


The Children's and the Teacher's Participation in the Constitution of Playing in School

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Abstract: Considering the relations between play and child development and the marginalization of play at school, evidenced in previous studies, this case study aimed to analyze children's and teacher's participation in the constitution of playing in a public nursery school in Fortaleza. The following procedures were adopted: observation of the class (composed of 24 low-income children) routine; semi-structured interview; elaboration and explanation of drawings; story to be completed; and symbolic game, with analysis both of this game and of play experienced at school along with the children. Analysis of the data collected allowed concluding that the sort of play valued by the teacher is that which is planned and conducted by her aiming at learning and training skills. Free play, valued by children, is seen by her as "a mess." The absence of critical reflection on the adult-centered posture of society, plus to the scarcity of knowledge of the relations between play and child development, compromise the quality of the teacher's work.

Keywords: childhood play behavior, early childhood education, teacher education

A Participação de Crianças e Professora na Constituição da Brincadeira na Escola

Resumo: Considerando-se as relações brincadeira-desenvolvimento e a marginalização da brincadeira na escola, evidenciada em estudos anteriores, buscou-se analisar, neste estudo de caso, a participação de crianças e professora na constituição da brincadeira em uma pré-escola pública de Fortaleza. Foram adotados como procedimentos: observação da rotina da turma (composta por 24 crianças de baixa renda), entrevista semiestruturada, elaboração e explicitação de desenhos, história para completar, jogo simbólico e análise desse jogo e das brincadeiras vividas na escola, em parceria com as crianças. A análise dos dados construídos permitiu concluir que a brincadeira valorizada pela professora é aquela planejada e dirigida por ela objetivando a aprendizagem e o treino de habilidades. A brincadeira livre, valorizada pelas crianças, ela vê como "bagunça". A ausência de reflexão crítica sobre a postura adultocêntrica da sociedade, somada à escassez de conhecimentos a respeito das relações brincadeira-desenvolvimento infantil, comprometem a qualidade do trabalho da professora.

Palavras-chave: comportamento de brincar, educação infantil, formação de professores

La Participación de Niños y la Maestra en la Constitución del Juego en la Escuela

Resumen: Teniendo en cuenta las relaciones entre el juego-desarrollo y la marginación del juego en la escuela evidenciadas en estudios previos, en este estudio de caso se buscó analizar la participación de niños y la maestra en la constitución del juego en un jardín de infantes público en Fortaleza. Se adoptaron los siguientes procedimientos: observación de la rutina del grupo (compuesto por 24 niños de bajos ingresos), entrevista semiestruturada, elaboración y explicación de dibujos, historia para completar, juego simbólico y su análisis y los juegos practicados en la escuela en colaboración con los niños. El análisis de los datos recolectados permitió concluir que el juego valorado por la maestra es el mismo que planeó y dirigió con el objetivo de que los niños aprendan y entrenen sus habilidades. El juego libre valorado por los niños es considerado un "desorden" por la maestra. La ausencia de reflexión crítica sobre la posición adultocéntrica de la sociedad y la escasez de conocimientos sobre las relaciones entre el juego y el desarrollo infantil comprometen la calidad del trabajo de la maestra.

Palabras clave: conducta de jugar, crianza del niño, formación de profesores

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This article summarizes a research that sought to understand the participation of a group of children and their teacher in the constitution of playing in the routine of an early childhood education institution. The teacher's and children's conceptions of playing at school were analyzed, as well as how such conceptions interact and incorporate play into their daily activities in class.

The topic of “play and early childhood education” has been addressed in several studies carried out in our country (Côco & Soares, 2016; Priolo Filho, Pompermaier, Almeida, & Souza, 2016; Sommerhalder, Nicolielo, & Alves, 2016, among others), but listening to what children have to say about the meaning of playing is still an exception among these investigations. However, as shown by Oliveira, Guimarães and Lima (2013) in a study on the contributions of academic research on the quality of early childhood education in Brazilian institutions, by Cruz and Martins (2017) in research on children’s voice and public education policies, and by Marques and Sperb (2013) in a study on the early childhood school from the children’s perspective, the interviewed children point out that play is a fundamental component in their educational experience.

