



Between Make-Believe and Make-Belief: children and their performances in recreational play installations

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ABSTRACT – Between Make-Believe and Make-Belief: children and their performances in recreational play installations – Based on Early Childhood Social Studies and Performance Studies, this article aims to analyze the ways children in Early Childhood Education, aged 3 to 5 years, produce performances during play in recreational play installations, as the result of research with children. The methodology is based on the Mosaic Approach and on the proposition of recreational play installations. Through the analyses, two units were defined: a) make-believe performances; b) make-belief performances. Thus, it was possible to make inferences about the free movement of children between make-believe and make-belief performances through their body modulations, gestures and voices.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education. Recreational Play Installation. Performance. Research with Children. Contemporary Art.

RÉSUMÉ – Entre le Faire Semblant et le Faire Croire: les enfants et leurs performances dans les mises en œuvre du jeu – Basé sur les Études Sociales de l'Enfance et sur les Études de la Performance, l'article a comme but d'analyser les façons dont les enfants de l'École maternelle, âgés de 3 à 5 ans, produisent des performances pendant les jeux dans leurs mises en œuvre. Il s'agit d'une recherche avec des enfants dont la méthodologie est fondée sur l'Approche de la Mosaïque et sur la proposition des mises en œuvre du jeu. Après les analyses, deux unités ont été définies: a) performances de faire semblant; b) performances de faire croire. Il a été ainsi possible d'inférer à propos du libre passage des enfants entre les performances de faire semblant et de faire croire, à travers leurs modulations corporelles, gestes et voix.

Mots-clés: École Maternelle. Mise en Œuvre du Jeu. Performance. Recherche avec Enfants. Art Contemporain.

RESUMO – Entre o Fazer de Conta e o Fazer Acreditar: as crianças e suas performances em instalações de jogo – Fundamentado nos Estudos Sociais da Infância e nos Estudos da Performance, o artigo objetiva analisar os modos como crianças da Educação Infantil, com idades entre 3 e 5 anos, produzem performances durante brincadeiras em instalações de jogo. Trata-se de uma pesquisa com crianças cuja metodologia é pautada na Abordagem do Mosaico e na proposição de instalações de jogo. Mediante as análises, foram definidas duas unidades: a) performances de fazer de conta; b) performances de fazer acreditar. Assim, foi possível fazer inferências a respeito do livre trânsito das crianças entre as performances de fazer de conta e fazer acreditar, por meio de suas modulações corporais, gestos e vozes.

Palavras-chave: Educação Infantil. Instalação de Jogo. Performance. Pesquisa com Crianças. Arte Contemporânea.

Initial considerations

How do worms walk?

Fall Cold afternoon. Inspired by the work *Balls*, by Martin Creed, I organized a recreational play installation – Sea of balls – inside an empty room in the school. The recreational play installation consisted of numerous balls of different sizes, weights, colors and textures. Upon entering the room and observing the arrangement of the balls, Gabriel (4 years old)¹ and Ivi (4 years old) were surprised, while the other children kicked the balls and threw them upwards. After the initial exploration of the balls, Gabriel and Ivi began initial attempts to move like ‘worms’ (denomination given by the children), using the balls as a means of movement through the space of the room. The other children in the group interrupted their actions and began to watch them. Gabriel, with his body lying on a small vinyl ball, used his hands and feet – supported on the floor – to move, sliding back and forth. Then, in this movement, the boy drew Ivi’s attention, by shouting: ‘Look! I’m a worm!’ Ivi, who played in another corner of the room, approached bringing bigger balls. Gabriel used them to look for other possibilities of movement, trying to balance himself on two big balls. Due to the size of the balls, he could no longer reach the ground with his feet and his hands. Inadvertently, Gabriel started slipping from the balls. Ivi caught one of the balls in an attempt to help her colleague. Together, Gabriel and Ivi began to adapt the recreational play, swapping balls and supporting each other in their attempts at moving. After all, it was necessary to test the possibilities of walking like worms. The worms could not stay still (Episode of the field journal).

Bodies that move, gestures that constitute performances, *worms* that come to life through the movements and expressions of children. The children share recreational play through the appropriation of the balls as materiality that enables their motions. Gabriel’s performance becomes a benchmark for Ivi and the other children observing. With the constitution of a duo, and under the attentive eyes of the audience, Ivi and Gabriel create unusual modes of moving. The children lie down, slide, support their hands, feet, hold each other. What the silence of their voices does not say,

the bodies, in their gestures and movements, communicate to all children. At a certain point, silence is interrupted. Laughter is heard. The children throw themselves on the floor and say: “– We will fall! The earth is all wet!”. Thus, it is observed that the “[...] body [of the children] adheres to situations: the experience is lived with vigor and intensity” (Machado, 2010, p. 121, our translation). Ivi and Gabriel then follow the dynamics of creating ways of walking like worms, appropriating and re-signifying the material, differently from the usual way.

The account shared in this article is the result of a research (Santos, 2021) in which we were — as researchers in the field of Early Childhood Education — imbued with the desire to ensure “[...] the children’s right to play, create and perform, in new forms of content, never before imagined” (Machado, 2020, p. 369, our translation). Thus, based on contributions from Early Childhood Social Studies (Ferreira, 2004; Alderson, 2005; 2011; Clark, 2015; Fians, 2015; Vasconcelos, 2016; Santos, 2021) and from the field of Performance Studies (Schechner, 2012; 2013; Icle, 2010; 2013; Bonatto, 2015; Icle; Bonatto, 2017; Caon, 2017), our objective is to analyze, in this article, the ways a group of eight children from a multiethnic group of Early Childhood Education, aged 3 to 5 years, produces performances during their play in recreational play installations. Fieldwork was conducted in a private Early Childhood Education School in Porto Alegre (RS), Brazil.

