


**FROM PLAY TO STUDY: CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN THE TRANSITION FROM EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE HISTORICAL-
CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

**DA BRINCADEIRA AO ESTUDO: O DESENVOLVIMENTO INFANTIL NA TRANSIÇÃO
DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL PARA O ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL NA PERSPECTIVA
HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL**

**DEL JUEGO AL ESTUDIO: EL DESARROLLO INFANTIL EN LA TRANSICIÓN DE LA
EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL A LA EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA EN LA PERSPECTIVA
HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL**

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a study aimed at analyzing how the transition from play activity to study activity occurs in child development, considering the cognitive and affective aspects of this process in light of historical-cultural psychology, within the context of the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School. This is a qualitative investigation, conducted through the case study method (Lüdke & André, 2013), carried out in a municipal public school in the Northwest of Rio Grande do Sul. Data collection involved classroom observations in Early Childhood Education and the early years of Elementary School, training meetings with teachers, questionnaires administered to students and teachers, and semi-structured interviews, with records in video, photographs, and a field diary. The analysis followed the assumptions of Discursive Textual Analysis (Moraes & Galiuzzi, 2016) and was based on authors of historical-cultural psychology, such as Vygotsky and Elkonin. The results highlight the need for pedagogical practices that integrate play and study in the 1st year of Elementary School, fostering a more sensitive school transition and ensuring children's engagement in the learning process.

Keywords: Human Development. Higher Mental Functions. Internalization. Mediation.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa que teve por objetivo analisar como ocorre a transição da atividade de brincadeira para a atividade de estudo no desenvolvimento infantil, considerando os aspectos cognitivos e afetivos desse processo à luz da psicologia histórico-cultural no contexto de passagem da Educação Infantil para o Ensino Fundamental. Trata-se de uma investigação qualitativa, conduzida por meio do método de estudo de caso (Lüdke; André, 2013), realizada em uma escola pública municipal do Noroeste do Rio Grande do Sul. A produção de dados envolveu observações de aulas da Educação Infantil e dos Anos Iniciais, encontros formativos com professores, aplicação de questionários a

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estudantes e docentes e entrevistas semiestruturadas, com registros em vídeo, fotografias e diário de campo. A análise seguiu os pressupostos da Análise Textual Discursiva (Moraes; Galiuzzi, 2016) e fundamentou-se em autores da psicologia histórico-cultural, como Vigotski e Elkonin. Os resultados apontam a necessidade de práticas pedagógicas que articulem o brincar e o estudar no 1º ano do Ensino Fundamental, favorecendo uma transição escolar mais sensível e garantindo o engajamento das crianças no processo de aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Humano. Funções Mentais Superiores. Internalização. Mediação.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación cuyo objetivo fue analizar cómo ocurre la transición de la actividad de juego a la actividad de estudio en el desarrollo infantil, considerando los aspectos cognitivos y afectivos de este proceso a la luz de la psicología histórico-cultural, en el contexto del paso de la Educación Infantil a la Educación Primaria. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, realizada mediante el método de estudio de caso (Lüdke y André, 2013), llevada a cabo en una escuela pública municipal del noroeste de Rio Grande do Sul. La producción de datos incluyó observaciones de clases de Educación Infantil y de los primeros años de Educación Primaria, encuentros formativos con docentes, aplicación de cuestionarios a estudiantes y profesores, y entrevistas semiestruturadas, con registros en video, fotografías y diario de campo. El análisis siguió los presupuestos del Análisis Textual Discursivo (Moraes y Galiuzzi, 2016) y se fundamentó en autores de la psicología histórico-cultural, como Vigotski y Elkonin. Los resultados señalan la necesidad de prácticas pedagógicas que articulen el juego y el estudio en el primer año de la Educación Primaria, favoreciendo una transición escolar más sensible y garantizando la participación de los niños en el proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo Humano. Funciones Mentales Superiores. Internalización. Mediación.