This research was performed based on the following principles: the child’s right to play, guaranteed in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Law No. 8,069 (Brasil, 1990); the promotion of global child development as a function of early childhood education, as prescribed by the National Educational Bases and Guidelines Law No. 9,394 (Brasil, 1996); the relations between play and development evidenced by developmental psychology (Piaget, 1990; Vygotsky, 1994; Wallon, 1981; among others); and the adoption of interactions and play as guiding axes for pedagogical practices in early childhood education, as provided by Resolution No. 5, of December 17, 2009, which sets the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2009). It is noteworthy that considering play one of the axes for teaching practices is justified by the myriad acquisitions provided by playing in different areas of child development.

Discussing the close relation between play and development, Vygotsky (1994) states that playing demands children’s cognitive exercise that makes them to operate beyond the usual behavior of their age, being an irreplaceable instrument for habit learning and social skills education.

Piaget (1990) points out that in pretend play, children subject objects to their activity, assimilating everything to their self. Vygotsky (1994) has a similar thought: for him, it is in play that “the child learns to act in a cognitive, rather than an externally visual, realm by relying on internal tendencies and motives and not on incentives supplied by external things” (p. 126). Along the same lines, Wallon (1981) emphasizes that playing helps developing the capacity to symbolize, with an important role in the child’s psychic evolution: while the child needs the *clue*, the adult deals with the *symbol*, and playing makes it possible to cross that threshold.

The gains provided by free play to the child’s affective life are highlighted by Piaget (1990), who identifies playing as an activity at the service of the children, enabling them to have a respite from their difficult task of adapting to a world of established laws; by Winnicott (1975), who emphasizes the characteristic potential of play for promoting mental health; and by Wallon (1981), who recognizes play as a fundamental experience in the processes of identity construction, given that it provides not only knowledge of the world, but also child’s self-knowledge.

Elkonin (1998), alike Piaget (1990), finds relations between play and the child’s moral development, calling attention to the fact that the existing norms in social relations also present in play through its rules are a source of child’s moral development, so playing is “a school of morals” (p. 421). This author defends free play in daycare centers, emphasizing that play experienced with the other (pairs or groups) favors moral and cognitive decentralization, since the child needs to establish agreements, besides understanding and respecting their partner (s). For him, play experienced at home is limited experience compared with collective play.

However, even though: children’s right to play is determined by law; theories reiterate the importance of playing for different areas of child development; the most important law on Brazilian education defines the promotion of child global development as a role of early childhood education; the resolution that defines the guidelines for the pedagogical practices in daycare centers and nursery schools elects play as one of the guiding axes for the teacher’s work, research has shown that, in general, play is not valued by teachers from most institutions serving children under six years of age in our country (Côco & Soares, 2016; Cruz & Santos, 2016; Jóia, 2018; Portilho & Tosatto, 2014, among others).

Aiming to better understand this issue, the investigation in this article aimed to apprehend how play happens in early childhood education, what conceptions children and the teacher have regarding play and how these conceptions interact with each other in constituting play at school. It is necessary to make it clear that the term *conception* refers here to the notion, idea, concept, or understanding that one has of something; in this case, play in the learning environment. The term play refers to an experience which is either spontaneous (when the individual engages in it by himself or herself) or voluntary (when the individual accepts an invitation to engage). This is a condition for the full involvement of the one who plays. Educational games and other activities directed by the teacher and imposed on children, who are not given the right to decide whether to participate or not, cannot be considered play. It is also worth mentioning that the use of the term *school* in this text is due to the fact that, in the local reality, early childhood education institutions are called “school” by children, their families and educators.

In addition to the aforementioned development scholars, the sociological studies by Marchi and Sarmiento (2017) on childhood culture and the contributions of Foucault’s work (1987) regarding disciplinary processes were also considered as theoretical framework.

