based on these ideas, Verba (1993) observed children's play in which children used objects such as cardboard boxes and cylinders and verified the development of the imaginary situation. Another research from this perspective is by Mello (1994), who found that unstructured objects can lead to play. Such research was concerned with the description of the play, without analyzing why children make use of such objects and their role in play activities, resulting in fairly general conclusions about the children's use of these objects in their play.

Gosso, Morais and Otta (2006), based on Vigotskian ideas, understood that such objects provide support for the actions with the meanings in play, acting as pivots to the imaginary situations, enabling a greater number of transformations of meaning than toys would. The authors found that, in different cultural groups, children use pivots made of different materials and that their use in play reflects the individuality of each child and their cultural values.

In this article, we will name such objects without their specific play meaning, based on the discussion held by Elkonin (2009), because we consider that this designation better captures the role of these objects in play action and how they affect learning and development. According to Elkonin (2009), toys are effective tools, therefore, when it comes to presenting the rules of social roles. They provide the children with hints for ways of acting.

However, the children become increasingly aware of meanings, and of the possibility of applying them to different objects (Elkonin, 2009). Thus, objects that do not have a specific meaning gain meaning within an imaginary situation. In this process, there is a distance between the actual object and its initial mode of use and, in the second moment, the separation between the word and the object, and the word becomes, not the image of the object, but a complex network of possibilities. Therefore, the action at play is plastic, and it conveys general meanings (feed, put to sleep).

Due to the importance of the use of objects without specific meaning in the learning and development by children during play, it is interesting to insert these items into the play activities that happen in elementary scho-

ol. However, the results of Marcolino's (2013) research raise doubts about how to present these objects in the pedagogical context. The researcher found that only by offering these objects along with toys does not always enhance work with meanings.

Such comprehension sheds light on Elkonin's suggestion (2009) that toys should be gradually withdrawn, in accordance with phases of play that children are already able to outgrow.

But which toys should be taken first?

For Elkonin (2009), themed toys are those that propose a series of actions for the child: when you come across a doll, you can feed it, put it to sleep, etc. There is a thematic subtype of toys, which are those that the author called toys that determine concrete actions (Elkonin, 2009). These toys lead children into specific actions with them. On the other hand, they create conditions for the children to engage in actions with other toys.

Functionally comparing the two types of toys, the first thing we have to do is propose different actions using the same toy. With the second type of toys, the children may perform actions that target another toy and/or object or playmate. For example, they might feed the doll, in case of a toy spoon, or put the cake on a plate and offer it to someone, the plate being the toy that determines concrete actions. So, it seems to us that the fact that these toys are related to others makes them candidates to be preferably withdrawn because of the function they serve in their interaction with the other objects the children are playing with.

Frádkina's research (cited by Elkonin, 2009) corroborates this idea, for it showed that children tend to attribute specific meanings to random objects in their interactions with toys which are the target of an action but another toy is missing in order to perform the action. For example, a child might comb a doll (target-themed action toy) using a ruler in the absence of a comb (thematic toy that determines concrete actions).

Resemits in Frádkina (cited by Elkonin, 2009) and Elkonin (2009), we construct the hypothesis that the introduction of objects without specific play meaning should occur, as a priority, articulated with the removal of toys that have another toy as the target of the action, that is, those that determine concrete actions.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was inspired by didactic-pedagogical experimentation. In this type of methodology, a situation similar to the pedagogical context is created in order to produce experiences and get to know their effects for the learning and development of children. This proposal is based on the Vigotskian idea that interactions with more culturally experienced partners enable psychic processes to get started, reaching new levels of development.

The situation created

We organized a scenario like a small home as a cue for the kids to play house and exercise their own interpretation of family relationships. The scenario consisted of the following toys: [1] a stove, two cabinets, a washing machine, an ironing board with iron, a table and chairs, cake, fruit, vegetables and juice cans, [234] boxes that represented industrialized foods (such as gelatin, cereal, pasta, etc.), cups, cutlery, pots, plates, two dolls, a set of tools, a small wheelbarrow, a small shopping cart, two supermarket baskets, a watering can, a broom and a mop. And the following real objects: wall paint roller, cushions of varying sizes, a mirror, a phone, a bottle, a mini-egg beater, a comb, a brush, bags and hats, and decorative items such as flower vases, carpets, and tablecloths.