1 INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to analyze how the transition from the activity of play to the activity of study occurs in child development, considering the cognitive and affective aspects of this process in the light of historical-cultural psychology in the context of the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School. The study highlights the essential role of play and study activity as privileged modalities of children's action, which manifest themselves as expressions of their psychic development.

In this approach, the development of the child is understood as a process mediated by cultural instruments and signs, actively built in social interactions and in the appropriation of cultural heritage. Prominent theorists of this current, such as Leontiev (2021a, 2004), Vygotsky (2007, 2008, 2009, 2012) and Elkonin (1987, 2008), maintain that each phase of development is characterized by a main activity, which provides substantive transformations in children's psychic capacities. In addition, Sirgado (2000) elucidates that the higher mental functions, initially external relations, are progressively internalized, constituting the individual psyche.

From direct emotional activity with adults, predominant in the first year of life, through the manipulation of objects – characteristic of the period between one and three years of age – to the play of social roles, developed between three and six or seven years of age, each phase represents a qualitative reorganization in the way the child relates to the world.

At preschool age, social role play is configured as the central and structuring activity of child development, playing a decisive action in the formation of higher psychological functions. Through make-believe, the child represents situations in the adult world, internalizes social norms, expands language, regulates behavior and mobilizes complex cognitive processes, such as voluntary attention and memory, imagination and symbolic thinking (Elkonin, 1987). The dramatization of roles – such as mother, teacher or doctor – goes beyond simple imitation, constituting itself as a creative activity, mediated by language and social interactions. From this perspective, play becomes a privileged space for the constitution of subjectivity and for advancement in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), consolidating itself as a fundamental element in the child's formative path (Vigotski, 2009, 2012).

Considering that "human existence goes beyond natural determinations, as it is engendered by social and cultural relations, historically constituted" (Martinez, 2020, p. 119), it is highlighted that play cannot be naturalized, as it expresses multiple childhoods and ways

of being a child, according to the sociocultural contexts in which it is inserted. In this sense, the author reinforces that playing is a historically and culturally mediated activity, essential to the development of the child's maximum psychic potential.

From a certain degree of psychic development, the activity of study begins to occupy the central place in the child's life, succeeding the play of social roles that predominated in the preschool period. This process marks the emergence of new psychic needs, related to the conscious search for knowledge, the expansion of intellectual curiosity and the desire to understand the world in a more systematized way. It is, however, precisely through play – especially that which involves the experience of social roles – that the child begins to internalize motivations, meanings and ways of acting typical of the culture, which constitutes the basis for the development of these new needs.

Therefore, the articulation between play and study activity not only favors a more dialogical transition between these forms of activity, but also proves to be essential to develop the child's interest in learning and sustain their development in its entirety. Later, in adolescence, the study activity will be followed by the activity of study/intimate communication with peers and, then, by the activity of study/professional practice, evidencing the continuity of psychic development throughout the stages of life.

The need for this study emerges from the teaching experience itself, which reveals how teachers often lack clarity about the importance of understanding psychic development and its stages to guide pedagogical work. From the historical-cultural perspective, authors such as Vygotsky (2008, 2012), Elkonin (1987) and Leontiev (2004) demonstrate that each stage of child development is marked by a main activity that promotes qualitative reorganizations in the psyche and enables the emergence of new needs and forms of relationship with the world. Ignoring these transformations can lead to fragmented pedagogical practices, in which play and study are treated in a dissociated way, compromising the mediation necessary for the child to appropriate school knowledge and reach more complex levels of cognitive and affective development. In view of this scenario, this study is guided by the following research question: How does the transition from the activity of play to the activity of study occur in child development, considering the cognitive and affective aspects of this process in the light of historical-cultural psychology in the context of the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School?

To answer this question, we seek theoretical support from authors of historical-cultural psychology who investigate the importance of appropriating school knowledge for human

development, including Vygotsky (2008, 2012) and Leontiev (2004, 2021a), who highlight that access to scientific concepts and culturally elaborated forms of thought allows the child to overcome elementary degrees of psychic functioning and reach their maximum potential.