Methods

Participants

The universe studied is an educational institution belonging to the District Nursery and Elementary Education Board in the city of Fortaleza. Located in a neighborhood

known for its high violence rates, this school serves a population composed of low-income families, in which a significant portion of the parents have no employment or fixed income. The research participants were the 24 children of a single class called *Infantil V* (mostly composed of five-year-olds) in the nursery school and their teacher. This class was chosen considering the fact that relative verbal resourcefulness and spontaneity (Wallon, 1981) are commonly present in children of this age, characteristics that facilitate the work of the researcher who proposed to listen to the children through their oral expression. Other means of children's self-expression, such as playing and drawing, also reviewed in this research, are very present in this age group.

Instruments

The research is a case study with a qualitative approach. As Stake states (as quoted by Yazan, 2015), this type of investigation seeks to raise knowledge on particular case in an extensive and intense manner, without generalizing about the phenomena, as the greatest interest lies in deeply understanding a specific case in detail.

Six instruments have been used in this investigation: (1) *observation* of the class routine, recorded in film and in a field notebook; (2) *semi-structured interview*, based on a flexible script that addresses issues related to play at school; (3) *elaboration and explanation of drawing*, which provides the children under investigation (whose age group experiences a process of development of the capacity for abstraction) with the newly-constructed drawing support as a stimulus for dialogue (Arfouilloux, 1976); (4) *story to be completed*, a procedure based on the projective test for children named "Histoires à Completer," a technique created by Madeline Backers - Thomas for use in the psychological clinic that allows access to ideas that the child does not easily express (Schoenfeldt, 1979); (5) *symbolic game*, a sort of a planned observation about play at school; (6) *analysis of the symbolic game and play experienced at school*, carried out along with the children and whose object of study was the scenes previously recorded and later on presented to them on a TV screen.

Procedure

Data collection. The data collection process started with observation sessions of the class routine (14 in total), in the reference classroom and outside, both when the teacher guided the children's activities and during children's free time. Then, meetings were held with six children – three boys and three girls – chosen by random draw, who made up the frequently investigated group. The choice of six individuals was due to the fact that it would be a group with favorable size for the application of the instruments, and the losses would be minimized if any child stopped participating in the research at an advanced stage of data collection. The equivalence of boys and girls sought to eliminate the possibility of supremacy of a specifically female or male perception of playing, since, in

many aspects, culture assigns different roles to each gender. Most of the procedures addressed these boys and girls collectively, since the group work favors the children's feeling of trust, minimizing the existing inequality in the researcher (adult)-subject (child) interaction.

In the interview, the group answered questions about "when," "how," "with whom" and "why" they play at school, and details of the experiences narrated by the subjects were explored. In another meeting, drawings were elaborated and made explicit with each of the children, individually. The drawing itself was not meant to be analyzed and interpreted, but rather used as a stimulating resource for verbal expression, which was the actual object of analysis. Talking about what the child drew proved to be a good stimulus for his/her verbal expression.

Subsequently, the story to be completed was introduced, in which the group of children, stimulated by the fantasy of the beginning of the story, was motivated to express their ideas on how this story could be continued according to them. Its basic plot is about a boy who attended that school and needed to explain to another boy how play happens there. This challenge mobilized the children's attention, which made this instrument fundamental for data collection. In order to further listen to the children, the symbolic game was performed – a strategy developed for research purposes and recorded on video, which has been drafted based on the following proposition: "You choose a game that you like and then play freely." This experience enabled access to many important data, such as the richness of themes present in the games experienced. As stated by Arfouilloux (1976), playing is embedded with symbolic meaning, and it is a children's privileged mean of communication. The last instrument used with the group of children was the collective analysis of the symbolic game and play experienced at school. Initially, the scenes recorded by the researcher and presented on a TV screen generated euphoria. However, as the surprise of the unusual situation eased off, the children commented on their experiences and the feelings evoked by them, elucidating hitherto unclear aspects.

The data collection was concluded by interviewing the teacher, aiming to understand her insight into play in school and the meaning of play for the children, her position with regard to her class playing both inside and outside the classroom, as well as to be acquainted with her professional career. This teacher started teaching 25 years ago, as soon as she graduated from teacher-training school, and later studied theology.