We had four meetings in the first phase of the research, in which we had the children play with the actual toys and objects in the scenario. In these meetings, we observed the use of toys in order to evaluate which ones could be removed in the subsequent meetings.

In the second phase of the research we had a set of seven meetings, when we proceeded to the gradual withdrawal of the toys normally employed in order to complete actions, we replaced the removed toys with items with no specific function into the box and observe their interplay with toys, and real objects. The meetings, in the two phases, had a duration of approximately one hour to one hour and twenty minutes.

The first toys removed were the cooking utensils: first the knives, then all the cutlery, then the cups, plates, the pots, the iron, and finally the tools. These toys were the ones that, we assumed, would have a greater impact, because children would need them to complete the play actions and that would make them look for some replacement. The removal was made before the children arrived for the meeting. The random items were placed in baskets by the side of the scenario.

The inserted replacement items were: plastic straws of varying sizes, ice cream spoons, little bottle caps, broomsticks sand-papered and cut into different sizes

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[1] All toys were purchased with the bench rate and were given to a public school of Early Childhood Education, after completion of the research.

[2] Toy composed of four parts joined by velcro, with which children could make sure they cut pieces.

[3] Two-part toy, joined by velcro, with which children could make sure that the cut through (banana, pear, lemon etc.).

[4] Two-part toy, joined by velcro, with which children could make sure that the cut through (corn, peppers, tomatoes etc.).

and shapes, cardboard cylinders of various sizes, a ruler, plastic tubes and containers of varying sizes and shapes, straps of fabric of varying sizes, cardboard boxes of various sizes and shapes, styrofoam, wooden coasters, mouse pads, a toothbrush case, and an iron spring.

Participants, location, and form of registration

To take part in the research, we invited children aged between four years and three months to five years who were enrolled in a public kindergarten in a medium-sized municipality in the countryside of São Paulo [5]. The meetings took place in the morning in a room at the school. All meetings were filmed and photographed by the research assistant. As an accessory registration strategy, at the end of each meeting, the researcher wrote descriptive summaries, narrating the main events of the day in connection with the interests of the research.

Ethical issues in research with children

Considering the children's rights and their capacity to decide whether they wanted to participate or not, in addition to parental consent, a document was written in which parents provided researchers with their signatures. Before the first phase, meetings were held with the intention of introducing participants to the place, the scenario, the nature of the activities, and the objectives of the research.

In these meetings, in addition to the children playing on the set, there was a special time to talk about the research. In the first meeting, the conversation revolved around what a researcher does. One of the children verbalized that researchers "do things on the computer." The researcher asked the group if they agreed with their classmate. They said yes. It was said that researchers use the computer to make notes about what they observe and discover and that there are people doing research in the school. It was then announced that, in this case, the researcher was conducting research to find ways to make the school a better place for children to play. We explained to the children that that was the reason why we would play with different toys and materials. It was also made clear that participation was not mandatory and that if they did not want to come to one of the meetings, there would be no problem at all.

At the end of the second meeting, the researcher asked the children if they wished to participate in more meetings such as those. I also wanted to know what they liked the most about the activities. They replied that they liked everything and asked the researcher to bring along all the toys the next day. The children's answers showed their desire to participate in the meetings, thus

demonstrating their consent.

Procedures for analysis

All sessions were transcribed for analysis. From the transcriptions, we highlight situations, called scenes, in which the children just played around with the items without any specific function. Inspired by Moura's work (2004), we are based on the premise that scenes can be translated into sentences, into dialogues between the children themselves or between the children and the researcher, and into play actions and relationships that are related to the object of study of this research. Based on these scenes, we built episodes. Such episodes depict situations that aim to demonstrate how the researcher's actions affected the children's activity and in what sense.