2 THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PATH

This qualitative research was conducted using the Case Study method, according to the theoretical assumptions of Lüdke and André (2013), which understand the analysis of qualitative data as a systematic work process on the collected material – observations, interviews, documents – aiming at its organization, segmentation and interpretation. For the authors, it is a matter of identifying significant trends and patterns, reevaluating them in search of relationships and inferences in more abstract spheres.

The research was developed in a Municipal Elementary School located in the Northwest region of Rio Grande do Sul, with the monitoring of a class composed of 17 preschool children who, in the following year, entered the 1st year of Elementary School, with the addition of a new student. In all, the group is now made up of 18 children, 14 males and four females. The follow-up lasted for two consecutive years, which made it possible to continuously observe the children's transition process from play activity to study activity.

In addition to the children, eight teachers, all female, aged between 40 and 56 years old, participated in the study. Among them, one was responsible for the class during the Early Childhood Education stage and the other accompanied the same group in Elementary School I; five were part of the school's management team, with administrative and pedagogical functions; and the eighth teacher corresponds to the researcher, the first author of this study.

The data production followed a qualitative approach, being developed throughout the years 2024 and 2025 and involving different articulated procedures. Initially, four shifts of classes in Early Childhood Education were observed in 2024, and later another four shifts in 2025, already in Elementary School I. This continuity allowed us to identify, in the school routine, the changes in the way children's activities are organized during the transition between stages. In addition to the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two teachers responsible for the class, held in a reserved room, on previously scheduled dates and times, in order to ensure greater freedom of expression. The children were also interviewed spontaneously during school activities, according to their willingness to dialogue about the investigated theme. All statements were recorded and fully transcribed for later analysis.

The semi-structured interviews proved to be particularly pertinent to this study, as they allowed us to apprehend "the process of beginning to become aware of the purposes of the actions (for what) and the reason for the activity (why), which is fundamental at the preschool age and constitutes the basis for the school phase" (Lazaretti, 2023, p. 137). This methodological trajectory enabled an in-depth analysis of child development in two distinct stages, evidencing the transition from the activity of play to the activity of study from the perspective of historical-cultural psychology, with special attention to the cognitive and affective aspects that permeate this process.

As a complementary data collection procedure, questionnaires were applied via Google Forms to the two teachers responsible for the class and the five members of the school's management team. These instruments contained questions aimed at analyzing the process of child development and the transition between the main activities of childhood – playing and studying – seeking to broaden and deepen the information obtained through observations and interviews. All data collection procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of scientific research, ensuring the confidentiality of the information and replacing the names of the participants with pseudonyms.

This study is part of a Master's research approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the university to which the authors are linked. The participants signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and the Informed Consent Form (Tale), ensuring compliance with the ethical principles that govern investigations with human beings.

For the elaboration of this text, the children's answers to four questions that made up the semi-structured interview were analyzed: i) where do they like to play the most; ii) if they like to play more inside the living room or in the schoolyard, iii) what they imagine about the first year; and iv) what toys and games you would like to have in the first year.

For the interpretation of the data, a dialogue was established with authors who investigate human development and child learning processes from a historical-cultural perspective, such as Elkonin (1987), Vygotsky (2006, 2007, 2009) and Leontiev (2001, 2004), whose contributions are fundamental to understand the school transition and the change in the child's main activity. Works by Motta (2013), Barboza (2020) and Arce and Jacomeli (2012) were also mobilized, which address aspects of early childhood learning and deepen the understanding of the implications of this process in the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School.

In addition to these references, we sought contributions in studies by Martins, Abrantes and Facci (2023), Resnick (2020), Pezzi and Frison (2022), Friedmann *et al.* (2022b), Pasqualini (2013) and Martinez (2020), which deal with the appropriation of school knowledge as a condition for the maximum development of the child's psychic potentialities. Normative documents, such as the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC – (Brazil, 2018), the National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (2019) and the National Common Curricular Base – Elementary Education – Early Years (2018), were also considered to contextualize the analyses and articulate the theoretical discussions to the current educational guidelines.