Methodologically, we conducted research with children (Graue; Walsh, 2003; Vasconcelos, 2016), whose data were generated by means of the proposition of recreational play installations (Abad Molina, 2008; 2014; Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019; 2021) and methodological strategies of the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2015). Recreational play installations (Abad Molina, 2008) are contexts planned for children’s free exploration and play, which enhance the production of narratives and the development of the imagination. The proposition of recreational play installations is inspired by the materials and/or processes used by contemporary artists in the composition of their installations.

In our research, we proposed seven recreational play installations, where children had the opportunity to play in groups, during 14 sessions lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. Based on the propositions of Abad Molina (2008)

and Gómez-Pintado, Zuazagoitia and Vizcarra (2020), for each proposed installation we provided the children with two play sessions, on different days of the week, in which they were able to create plots, plays, narrate stories and interact according to their interests through the context offered.

Moreover, our research was founded on the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2015), which combines visual and verbal participatory strategies so the researcher listens to the children's point of view on the subject under investigation. Based on this approach, we developed the following methodological strategies: (1) observation of the children's performances during play in recreational play installations; (2) proposals for the children to draw; (3) proposition of conversation circles with children; (4) collective production of a photo display board with the children, composed of photos and drawings, in which we documented the course of the investigation; (5) creation of collective albums, with images of the interactions and explorations during play, which constituted a research feedback for the children. However, specifically in this article, the *corpus* of analysis will be composed of episodes of the field journal and photographic images referring to the children's performances.

The diversity of listening strategies (Clark, 2015) with which we operate in the conduct of research constituted an interactive and participatory methodological design (Morrow, 2007; Alderson; Morrow, 2011). In fact, the methodology was intrinsically related to our ethical commitment (Cruz, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2016; Scramingnon, 2019) to the children. That is because we consider that “[...] ethics as a research posture has to do with the researcher's authorship and is not given a priori, but is an assumption throughout the research process” (Scramingnon, 2019, p. 63, our translation).

To that end, with regard to ethical standards, we follow the guidelines contained in CNS Resolution No. 510/2016 (Brasil, 2016), which regulates and guides research in Human Sciences. After presenting the research to the management team, we obtained the signed Term of Agreement from the Institution. Subsequently, through a meeting with the children's families, we obtained the signed Informed Consent Form. Furthermore, we met with the children and invited them to participate in the research by sharing

a Free and Informed Consent Form (Tale), in the format of an illustrated book.

On the other hand, inspired by the discussions of Morrow (2007) and Alderson and Morrow (2011), we maintained attentive listening and a process of permanent negotiation with the children, so they could express whether or not they wanted to participate in the recreational play sessions, as well as in the other proposals. Accordingly, based on the contributions of Clark (2015), during the research we produced a photo display board with the children, whose images were transformed into an album, as a means of providing research feedback to the participants. Thus, we understand that all our ethical and methodological choices constituted a sensitive way of being with the children, through the construction of a horizontal relationship with them (Pereira, 2012). In summary, the ethics in the act of doing research with children required us to reflect continuously (Graue; Walsh, 2003; Vasconcelos, 2016) throughout the investigative process.

By analyzing the data generated in the field with the children, two analytical units were defined, inspired by the discussion proposed by Schechner (2013), which differentiates, in their studies, the making-believe performances and the making-belief performances. Regarding the making-believe performances, we observed that, through interactions and plays in the recreational play installations, the children played characters, created plots, produced oral narratives, developed powerful dialogues and used the body as a way of playing the characters.

On the other hand, in the course of the research, we observed that the children's performances were not restricted only to the contexts of play that involved the make-believe, but that children often also produced make-belief performances. From this perspective, we found that children, during play in the context of recreational play installations, through creative actions, sought to transform some episodes experienced by them, in their interactions, into strategies to convince their peers. The moments of leaving the proposed sessions, the dispute for the materials they desired or, even, actions daily seen as "transgressive" (Almeida, 2019) were performed by the children, in the context of the research, as creative modes of expression before the peers and attempt to change the current order (Ferreira, 2004).

In fact, the research (Santos, 2021) enabled us to make inferences about the potentiality of the proposition of recreational play installations as important free play spaces, which foster the children's production of performances. Moreover, based on our observations (Santos; Carvalho, 2019; 2021), we emphasize the children's free movement between the make-believe and make-belief performances in the context of play through their body modulations, voices and gestures.

Taking into consideration this preliminary exposition, we organized the article into five sections. After this initial section, in the second section we present a discussion on the concepts of performance and ephemeral recreational play installations. In the third and fourth sections, we share the research data analysis, through discussion of make-believe and make-belief performances, respectively, performed by the children. Finally, in the fifth section, we present the final considerations of the article.

Children, contemporary art, recreational play installations, and performances

Based on the contributions from Early Childhood Social Studies, we affirm, during the research, the child participation (Santos; Carvalho, 2019), the respect for the children's alterity (Scramingnon, 2019), and the recognition of their position as citizens and producers of child cultures (Corsaro, 2011). Through these assumptions, by means of our methodological approach, we seek to ensure the participation of children and the safeguarding of rights, taking into consideration the multiple modes of expression of children.

The proposition of recreational play installations as a methodological strategy led to fruitful experiences for the participating children. Thus, we understand that, as the recreational play installations refer to contemporary art (Gómez-Pintado; Zuazagoitia; Vizcarra, 2020), the children are provided experiences "[...] of much interrogation, questioning and strangeness" (Koneski, 2008, p. 19, our translation). Contemporary art offers an invitation to people's interaction (Delavald, 2013), bringing them closer to issues arising from everyday life. From this perspective, we agree with Dornelles (2013) when emphasizing that the opportunity of children's experiences through contemporary art contributes to "the way they explore and express

their understandings of the world” (Dornelles, 2013, p. 32, our translation).