In this article, we present the episodes that most illustrate the findings of the research. They are: (i) "Playing with toys on the set", in which we identify the toys that determine the concrete actions mostly performed by children in the first phase of the research; (ii) "The use of objects according to what can be done with them", which articulates scenes conducive to the analysis of the first ways the children used the items without any specific function, with the removal of toys, and; (iii) "The absence of certain toys and the search for replacements", which evidences the process of using the spoken word in order to find an item capable of replacing the missing toy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first phase, the most frequently used items by the children were the kitchen utensils and tools: in all meetings the table was prepared for meals and the children simulated common situations connected to mealtimes. In the first and second meetings, the children carried on a situation in which a trip to the beach took place. The children also produced pictures of the beach house where they would spend the imaginary holiday. In these days, the children set the table by themselves and it was observed that they used toys that resembled tools. In the last two meetings, family play predominated, with the arrangement of the table, and interactions related to cooking and serving meals.

Phase 1 - Episode 1 - Play with the toys of the scenery.

Scene 01
Meeting 01
Margarida sits at the table, while Catarina places toy bowls, a small metal jug, and cups over the table. Margarida pretends to be pouring juice into the cups. João says: "There are tools for everyone to play." Catarina finds the bottle that is in the closet: "Look, a bottle!" Margarida takes the cup and starts fixing her own drink, then she stands up, approaches the little

ironing board, grabs the toy iron, and starts ironing. After a while, she moves over to the stove, and starts doing some imaginary cooking in the small kitchen. Catarina adds a bottle, a few more plates, glasses, and cutlery to the items on the table. Meanwhile, Rosa minds her own business with a pressure cooker and a toy spoon. She seems to be stirring something within the pressure cooker as she sits at the table. After that, she distributes the imaginary concoction onto the bowls.

Scene 02
Meeting 01
Catarina to Margarida: "sweetheart, wait. Don't forget to put on your hat!". Then she puts the hat on Margarida's head. João: "You have to put your hat on. Otherwise we won't be going to the beach. You know that we are on vacation." Catarina: "Yes, and to the beach we go! Let's have a picnic. I will pack everything." Catarina begins to pick up the toy utensils that are on the table. Margarida seems to be muttering a complaint. Catarina: "I'm getting everything ready. Stop complaining! " Rosa is still using the spoon to stir her own imaginary recipe in the toy pot: "I'm the mother!" Catarina: "let's all pretend we are already on the beach apartment." João: "We used to live in an apartment!" (...) Catarina: "Here we are, folks! Everybody's here! "." Margarida hangs the little ironing board on its place on the set. Catarina: "Let's get started!" Then she shoves a pot into the oven. João: "I'm hungry!" Rosa: "I'm going to make a cake!" João takes hold of a brush and the paint roller, and pretends to be painting the walls around the house. Margarida picks up a few tools and gets busy fixing the washing machine. Rosa to João: "Would you like me to help you?" João do not answer her question. João drops the paint roller onto the floor and picks up the pliers. Now he pretends to be tightening up a screw on the table. Rosa wields the paint roller and says: "In the meantime, I'm going to do some painting with the roller." She walks up to the wall as starts moving as if she were painting.

Scene 03
Meeting 02
Catarina places four toy cups on the table and then goes back to the closet. Rosa keeps on cooking by the stove. She uses a spoon to stir something in the pot. Catarina puts dishes on the table. João helps Catarina organize the table. The children define roles. Rosa puts the jar on the table. They sit down for the meal. They pretend to be drinking juice from their cups.

Scene 04
Meeting 03
Rosa picks up the birthday cake: "Look. I made us a cake." Catarina with cutlery in her hand: "I'm making a

pie." She grabs a knife, pretends to use it to chop the fruit and puts the pieces of fruit into the pan. João puts the chili in the pan. Catarina: "Don't put the chili in there. There is no chili in fruit salad." Rosa puts pieces of cake onto the little plates. Paulo cooks on the stove using the cutlery to stir the pots. João: "There's going to be fruit salad and food salad."

We have identified that cutlery, glasses, tools, plates, and the toy iron served their traditional function as children performed their simulations during play. Those toys determined concrete actions. So, we decided to remove them.

Episode 2 presents the first ways the children interacted with the items inserted by the researcher.

Phase 2 - Episode 2 - Use of objects according to what can be done with them.

Scene 01
Meeting 01
Researcher's action: removal of toy knives and insertion of objects with no specific function.