Based on this framework and on the children's voices, we present below the analysis of the answers obtained in the interviews, evidencing their perceptions about playing and expectations regarding the entry into the first year of Elementary School.

3 FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A HISTORICAL-CULTURAL APPROACH TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The human being constitutes himself as a social being and, when interacting with the historical context in which he is inserted, develops and individualizes himself through his own action. This process occurs, initially, on the external plane, in the relationships established with the other – called interpsychological – and, later, it is internalized, configuring the intrapsychological plane. Such stages show the determining role of social relations in the formation of the individual and in his or her humanization process. As Vygotsky (2007) explains,

All functions in the child's development appear twice: first, at the social level, and then, at the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then within the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory, and concept formation. All higher functions originate from the actual relations between human individuals (p. 65).

Vygotsky (2007) teaches that, as the child internalizes cultural forms of behavior, there is a reconstruction of his psychological activity based on the mediation by signs. This movement, which transforms initially interpersonal processes into intrapersonal ones, characterizes the specificity of human development and highlights the central role of social interactions in the formation of higher psychic functions. With this framework, the attentive listening to the children's speeches during the interviews and the observation of their actions

throughout the classes, made it possible to interpret not only what they said, but also how they attributed meaning to their experiences. When asked about the place where they liked to play the most, their answers were unanimous and revealing: *"In the living room and in the square!"*; *"In the courtyard!"*element.

In addition to the variety of spaces and toys available, playing provided children with the opportunity to socialize with their peers, strengthening bonds of friendship and allowing collective experiences marked by creativity, expression and meaningful exchanges. In this context, play is an essential element for the development of the potentialities and abilities of this phase of childhood. According to Resnick (2020)

While kindergarten children play, they learn many things. By building towers, they develop a better understanding of structures and stability, and by creating stories, they develop a deeper understanding of plots and characters. Most importantly, they learn about the creative process and begin to develop as creative thinkers (p. 11).

As Resnick (2020) observes, the act of playing is a complex learning experience, in which children, when building towers or creating stories, develop structural notions, narratives and, above all, creative skills. This perspective shows that playing is not limited to a moment of leisure, but is configured as a fundamental activity for the development of cognitive and creative capacities, preparing the child for more elaborate learning.

This understanding dialogues directly with the historical-cultural conception of development, in which the human psyche expands beyond the elementary, biologically-based functions, advancing to the higher psychological functions – forms of mental activity resulting from the internalization of social interactions. It is in this movement of appropriation of culture that the individual transforms external activities and social bonds into internal mental processes. The passage from the interpsychic (social) to the intrapsychic (individual) plane constitutes, therefore, the basis for the construction of properly human behaviors and for the elevation to more complex psychological levels. In this sense, Pezzi and Frison (2022) highlight:

(...) We warn that it is essential to know the child's needs and their motivations to put them into action, because only then will it be possible to understand their progress from one stage to another, since all progress is connected with a marked change in motivations, tendencies and incentives. (...) when the child is not able to satisfy his needs immediately, when he begins to experience unrealizable tendencies, that he

(child) "at preschool age becomes involved in an illusory and imaginary world where unrealizable desires can be fulfilled, and this world is what we call a toy" (p. 3).

Toys and games are essential parts of childhood, as they play a fundamental role in the child's development; not only from a cognitive point of view, but also on an affective level. Throughout early childhood education, the child has the opportunity to explore, create and manipulate the most varied objects that are inserted in different playful contexts that are made available to him or even created by him, especially in make-believe games. These experiences provide her with the representation of social roles in which there is experimentation of different emotions and understanding of the world around her, contributing to the construction of her identity. Friedmann *et al.* (2022b) contribute by stating that

The children's body when playing has a rhythmic character, which pulsates in movements of expansion and contraction, bringing inside what inhabits outside and expressing itself intensely to take out what is inside itself. This in varying frequencies and with different layers of subjectivities, which escape any logical procedure of systematization of knowledge (p. 37).