In fact, according to Nalini (2015), we can perceive an approximation between children and contemporary art through the actions, exploratory movements, questionings of daily life, and the children’s ways of attributing meaning to situations, spaces and materials. In this same approach, Cunha (2017) ratifies the argument proposing an analogy between the narrative modes of contemporary artists and the visual productions of children, noting possible relationships between these modes, such as, for example, the re-signification of the meanings of objects, the creation of universes beyond reality and the matter of emphasizing or minimizing aspects of their experiences. Therefore, we emphasize that it is not any art, but contemporary art (Cauquelin, 2005), in which the invitation is open to those who want to interact; hence, one can not only admire, but also modify and be part of the work that is presented (Delavald, 2013).

As we have defended elsewhere (Santos; Carvalho, 2019; 2021), the open, procedural, interactive and manifest character through numerous languages, which often hybridize, makes contemporary art an invitation to interactions, investigations and discoveries of children. For this reason, we understand that “[...] among the ways art is present in school (visual culture, music, theater, dance, etc.) one of the most interesting current proposals is the use of installations” (Gómez-Pintado; Zuazagoitia; Vizcarra, 2020, p. 2, our translation) as a means to foster interactions and creation of plays by children in Early Childhood Education.

As we mentioned initially, recreational play installations (Abad Molina, 2008) are spaces planned and offered by adults, inspired by contemporary art installations, which enable children to identify themselves “[...] with the place as an object setting for an experience that is firstly sensory, relational and then symbolic and imaginary” (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2021, p. 109, our translation). The installations are open to the transformations and significations attributed by children through their individual and shared experiences.

The proposition of recreational play installations creates the possibility of creative chaos (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019), which provides the modification and management of spaces and objects by children in their

explorations. As we have realized in our research, the recreational play installation sessions provide children with fruitful modes of interaction with their peers, materials and spaces in everyday life in Early Childhood Education.

It is important to point out that “[...] the recreational play installations were designed to offer a meeting place and life metaphor” (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2021, p. 110, our translation) to children. That is because the recreational play installations are constituted by spaces and materials “[...] open to interpretation, modification and appropriation, to allow children to have their own narratives and knowledge” (Gómez-Pintado; Zuazagoitia; Vizcarra, 2020, p. 3, our translation).

As they do not have a predetermined *script* and because they are constituted by “[...] objects [that] allow giving and communicating different meanings” (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2014, p. 3, our translation), recreational play installations can be understood as an invitation to play. We understand that the children’s bodily and imaginative experiences are enhanced when they have the possibility to interact in “an environment composed of sensitive, intelligent, living contexts” (Machado, 2010, p. 117, our translation), such as the recreational play installations we proposed during our investigation.

Observing the interactions and play of children in the context of recreational play installations enabled us to follow the ways they produced their performances. We clarify that, based on the studies of Schechner (2013, p. 35, our translation), we understand performance as restored behavior, which “means never for the first time, always for the second to the *n*th time [...]”. However, we advise, based on Icle (2010), that, if performance is the repetition of certain behaviors, it also differs from simple reproduction. That is, performance can be seen according to the “ritualization of behaviors and the inventive possibility of breaking with these repetitions” (Icle; Bonatto, 2017, p. 11, our translation).

In this regard, Bonatto (2015, p. 44, our translation) argues that, in the case of performance, “it is not only about reproduction, but the latent possibility of rupture.” In other words, it is possible to say that performance is not established in something, but “between things, such as action, interaction and relation” (Pereira, 2012, p. 294, our translation). In fact, there is

no performance without the look of the other, without “a body shared in the action of looking and doing, interacting and reacting” (Icle, 2013, p. 21, our translation). Therefore, within the scope of our research, performance is conceived as constituted by the repertoire of experiences of each child, based on their interactions, relations, bodily memory and also the possibility of being another.

From this point of view, Schechner (2013) points out that playing can be considered a type of *make-believe* performance. According to Schechner (2013, p. 43, our translation), “make-believe performances maintain a clearly marked boundary between the world of performance and everyday reality.” For example, children who play mom and/or dad, professional roles or dress up in costumes know they are enacting and can even narrate that. On the other hand, according to Schechner (2013), *make-belief* performances intentionally sabotage this boundary. Since “[...] the many performances in everyday life, such as professional roles, gender and race roles, that constitute one’s identity are not make-believe actions” (Schechner, 2013, p. 42, our translation). Thus, the performances of everyday life are examples that “make belief,” which implies that such performances “create the social realities that they represent” (Schechner, 2013, p. 42, our translation). In this sense, inspired by the studies of Schechner (2013), we understand that the children’s discourses, actions and expressions may be related to attempts to convince the peers in the context of recreational play. Ratifying the above, Caon (2017) argues that, through the children’s appropriations, interactions and creations, there are constant performances involving recreational play among peers in Early Childhood Education.

In our research (Santos, 2021), the types presented by Schechner (2013) were productive for observing the performances carried out by children during their play in the recreational play installations. We understand, based on Schechner (2012, 2013), that, since performance studies constitute an open field, there are many voices, themes, opinions, methods and subjects that can be studied *as* performance. In discussing the notion of performance, Schechner (2012, p. 18, our translation) argues that “performance is an inclusive term,” which can be interpreted as a *broad spectrum* or *continuum* of human actions, which can also be related to rituals, theatrical

plays, sports, popular entertainment, the performing arts and even everyday life.

Having made these considerations, we emphasize that the promotion of spaces, times and contexts in which children, through free recreational play, produce their performances in Early Childhood Education can contribute to the reflection and the teaching challenge that “children live school, not only remain in school” (Staccioli, 2018, p. 71, our translation). Certainly, in this way it will be possible to constitute an institutional daily routine based on the “experimentation of a time and a space qualitatively distinct from the ordinary, that is, [per]formative” and founded on the “materiality of the world, on the body and presence” (Pereira, 2012, p. 290, our translation). According to Icle (2013, p. 20, our translation), performance “restores the centrality of the body in Education”; that is because, according to the author, both performance and Education “are done in the body, with the body and for the body” (Icle, 2013, p. 24, our translation). Now, there is no separation or distinction, in performance, between thought and body.