Margarida walks around the scenery. She handles the items brought by the researcher. She picks up a set of wooden coasters. She walks up to Catarina: "Look what I found, you can put the food on these, like plates." Catarina takes the coaster set and places them on the table as if they were plates. Margarida goes back to the basket. She has a set of cups and a yogurt bottle in her hand. She places the items on the table: "Look what I found there!" Margarida keeps bringing things to the table. She brings an empty roll of paper towels. She shows it to Catarina: "Look, look, look!" She puts it on the table.

Scene 02
Meeting 01
Researcher's action: removal of toy knives and insertion of objects with no specific function.

João takes the roll of paper towels. He blows into it and produces a sound like: "Tututu.... Tututu." Catarina yanks it away from him and says: "It's for the paper things!" João and Margarida keep on handling the items. Margarida walks around with two mouse pads in her hand and says: "You can put the food on these!" Margarida picks up several items and takes them to the stage.

In experiments carried out by Vigotski and Lukov (cited in Elkonin, 2009), with the aim of clarifying the use of words at play, stories were told to the children using, in order to illustrate the plot, items that the children were already familiar with. For each object a playful denomination was given (a book meant a house; a bunch of keys, children; a pencil, a thermometer). Lúkov's experiment (Elkonin, 2009) showed refinement. The number of items available for telling the story to

the children was restricted and more characters were inserted by the researcher, so the children needed to use objects that had already been named and often change their attributed denomination.

The results of the vigotskian experiment highlighted the issue of the role played by actions in establishing the relationship between an object and a word: the objects are accepted by children as substitutes for the real things, provided that the same action or similar action could be carried out with them. This means that a child's experience, "[...] substantiated and systematized in the word [...]", influences the playful use of objects (Elkonin, 2009, p. 333). Lúkov (Elkonin, 2009), in turn, concludes that the determining factor for including an item with no specific function is the fact that it can be inserted into a system of play relationships created in the imaginary situation. However, this also depends on a child's previous experience with the items: they have to know the items, to know their social uses in order to insert them in the relationships established between the items during play.

In the first meetings in which objects with no specific function were inserted, the children explored the possibilities of these items and carried out a discussion among themselves about the possibilities of using each one or what could be done with them. Thus, mouse pads can be used to serve food like plates. João blew into the empty roll of paper towels to produce sounds.

The novelty in having the different materials in the setting during play attracted the children: they manipulated the items and deduced what they could do with them. In these scenes there is no development of predetermined imaginary situations with a plot and argument. Thus, items cannot be inserted into a network of play relations without being attributed temporary denominations while a discussion on the possibilities of each remains. Consequently, it seems that without a predetermined plot created and developed for play, the connection between action and object is strengthened.

Episode 03: The absence of toys and the search replacements.

Date: 01
Researcher's action: removal of toy knives and insertion of objects with no specific function.
Scene 01
Paulo pretends to be cooking. He walks up to the researcher and asks where the knives are. The researcher replies: "We do not have any today, I did not bring any. Please, check out if (points at the available items) there is something you can use as a knife." Paulo examines the contents of the basket. He picks up a popsicle stick, takes it to the table, and puts it on the side of the plate. He approaches the stove and pretends to be cooking something.

Date: 04
Researcher's action: Removal of cups, plates, pans, and iron.

Scene 02
Paulo puts the cake on the table and says to Catarina: "You need a knife." He walks to the basket and produces a toothpick. They sing the happy birthday song and cut the cake with the toothpick. Paulo slices the cake and places the pieces on the wooden coasters. They eat. Paulo says with a smile, "Now I need to brush my teeth!" He goes up to the basket again. He picks the toothbrush case and pretends that he is brushing his teeth.

Date: 07
Researcher's action: there was no removal of toys.
Scene 03
The children play doctor. João to Catarina: "You need a pen to write down the doctor's prescriptions!" Catarina: And another one for the secretary!" João to researcher: "May I use that thing as a pen? (a wooden jam spatula). Researcher: "Sure." João pretends to write down something using the jam spatula as a pen.

The need for a substitute object reminds us of a discussion proposed by Vigotski (2011) about the cultural development children. This development takes place through indirect paths: when a direct action by a child is prevented, the child is induced to start thinking in order to figure out indirect paths. We might assume that children use words, cultural signs par excellence, to solve the problems they come up against during these imaginary situations.