Excerpts from video and audio recordings documented during the procedures, which brought relevant information, were transformed into a digital file, as well as several situations entered in the field notebook during the observation sessions.

Data analysis. Qualitative data analysis seeks to capture the multidimensional character of the phenomena, apprehending the different meanings of the experience lived by individuals, inserted in their particular context. In this type of analysis, it is necessary to examine the informative elements so as to delimit parts and discover the relations

among themselves and between them and the whole (Rodríguez Gómez, Flores, & García Jiménez, 1996). Thus, the data related to the children's conception of play in school also brought information about the teacher's conception of play, and as the analysis progressed, an understanding of constituting play in that context was achieved. Analysis and discussion of the data content were performed through the lens of the theoretical framework adopted, which provided support for identification and understanding of the criteria used by participants to characterize play in that context.

Ethical Considerations

Before starting the procedures, the methodology of this research, with a detailed description of its instruments, was sent to and approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal do Ceará (COMEPE no. 231/06). It is important to clarify that the school principal, the teacher and the children's parents were consulted about their availability to participate in the research and, with regard to the parents, about their agreement concerning the children's participation. All of them formalized their acceptance by signing a consent form. Similarly, the children were consulted about their agreement to participate in this investigation and informed that they could stop participating in the event they wanted to do so at any point during the research. As they did not yet master reading/writing, instead of the consent form, they were invited to make a free drawing that would symbolize their acceptance.

Results and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, it was possible to describe how children's play happens in their daily life in class, the children's conception of play, the teacher's conception of play, and the interaction between the children's and the teacher's conceptions of play in the constitution of playing of those boys and girls.

How play happens

In the classroom, the most common type of play was spontaneous play, surreptitiously carried out during almost every activity proposed by the teacher, which were allowed by her in the waiting moments. This permission was given, mainly, in the early morning (when they arrived and sat at their tables, before the "circle"), when the teacher was busy (for example, attending to a mother or organizing children's materials), on occasions when one child had completed his/her task and the others were not finished yet, and late in the morning, when they were waiting for their parents to take them home. This play (playing with a toy car on the table; lulling a doll; rolling a coin; tickling a classmate, etc.) was "accepted" but not encouraged. It was not explicitly authorized; what emerged was that, during the waiting times, the teacher did not usually repress the spontaneous play that emerged. However, there seemed to be a criterion

for it to be accepted on these occasions: it could not generate much noise or movement. When it did, the teacher switched their seats. This sense of orderliness toward children/students and the physical space, characteristic of school pedagogy, is a way of managing human beings and controlling their multiplicities (Foucault, 1987).

Sometimes, the teacher organized the class for an planned play usually extracted from magazines focused on early childhood teachers. The main objective was to stimulate psychomotor development ("*serra-serra serrador*"; "*boneco de lata*"; "*epoca balão*"; "*cobra de jornal*"; "*corrente*" etc.). On these occasions, the children were not consulted about their desire to play, nor could they transform the game "prescribed" by the teacher into another one.

Observing the class routine made it possible to conclude that recess and the playground area were, par excellence, the time and place for playing at school. It was during recess that the children chose how and with whom they played, living this experience fully. In addition to exploring the playground toys (swings, stairs, walkways, slides), the children played with sand, played tag, cops and robbers, fighting, running and jumping, "stamping" the other's body with a lollipop, etc. Every so often, other spaces (the bathrooms, a disabled warehouse and a theater room that had a stage) were explored by children in their play during recess, but, when caught playing in these places, they were scolded by adults.

Children's conception of play

According to the children, they played simply because they liked to play: "Because we like to play." Desire, which belongs to the realm of freedom, is the condition for play. This children's perception reinforces what is pointed out by several scholars, among them Piaget (1990), Vygotsky (1994) and Wallon (1981), regarding one of the most important characteristics of play: it presupposes a spontaneous or voluntary insertion (when an invitation to play is accepted).