By saying this, we agree with Pereira (2012) when he states that, regardless of the context of research on performance, the common point between them will be the fact that all contexts involve the relation with the body and with the physical presence through the attribution of new meanings. That is, according to Pereira (2012), in performance, it is possible to perceive the constitution of a *poetic body*. Thus, within the scope of our research (Santos; Carvalho, 2019; 2021), we perceived the poetic body of the children in their ways of exploring whole-bodily what surrounds them, through actions, gestures, recreational play, experiments fraught with creative powers of being and being in the world that challenge the perspective from which adults usually observe and, mainly, relate to the things of the world.

Based on the above, we will share, in the next section, some episodes of the field journal. These result from the observations carried out in the research, whose focus is the make-believe performances produced by the children in situations of play in the contexts of the proposed recreational play installations.

Make-believe performances

Race through the forest

Inspired by the materials and creative processes employed by Korean artist Kimsooja in her works *A Laundry Woman* and *A Mirror Woman*, I set up a recreational play installation with large extensions of colorful fabrics, extended on clotheslines that ran all over the outside of the schoolyard. After extending all the fabrics (of different colors, textures, thicknesses), it was possible to perceive the movement caused by the wind and the constitution of a kind of colored labyrinth. When inviting the children to play in the installation, I noticed that unusual reconfigurations in the space were being established by them. Initially, Laura (4 year old), Frederico (4 year old), Ivi (4 year old) and Joana (3 year old) began to run between the fabrics, running the entire length of the recreational play installation from one side to the other. The sound of the children's laughter, quickened footsteps and gasping breaths and the sophistication of movements flooded the space with life. Opening spaces between the fabrics and going through the extension in which they were extended, I tried to put myself as an observer with the children. They passed quickly through the fabrics, from one side to the other, tracing paths, appearing and disappearing. At some point, I hear Laura screaming: "Run, run, run, there's a monster in the forest." Upon the warning, I realize that Ivi and Joana hide amid two fabrics, holding them. Immediately, I also try to hide. Next, Frederico appears on the side of the fabrics and shouts: "Boooooo." Immediately the girls let go of the fabrics laughing, and the boy retreats. After the first encounter between the monster and the girls, Frederico crawls across the floor again towards them and emitting a guttural sound: "Wooooo." The girls run away and hide again. Subsequently, through a new plot, the play follows its course. Frederico ceases to be the monster and runs along with the girls through the fabric forest (Episode of the field journal).

In the interactive situation that characterizes the shared episode, there is initially an appropriation of the space and materials (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019) by the children. Walking among the fabrics enables them to learn about the space and experiment with the possibilities it provides for recreational play. The accelerated footsteps, the laughs and the panting

breath mark the girls' entry into the game. Laura establishes a plot for the play, warning her colleagues that there is a monster in the forest. The girls, when running away from the monster, hide in the forest of fabrics. The act of appearing and disappearing constitutes a primordial play (Abad Molina, 2008; Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019) of early childhood, the symbolized disappearance, which confers expectation, tension and, in a way, rupture with the plot that is being produced collectively.

Frederico accesses the interactive playing space (Corsaro, 2011) of the girls through his performance as a monster that chases his colleagues. In fact, it is clear that the strategy used by the boy as a means of accessing the interactive space (Corsaro, 2011) of the girls' play works, as Frederico, by inventing his character, is accepted in the plot created by Laura and the other girls, who immediately interact with him. The escape and the search for a hiding place become the guiding thread of the recreational play.

However, after playing a lot, Frederico stops being the monster and starts running with the girls through the forest. We observed that the ephemerality of the monster is also marked by the symbolized disappearance (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019; 2021). Appearing and disappearing are not only in the dynamics of the monster's escape, but also in the very existence of the character. Frederico, as a monster, appears, requests access to the play, through the introduction of his character in the scene, and disappears at the end of the plot, becoming again just a boy.

When reflecting on the make-believe performances, we reiterate the arguments of Abad Molina and Ruiz de Velasco (2019) that the playful actions of children reverberate in a myriad of possibilities of interpretation and signification of what is proposed as spaces and materials in the recreational play installations. From this perspective, we affirm that the same proposal can lead to different actions by children (Gómez-Pintado; Zuazagoitia; Vizcarra, 2020), since recreational play installations are characterized as spaces open to exploration and reorganization through the creation of plots always open to shared creation. Consistently, the interactions established in the proposals with recreational play installations institute and/or re-signify the modes of action of children with themselves, with their peers and with the materials. However, there is no previous *script* or orientation of the adult other than the invitation to play.

In addition, the narrated episode reveals indicators of the production of make-believe performances (Schechner, 2013) by the children, in which the group, through the intonation and volume of their voices, in coordination with their gestures, establishes a *creative dialogue* (Abad Molina; Ruiz de Velasco, 2019). As can be seen, by reading the episode, the make-believe performances are marked by the threshold of understanding what is a performance and what is not a performance (Schechner, 2013). In the context of the plot initiated by Laura's warning, the children are able to distinguish what is part of the created play/action and what constitutes reality. Therefore, by running away and hiding from the monster, the girls recognize the boundary of what is of the world of performance and what is not.

Specifically with regard to this threshold between play and reality, we also base our argument on the discussions of research with children conducted by Fians (2015), when emphasizing, in their work, that children, when playing a certain role, do not assume it as a whole, but weave relations with it. Thus, the children, in their performances, know that they are "make-believe or play" (Fians, 2015). For example, at the end of the session, as it was possible to notice, Frederico ceases to be the monster and starts to play the role of another member of the group who is on the run. After all, the children are "polymorph and their being-in-the-world shows us a total body; [in which] drawing, talking, moving, singing, screaming, being silent are ways of existing and not curricular activities to carry out" (Machado, 2020, p. 361, our translation), as we can follow in the images² of Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1 – Running from the monster. Source: Authors' archive.



Figure 2 – Hidden in the forest. Source: Authors' archive.