In the process of choosing substitutes, words disconnect from objects. That gives children greater freedom during their play activities: even if you are standing in front of an object that does not resemble the real object or missing toy, the children are able to overcome this concrete perception and they no longer see this item in its physical particularities but with the new meaning they have attributed to the item.

In this sense, the experience of the child, embodied in the word, determines their conduct, evidencing the connection between word and action. This means, then, that the meaning of the word, at that moment of a child's development, refers to everything she the child has learned by experience and the social uses of things. This knowledge, still quite empirical, influences the imaginary situation. Thus, a child's use of the word, in situations where a substitute for the missing toy is being searched for, is an indication that the child is taking steps towards a transition into conceptual thinking, which involves the capacity for abstraction and generalization. Therefore, Vigotski (2008) understood play as the transition between the processes of imagination and

thought.

In episode number 03, imaginary situations develop with the freedom that the use of the word confers. No plot becomes attached to toys, or rather to the lack of them, because it is possible to transfer the meaning, based on the set of experiences of a child, from the missing toy to another item.

Thus, once the imaginary situation has been installed, the lack of toys to complete the play action produced a condition in which children look for objects capable of functioning as substitutes, and the children's conduct is directed by the word, which drives developing processes in each child.

In the research process, the importance of knowing what toys to remove from the action arose, so we could be more sure that the hypothesis of the removal of toys influencing concrete actions is correct. Thus, we removed the stove at meeting number 05 of the second phase. What was the children's response? Find a replacement. The cupboard became the stove.

However, in this meeting, only João used it, because in the imaginary situation created by the two, João - the doctor -, in addition to receiving patients, also produced the medication and used the substitute stove to prepare his formulas.

In meetings number 06 and 07, the children did not use the cupboard as a substitute for the stove, soon it was forgotten. The children no longer played cook with the stove, while toothpicks continued to be used as cutlery in all meetings: these toys seem to occupy a position in which the lack of them does not generate, at least at that point in development, the need for a replacement.

Thus, the function that the toys serve in the imaginary situation is the thing that determines whether they will be removed or not. They take turns with other toys in such a way that their lack seems to be more felt by children than the target toys of the actions, leading to the use of the word to direct the child's conduct.

CONCLUSION

This research refines the understanding of objects with no predetermined function at play and the importance of their presence in the spaces where children play. It also reaffirms the idea promoted in the field of Early Childhood Education, according to which it is beneficial to reduce industrialized, plastic toys (Roveri, 2012) and to introduce other items such as fabrics, wood, sand, clay, cardboard, and other assorted materials for children to play.

It should be emphasized that the knowledge produced by this research contributes to scientific support for actions of teachers concerning the types of items that might be introduced to the environment where children play. At the same time, it helps to think about how to manage the items, that is, which items should be kept, removed, or inserted.

We emphasize that there is no moment marked by the age criterion for the removal of toys and the insertion of items with no specific function. The important thing is to identify the cognitive transformations that children perform as they handle the items. Thus, the observation and recording of play are valuable procedures for the benefit of essential methodological actions for teaching in Early Childhood Education. Although the methodology used has its main focus on pedagogical practice, it leads to further comprehension of how Early Childhood Education influences children's learning and development processes. In this sense, it seems appropriate to create environments and situations for children to play and it seems clear how they influence learning and development.

As to this research methodology, it can prove or refute the findings of other psychological research works on the development of psychic processes, but such methodology is still rarely found. The production of more research works that use this methodology will contribute to its improvement.

This research focused the use of objects in imaginary situations and how the attribution of meaning to certain objects reveals a rich movement at work in the field of cognition and, consequently, of thought. It demonstrates that, in the imaginary situations, important events related to this psychological process occur (the separation between word and object; the experience of the child, which is focused on the word but in a generalized way based on synthetic and abbreviated actions with objects).

We decided that the best way was to allow children to play with toys, real objects, and objects without specific meaning, and report the moments in which the children select and use these objects. There are still many rich and important elements connected to play as a mediation factor between children and the world. Such elements need to be studied. One example is when adults - avoiding adult-centric postures - play with children, contributing to the enrichment of plots and discussions.

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