When asked about when they played, the children initially did not mention moments experienced at school. They said they played "at night and in the afternoon," "in the morning, when there is no school," that is, the periods when they were not at school were the first to be indicated as play times. Only then they mentioned the moments when they played at school, citing "recess" and "snack time."

Similarly, when asked about "where they played," the children firstly mentioned places other than. They played at home, on the street, at the neighbors' house. Encouraged to talk about other places where they played, they referred to the school, identifying the playground as the space for playing in that context. Only one girl, and only once, stated that "the school is for playing." Faced with the question "do you only play on the playground?" the majority answered affirmatively and one of them added: "At home too." When asked if they played at school, they replied that they played "during recess."

The fact, identified since the observation sessions, that, for children, the *time* spent playing at school was during

recess and the *place* destined for play was the playground, was expressed by them in all the procedures developed. During the exhibition of video recordings previously experienced on the playground, the children's euphoria seemed to confirm this fact. This children's perception of recess and playground in preschool is discussed by Cruz and Santos (2016).

Play proposed by the teacher, usually rule-based games that children tried to transform by modifying or disregarding the rules, was recognized as such by the children, including by those who were not involved in it. Still, probably due to their emphatically pedagogical character, some of these experiences were not categorized as games by children, but as "chores," "duties," and considered "cool" by them.

Teacher's conception of play

Seeking to conceptualize play, the teacher developed definitions and listed characteristics about which, throughout the interview and in her practice, she was not very sure. Her definition of play has a markedly utilitarian character, close to the idea of a pedagogical game: play is "a fun way to learn something," with which you can "work on the content in a playful, enjoyable way." However, she also considered the gains in socialization and psychomotor development as advantages of play and highlighted the fact that the children saw play only as "fun," while for her, the teacher, "learning something" was always the objective.

Her argument for the appreciation of play by the school is the fact that it is a learning tool: while free play is a "mess," guided play promotes learning. Those are antagonistic conceptions of movement/noise/play and learning/development/education. Occasions on which the *activity* proposed by the teacher was experienced as *play* by the children were rare. On the other hand, any play initiated by themselves did not tend to be valued by the teacher. The devaluation of free play by teachers was also evidenced by other researchers, including Cruz and Santos (2016) and Portilho & Tosatto (2014).

This teacher attributed to the deficiencies in her training the difficulty she felt in respecting the children's specificities and their need for freedom: "I don't know if that is what play all about, just to have a goal. I question a lot the freedom issue ... I really don't have much reading about it..." Her resistance to giving up dominance over the class and letting the children play freely seems to be related to the fact that the unpredictability of play requires an adaptation effort, since her role, the education of children, is usually associated with the establishment of order, frequently achieved through the imposition of limits and discipline.

Using the achievements promoted by play to argue its appreciation at school, she used the term *activity* to refer to a "productive" play, which she differentiated from free play, giving it superior status (she only allowed children to walk on the table "when play is an *activity*, such as working the body ..."). That is, she referred to pedagogical game and psychomotor exercise, not to play.

It is possible that a view of the school as a place of order and discipline (Foucault, 1987), in which the adult is the model to be followed, and a view of the teacher as one whose mission is to transform children – naturally corrupted and faulty – into productive, educated adults, are more decisive factors to the actions of this teacher than a vision of a child subject to rights and of an early childhood education institution as a place for play (Brasil, 2009), ideas that surfaced at specific moments, in which she seemed to act less spontaneously and more consciously, based on reason. Starting from this view of school and teacher, she attached importance only to play she planned for specific purposes, and that was not always experienced by children as play.

The interaction of the children's and the teacher's conceptions of play: the constitution of playing in the daily life of the class under analysis

The children perceived play as an experience dissociated from the teacher. For example, a boy who drew children playing on the playground during recess, when asked where the teacher was, replied: "She's in the classroom." In spite of sitting everyday in the corridor that surrounds the playground, staying there for the entire recess, she was always busy filling out school diaries, which may explain the disregard for her presence by the children. Some said that the teacher did not like to play: "She doesn't like to play! She likes to cuddle," "She likes to walk and do her work." Demonstrating a keen sensitivity to the feelings experienced by his teacher, a boy referred to the fact that she likes to hear jokes and funny stories: "When someone tells a joke, she likes it, just like play." The competence of this child at identifying the playful character of jokes is impressive, an experience highlighted by Winnicott (1975) as very common to adults and corresponding to children's play.