In line with the shared analyses of the children's make-believe performances, we consider it appropriate to present below another episode experienced during the field observations with the children.

The call

The recreational play installation, inspired by the exhibition *Imagined Memories*, by Japanese artist Mitsuo Miura, which shared works involving fabric strips suspended from the ceiling to the floor, constituted an invitation for the children to play in the cold winter afternoon. The children, as they entered the room, were surprised and began to closely observe the installation. After the initial observation, Laura (4 years old), Tina (4 years old) and Ivi (4 years old) walked slowly among the strips of colored fabric suspended from the ceiling of the room. Suddenly, Laura and Tina wrapped Ivi with some strips. Ivi sat on the floor and pulled, along with

Laura and Tina, the fabrics into her surroundings, holding on to them. I listened to the dialogue between the girls. Laura said: “Look there! Let me get the phone. I’ll call him He’ll come get us.” However, Tina warned Laura, “They were the ones that got us imprisoned in here.” Immediately, Laura leaned against the side of her face the ends of the fabrics in which she was wrapped. Gabriel (4 years old) appeared among the girls, pulled out one of the straps Ivi was holding and declared: “I took the phone, I took the phone.” Tina, with a serious face, replied: “Be careful, Gabriel.” The boy replied: “I just took your phone for make-believe.” Among the long strips of cloth, the girls observed Gabriel. Suddenly, Laura requested: “Gimme back the phone.” Gabriel replied: “I won’t give it back.” After a brief pause, Laura argued: “Gabriel, I have to call my father, we are in prison.” The boy thought for a few seconds and replied: “Oh, okay.” Immediately the boy returned the cloth to Laura. The girl took the cloth (phone), positioned it on her ear and said a long: “Hellooooo!”. Then Laura said: “Uhh, your phone is out of battery.” The girls and the boy began to laugh in unison. The sounds of laughter spread throughout the room environment (Episode of the field journal).

In the course of the narrated events, the children, initially, when entering the room, observe carefully the suspended fabric strips. The positioning of the strips in a high plane – from the ceiling to the floor – is something unusual in the room and therefore arouses the attention of the group. After the initial observation, the girls – Laura, Tina and Ivi – carry out a recognition of the space and an appropriation of the suspended material (Gómez-Pintado; Zuazagoitia; Vizcarra, 2020). To this end, using Ivi’s body as a support, Laura and Tina wrap her with the fabric strips. The plot of the narrative created by the girls begins when Laura announces that she needs to pick up the phone, as she will call someone. In the dialogue, the person the girl will call is unknown.

At first, we do not know what is the need to make a call, nor where the girls are. Now, the children are not only in the installation, but within an open plot shared by the group (Abad Molina, 2008; 2014). It is Gabriel’s access to the interactive playing space (Corsaro, 2011) that causes the plot to unfold. The boy tries to pick up the phone, but is warned by Tina to be careful. Gabriel warns that he just took the phone for “make-believe.”

However, it is the dispute between the boy and the girls over the phone (fabric strip suspended from the ceiling to the floor) that promotes the development of Laura's arguments and the conviction that she needs to make a call to her father, as she is imprisoned with her friends. The argument presented by Laura convinces Gabriel, who returns her phone, but unfortunately it is out of battery. The unusual outcome of the plot provokes laughter among the children, a fun shared by the whole group.

The children's make-believe performances show an inseparability between body and orality. The movement of the group through space operates in the development of the plot. In the dialogues, the strategies to change the volume of the voice, the lengthening of the syllables of the words and the emphatic mode of voice tone emission become continuous actions in the children's performances. Considering the above, we share, in Figures 3 and 4, photographic records that demonstrate the children's bodily involvement in playing.



Figure 3 – The call. Source: Authors' archive.

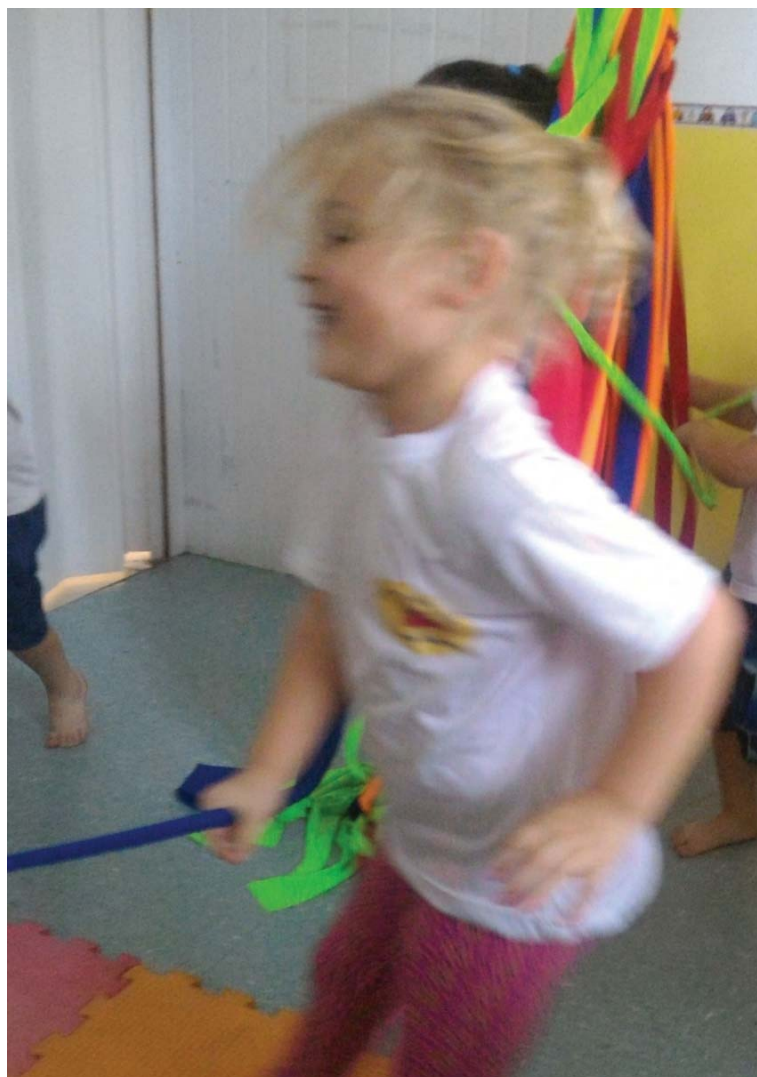


Figure 4 – Phone out of battery. Source: Authors' archive.