The teacher, when talking about what the experience of playing means for children, addressed important characteristics of play, far beyond the acquisition of knowledge and training of psychomotor skills, stating the presence of playing in the children's lives as remarkable. Answering the question about why children play, she claimed:

Because it's a way of expressing themselves. In play, they represent their lives, their reality. Sometimes I watch without them noticing; for them, everything is about playing. Having a toy doesn't matter; they can find anything to play with, to relate to. And they build it without any material; they play with nothing. So it (play) is part of their life, of everyday life (Teacher).

It is noteworthy that the teacher perceives two important characteristics of play studied by theorists: it is a form of language (Elkonin, 1998; Piaget, 1990; Vygotsky, 1994; Winnicott, 1975) and in the child recreates reality within it acts within an imaginary situation, operating with meanings disconnected from objects (Elkonin, 1998; Vygotsky, 1994).

Considering the recognition of these characteristics by the teacher, how can one understand her control over spontaneous play that arises in the classroom? Why was play – so often initiated there, in which children used different objects, their own body or the other’s body, exactly as she described – often restrained by her? One hypothesis may be that this play interferes with the planned routine, being understood by the teacher as a “mess,” as she repeatedly mentioned: “Everything becomes a mess!” It is worth remembering that Piaget (1990) identifies as characteristics of play the end in itself and a relative lack of organization.

There are significant divergences in the children’s and the teacher’s perspectives as to the meaning attributed to play in school setting: the children deemed it as fun and pleasant and it presupposes freedom; for the teacher, it was a “fun” way in which *she* provided children’s with learning and development. Yet other researchers, among them *Cruz and Santos (2016)*, found that the pedagogical game and the guided play are more valued by the early education teachers, in detriment of free play, valued by the children.

It is possible to understand the apparent contradiction between the children’s perception, according to which they “did not play in the classroom”, and the teacher’s perception that “games experienced in this space were diverse” by taking some issues into account. First, play proposed by her was performed without the full involvement peculiar to playing, and was perceived as “activities” by the children. When they transformed the suggested experience into a new play, it used to be suspended by the teacher, who thought that the class had not understood what she had proposed and was frustrated by the fact that she was unable to accomplish her plans. In the interview, she reported, for example, a situation in which a game planned by her, “wolf catches pig,” was transformed by the children: “They (children) did not understand that they had to stay within that space. It’s that game you plan and “doesn’t work out”, it takes another direction ... They loved it because it turned into a mess!” (laughing).

Secondly, spontaneous play, which is generally performed in a surreptitious manner in the classroom, was not perceived by the children as indicator of the classroom as a space for playing. The teacher seemed to say that play only happened in the classroom if “under her control”, while the children seemed to say that “without freedom it is not possible to play”, and, therefore, they stated that they did not play in the classroom.

The conflicts arising from the divergences between the children’s and the teacher’s conceptions of play can be better understood when we consider the differences between children’s culture and adults’ culture (Marchi & Sarmiento, 2017). The fact that play initiated by children has a purpose in itself and reinvents new meanings for objects, movements and sounds (Elkonin, 1998; Vygotsky, 1994) seemed to cause discomfort to the teacher. However, for each difficulty posed by her, the children created a new play: they would play with any things, in countless ways. A tension of opposing forces was then established between the teacher and the children: while she tried, in every way, to maintain order, the children

insisted on playing. In this struggle, her status of adult and teacher was not sufficient to guarantee her “victory.” If she, with her authority, undid games, the resistant children seemed determined in their desire to play freely, even if, for that, they had to deceive the teacher.

Such a process had already been described in research that analyzed manifestations of childhood cultures by children from a public nursery school, during activities proposed by the teacher (Silva, 2016). Even in those more directed situations, children build their own modes of collective organization: they question, resist, deceive, create new meanings on top of the initial plan, especially from play.

The teacher starts from a perspective of the school as a place where one learns the letters, numbers and forms of behavior proper of the productive, educated adult. Despite, at specific moments, affirming the importance of play in child development, her practices exposed her perception of free play as a “mess.” On the other hand, the pedagogical game, valued by her, was not recognized as play by children. For them, the activity room was not a place for play, but the playground area and recess were the space and time for playing at school, respectively. Then, it is possible to conclude that, starting from the activity room as a prototype of a school setting, both the children and the teacher conceived the school dissociated from free play. It is necessary to highlight that the marginalization of play at school consequently compromises the child’s global development, which is, paradoxically enough, the very purpose of early childhood education, according to the National Educational Bases and Guidelines Law (Brasil, 1996).

This study brought contributions to psychology, more specifically to educational psychology, through new reflections on the specificities of adult’s and child’s cultures, the power relations established between teachers and children and the role attributed by these subjects to school and play.

This study identifies losses in the quality of the teacher’s work in early childhood education inflicted by a fragile initial training, by the absence of a context-oriented training process and by the lack of support from a pedagogical coordination and an educational psychology service. Offering this teacher high quality training implies the recognition of psychology as the fundamental basis of the training processes, either as a science that studies the child’s development or as a resource for the teacher’s personal development in the exercise of reflection, awareness and change of posture. Occasional reflection and occasional reading do not make it possible to overcome deficiencies in teacher training. This overcoming can only be achieved with a quality continuing education process, in which, in addition to knowledge of the relationship between play and the child’s development, the teacher – using his/her work practice as reference – can reflect on it and can have the opportunity to review values, concepts and representations, which are the basis for his/her actions, for how he/she organizes the environment and the class routine, for how he/she plans and evaluates his/her own work. Educational psychology has an important contribution to such a process, which involves an affective, more subjective and complex dimension, posing greater challenges than those found

in training courses, which, as a rule, are limited to the study of educational theories and methodologies. It is regrettable that the presence of psychologists in the training processes and in the monitoring of the practices of professionals in daycare centers and preschools belonging to the various boards of public education is still an exception in our country.

In addition to these implications, this study also made new discoveries regarding listening to young children. We know that listening to and understanding what children say, especially the younger ones, are an obstacle for many professionals, not only for researchers, but also for psychologists, in their different fields of activity. Defining effective instruments that respected the characteristics of children's thought and language and that allowed the establishment of a more egalitarian researcher-child relationship, not so marked by the adult's power, was the greatest challenge of this research. Whether drawing as a stimulus to the verbal expression in children has already been used by many researchers, proving itself to be rich in possibilities, the *story to be completed* technique, not so present in the research reports, proved to be an excellent instrument for listening to the child in this study. Nonetheless, the instrument built especially for this research, the *analysis of the symbolic game and play experienced at school along with the children*, proved to be even more efficient. It was, among the instruments used, what most motivated verbal expression from children and brought very significant data. This study, then, offers new knowledge in the area of research methodology with young children, helping those who venture into the task of listening to children, an undertaking that demands effort and sensitivity from those who investigate.

When it comes to the limitations of this research, we must specify the fact that its project did not include an intervention action plan after data collection and analysis. This investigation, similarly to the vast majority of investigations, fulfills the role of expanding knowledge in the area among scholars. However, given that it is a case study, this investigation enabled an intense and extensive knowledge of a specific case (Stake as quoted by Yazan, 2015), by probing a specific fraction of a wider reality, through the lens of its topic of interest. Considering the teacher's accessible attitude during the field research and, above all, her reflective posture at different moments of the interview, it is possible to assume that there would be receptivity for a partnership experience, an experimentation, reflection and re-experimentation exercise with pedagogical practices that truly promote the children's global development through play. Contemplating the fact that this case study investigated not only the teacher's perspective, but also the children's perspective – unlike what Silva (2013) proposed, for instance –, it is possible that the knowledge that includes the child's perspective broadens the understanding of teachers about play in school. Such experience on context-oriented training would raise other questions, thereby new research.

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