In the images, it is observed that the corporeality of the children since childhood is full of expressiveness (Machado, 2010; 2020). In addition, the make-believe performances in the narrated context reiterate the presence of bodies that share actions under the look, action and reaction of the other (Icle, 2013). Thus, based on the actions of Laura, Tina and Gabriel, we found that performance happens in between, “between things, as action, interaction and relation” (Pereira, 2012, p. 294, our translation), in a perspective that always demands the look of the other.

As noted in the episode, the children’s interactional dynamics in the production of a play plot allows each one to play their role, performing with their peers and for them. Thus, there is no linear logic in the performances. Gabriel, for example, when dialoguing with girls, clarifies that his action of taking the

phone is a “make-believe,” declaring his understanding to the colleagues involved (Fiães, 2015). Such action “reflexively states that the ‘true’ action was in fact a performance” (Schechner, 2012, p. 89, our translation).

Make-belief performances

Continuing the discussion, we will share other episodes experienced by the children during their play in the recreational play installations, establishing possible approaches to the concept of make-belief performance (Schechner, 2013). To this end, we will describe these episodes narratively and visually through photographic images.

We understand that Schechner (2013), when addressing make-belief performances, refers to the various performances of everyday life (professional, gender, race roles, etc.) as performances that make belief by creating the realities they represent. However, we tried to use the concept to show how some actions of children during play may be situated in ways to make them believe in what they want. In fact, our intention is to show how the children participating in the research perform forms of convincing to modify the contexts in which they are interacting during the recreational play through instituting orders (Ferreira, 2004) or even “disobedience” (Almeida, 2019). Therefore, based on Machado (2010), we consider that gestures, discourses, cries and subtler expressions of children and intense words by the body can be seen as a performance act.

Starting from this indicative, next we will present the episode experienced by Gabriel (4 years old) during a play session in the recreational play installation entitled *The Paper Festival*. The installation’s proposition was inspired by two works, *Schwarzer Papierhaufen* and *Weisser Papierhaufen* (black paper pile and white paper pile), by the German artist Reiner Ruthenbeck, which involves accumulations of papers. Accumulation, in addition to being a production process used by that artist, is part of children’s play from an early age. According to Abad Molina (2008), accumulating objects, toys and materials, bringing them together, plays an important role during play.

Do you see me?

During the play session involving the recreational play installation *The Paper Festival*, composed of dozens of paper reels of different sizes and streamers, Gabriel (4 years old) built a house. To carry out the construction of his house, the boy accumulated the papers of the reels unwound by the other children and organized them on top of a plastic table that was initially located in the central area of the room. During this process, the boy tried to collect the reels that were with the other children. As a negotiation strategy for collecting the larger reels, Gabriel offered his peers the smaller ones: “Take this one. Look, take it.” In addition, the boy offered the streamers as a possibility of exchange for the larger reels, saying: “This one is much better. Take this one and give me the others.” At the end of the construction of his house, the boy got under the table covered with papers that hung from the base to the floor. Inside the house, lying on the floor, he watched all the children who were in the room. After a few moments, Gabriel left from underneath the table and, without saying anything, began to remove the papers and throw them up. As he repeatedly carried out the action of throwing the papers up, the boy watched my reaction closely. When there was no paper left, the boy held the table with both hands, watched me closely and began to raise the table laughing. Then the boy lowered the table, observed me again and repeated the action three more times in a row. In a few moments, he asked the question: “Do you see me? Doing so is much better” (Episode of the field journal).

In the flow of events narrated in the episode, we initially highlighted two aspects that mobilized our attention. The first refers to Gabriel’s cunning in his negotiation strategies (Ferreira, 2004; Corsaro, 2011) with the other children to collect as many reels as possible, planning the construction of his house. In this process, the boy tries to pick up some paper reels that were being used by other children, who refuse his attempt. Thus, when perceiving the resistance or the negative response, the boy tries to negotiate through exchange relations, saying: “Take this one. Look, take it.” In such action, Gabriel gestures and immediately places another paper reel in his colleague’s hand.

However, at times when this strategy does not work, the boy seeks streamers, grouping a greater amount of material to offer to colleagues, emphasizing that the streamers would be an appropriate exchange option. Gabriel does not make believe, but, within the possibilities of the context, seeks answers through creative actions to, in a way, convince colleagues to believe that the streamers being offered as a possibility of exchange for the reels is the best alternative. During the negotiations proposed by Gabriel to his colleagues, it is possible to perceive the ways the boy produces performances. From this point of view, we understand that such actions are close to what Schechner (2013) names as make-belief performances. That is, “[...] this leads us to meet a child who proves plastic, malleable, imaginative; who lives with us, but transits through another logic, other ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (Machado, 2010, p. 119, our translation).

Therefore, the second aspect that aroused our attention, and whose images we will share next (Figure 5), concerns the way Gabriel repeatedly throws the reels of unwound paper upwards, while observing the researcher carefully.



Figure 5 – Rain of papers. Source: Authors' archive.

In the episode, as can be seen in the shared images, the boy knows that he is being photographed and filmed; therefore, he calls on the researcher to observe him, as well as his colleagues. Gabriel's said action ratifies the statement of Icle (2013, p. 21, our translation) that "[...] there is no Performance without the look of the other, so we speak here of a body shared in the action of looking and doing, interacting and reacting."

This shared body (Icle, 2013), in other contexts, could be seen as a disobedient and defying body. However, from our analytical perspective, disobedience does not have a pejorative connotation, but is related to the creative modes of expression of children, which enable "rebellious poetic acts" (Almeida, 2019, p. 138, our translation), as can be observed in the scenes in Figure 6.



Figure 6 – Disassembling the house. Source: Authors' archive.

Continuing the analysis, in the next episode we will seek to highlight the ways Joana (3 years old) performs to establish an instituting order (Ferreira, 2004), breaking the dynamics of ending of the recreational play installation session called

Interlocks, ropes, belts and fabrics

A belt?

Cold afternoon. The strong wind hit the window. Last proposal in the field. Installation *Interlocks, ropes and fabrics*. Fabrics, belts, rubbers bands and ropes tied and suspended from a fishing net on the ceiling of the room swayed with the wind that invaded the room through the window gap. The children were fascinated by the movement of the fabric strips. Almost 2 hours of play had passed, and they were still involved with the session, interacting among the peers and with the suspended fabric strips. I began to invite the children to end the moment, as the afternoon was ending. I noticed that while the children were organizing themselves to leave the room, Joana (3 years old) positioned herself in the center of the installation, looked up and began to closely observe the fabric strips. The room was empty, only Joana and I remained. Standing in front of the installation, the girl began to pull some fabric strips. Joana looked at me closely and said: “Wait... just a little longer.” Immediately the girl asked: “Why do you have a belt hanging?” Joana got up, sat down on the floor and pulled out a golden belt that was hanging next to the fabrics. The girl moved her body, gestured with her hands, looked at me seriously and said: “Look, a beeeeelt! I will need more time, I cannot return to the room now.” From that moment on, I accompanied Joana in the search for other belts in the installation. With this, our time of leaving ended up postponed, and the other children of the group ended up returning in order to help Joana to locate other belts in the installation (Episode of the field journal).

Initially, it should be noted that the recreational play installation described in the episode consisted of several cloth scraps, pieces of fabric, belts, elastic bands and ropes, in a fishing net suspended from the ceiling of the room. Such recreational play installation was inspired by a work by artist Bianca Santini, in her exhibition *Risco e Ar*. As it is possible to observe,

by reading the episode, after the researcher informs the children about the time and, therefore, about the imminent end of the session that afternoon, Joana (3 years old) interrupts the ending of the proposal. The girl, who watched closely the installation and the movements of her colleagues, began to explore the materials more intensely. After pulling some fabrics, Joana says: “Wait... just a little longer. Why is there a belt hanging?”. The girl’s body expression when asking the researcher emerges full of expressiveness – the intonation of the voice, the pause after saying “Wait,” the intensification of the word belt. Joana’s questioning is shared by and with the body, in a relational way (Machado, 2020).

The episode confirms the fact that there is no dissociation between body and thought, between what children say and do. Thus, being and doing are not seen in isolation or in opposition; on the contrary, they are united and characteristic of performance (Icle; Bonatto, 2017). Therefore, Joana does not only share an isolated speech through her question, but is full of action through her body expression.

Based on this indication, we highlight that the girl, when performing, mobilizes the group of children and the researcher herself, calling on her peers to locate other belts in the installation. We understand that Joana produces a make-belief performance (Schechner, 2013), which is manifested by the pursuit of convincing the researcher that it takes more time for a new exploration. Such performance, as can be seen in the following images (Figure 7), evidences meanings of transformation of the moment established in a creative way, raising new dialogues and actions shared with the other children.

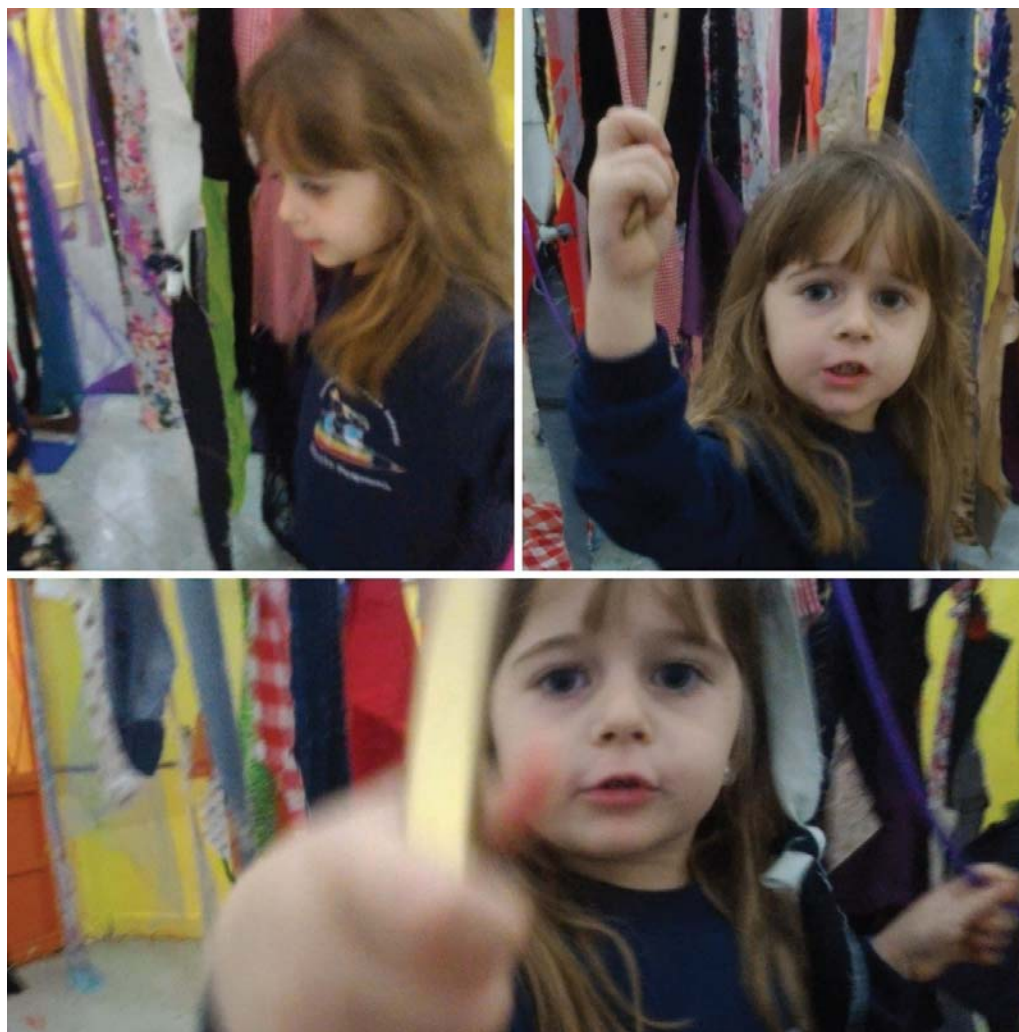


Figure 7 – Look, a belt! Source: Authors' archive.

As noted by the observation of the images, Joana interrupts the closing of the session. The girl institutes a new order (Ferreira, 2004) to what is being proposed at that moment. As Ferreira (2004) clarifies, children use strategies of continuity of play through the creation of instituting orders. In the case of the episode, the dialogue with the researcher and the search for new belts, as can be seen in the photographic record in Figure 8, below, was the strategy employed by Joana.



Figure 8 – It is a belt. Source: Authors' archive.

We consider that the researcher's attentive listening, as well as the valorization of the question proposed by Joana, enabled the recognition and appreciation of the performative acts of the girl. We understand that, in this situation, the researcher, as an adult, gives a positive character to the action of the girl (Machado, 2010; 2020). This implies decentralizing the look from adult ways, which do not value children's experiences. According to Machado (2010, p. 130, emphasis added by the author, our translation), this can be "the most fertile way to understand the child as a *performer* who creates their performative acts."

As researchers, we understand that, even when the children's questions contradict the institutional order (Ferreira, 2004) proposed by adults, it is necessary to "[...] refine the meanings to understand what that gesture [of the child] expresses and communicates, in order to talk with it" (Machado,

2010, p. 130, our translation). As can be seen in the shared episode, Joana's action escapes, overflows, *disobeys* (Almeida, 2019) the context of closing the session. However, Joana, through her make-belief performance, establishes an opportunity “[...] to live what is outside the norm, outside the predicted and the regulations that order daily life in the time-space of the class or in the time-space of the school” (Caon, 2017, p. 116, our translation). After all, the girl institutes a break with the expected time for ending the proposal and institutes, with her action, new possibilities of continuity of the moment.

Final considerations

Official Childhood

Laura: Ready! Official childhood.

Researcher: Look! Official childhood, Laura?

Laura: Yes! I wanted to use childhood and a word that had ‘O’ to make this doughnut pointing to the letter. But now it’s official as in true.

Researcher: But what is a true childhood?

Laura: A childhood in which children play, right? (Episode from the field journal).

Official childhood. True childhood. Childhood that plays. The dialogue with Laura (5 years old) and the other children of the group in search of a title for the album of memories of the research ratifies our defense that Early Childhood Education is a space where children can play. That is because we understand, like Machado (2010, p. 127, our translation), that “[...] the richer the ‘menu’ of tastings in the world, the more diverse the experiences adults provide to small children, the more repertoire they will collect to enjoy and reinvent the world.”

In this sense, we consider that recreational play installations constitute one (among many others) possibility of sharing with children, times, spaces and materials, for exploration, experimentation and invention of other worlds, through the intensity of their interactions and play. Now, recreational play installations promote “[...] experiences not only aimed at doing, but rather at enjoying, experimenting, feeling and also thinking that mobilize the children’s discussion with their peers about what they see and feel” (Delavald, 2013, p. 112, our translation).

Considering the above, in the course of the article we share the production of performances developed by children during their play in the context of recreational play installations, which tend to approach the notions of make-believe and make-belief performances conceived by Schechner (2013). In the investigation, we observed that children, when carrying out make-believe performances (Schechner, 2013), play characters – monsters, mothers, daughters, among many others –, invent magical props and create imaginary worlds. To this end, in their performances, children express themselves whole-bodily and attribute new meanings to the spaces and materials shared in the recreational play installations. Moreover, in their performances, children operate body modulations (Caon, 2017), exploring a myriad of voices, movements, gestures and modes of expression.

Similarly, during the investigation, we observed that children execute actions that approach make-belief performances (Schechner, 2013). These were present in situations of the children's interactions and explorations as possibilities to convince as to their desires and intentions. Negotiations, arguments and strategies of convincing were on the plan, always along with gestures, changes in tone of voice and body expression. That is, the children participating in the research were involved in rebellious poetics (Almeida, 2019), which operated to promote instituting orders (Ferreira, 2004) that challenged the position of the researcher in the field, as well as of the peers during the negotiations for materials.

Through the research, we made inferences about the potency of the children's performances as a means of "experimenting with a time and space qualitatively distinct from the ordinary" (Pereira, 2012, p. 290, our translation). To this end, the narratives presented through the shared episodes and sets of images showed the centrality of the body in the performative acts of children. That is because the children's smallest expressions and intense expressions through the body can be seen as performance acts (Machado, 2010). Therefore, we consider that valorizing the performances shared by children enables giving a positive character to their bodily, gestural and oral experiences (Caon, 2017), as well as to recognize the alterity of childhood. After all, like Laura, we defend the existence of childhoods experienced by children who have the possibility of playing inside and outside the spaces of Early Childhood Education.

Notes

- ¹ We clarify that the children's names are fictitious. Moreover, we highlight that, although the article was written in co-authorship, the fieldwork was carried out only by one of the authors. The ethical discussions of the research will be presented in the course of the article.
- ² We obtained authorization from the children's guardians to use the images that are presented in the article, by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and specifically the Term of Use of Images and Voice Recording.

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