The thought of Friedmann *et al.* (2022b) emphasizes that children's play manifests itself through bodily rhythms of expansion and contraction, in a continuous movement of internalization of the world and externalization of subjectivity. It is an experience crossed by multiple sensible modes, which escape the formal logic of systematization, evidencing play as a singular form of expression and elaboration of children's thinking.

In the school context, internal and external spaces are intentionally organized to provide experiences for pedagogical purposes, which promote significant advances in knowledge and in the integral development of the child. The playfulness present in activities, games and creative situations also favors the formation of essential socio-emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, self-control and conflict resolution – indispensable skills for adult life and for living in society.

When questioned, during the interviews, about their preference between playing in the living room or in the schoolyard, most of the children indicated the playground as their favorite space, as they expressed: *tag and hide and seek* (Rosa); *with toys* (Rebeca); *of the square* (Rita); *football* (Sydney).

These choices are related to the possibilities of enjoying a large environment, which allows running, creating, exploring and interacting with colleagues from different classes,

making it particularly significant for the observed group and revealing the centrality of external spaces in the children's playful experience.

The children's answers, which show a preference for collective and movement games, can be understood in the light of historical-cultural psychology, according to which playing occupies a central place in the constitution of the child psyche. For Vigotski (2007), play creates a zone of proximal development, enabling the child to act beyond his daily behavior and appropriate social norms and cultural roles. Elkonin (1987) complements by highlighting that, at preschool age, playing with social roles and playing with movement are fundamental for the development of imagination, self-regulation and socialization.

In this sense, by choosing the playground as their preferred space to play, children demonstrate that they seek environments that favor interaction and freedom of movement, essential elements for the development of higher psychological functions. As Leontiev (2021a) points out, it is in the main activity – in this case playing – that psychic structures are organized and transformed, allowing qualitative advances in development. Thus, collective play, permeated by rules and creativity, contributes to the formation of cognitive and socio-emotional skills that will be mobilized in later stages, especially in the transition to the study activity in Elementary School. From this perspective, offering time and space for the child to be heard, welcomed and recognized in his or her uniqueness becomes an essential condition for him or her to experience, in a more comfortable and meaningful way, this passage, understanding the specificities of each school stage. It is in this context that the Municipal Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (Smed, 2019) highlights that the objectives of this educational stage are:

(...) provide the organization of time, space and materials that allow and enhance the physical, emotional, intellectual, moral and social development of the child; and to promote experiences in which the child is guaranteed the six learning rights: to live together (...), to play (...), to participate (...), to explore (...), to express (...) and to know oneself (...).

The guidance of the Municipal Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (Smed, 2019) highlights the importance of organizing times, spaces and materials that favor the integral development of the child – physical, emotional, intellectual, moral and social – as well as ensuring experiences that guarantee their learning rights: to live together, play, participate, explore, express and get to know themselves. This conception reinforces play as

a structuring element of the educational process and as a mediator of experiences that enable the child to appropriate culture and develop to its maximum potential.

In this context, when dialoguing with the children of Early Childhood Education through interviews about what they imagined about the first year and which toys and games they would like to be present at this stage, it became evident that, although implicitly, they already differentiated play from study activity.

The answers expressed both expectations and concerns in the face of the new school reality, anticipating changes that mark the transition to Elementary School. Rebeca, for example, commented: *we can't play there anymore, because we have to sit all afternoon in a row*, to which Rita added: *and without being able to talk*. Sebastian showed apprehension about the amount of writing when he said that *his hand will hurt from writing so much*. Sérgio, on the other hand, projected the new requirements, observing: *let's learn the letters... The numbers... To read... You have to take material to school and you have to study a lot*.

These comments express an expectation of greater responsibility linked to the study, accompanied by a feeling of loss of play, understood by the children as a rupture in relation to the experience lived in Early Childhood Education. This understanding highlights the contrast between two main developmental activities: play, predominant at preschool age, and study activity, characteristic of the school period. In role-playing, children reproduce social relationships and, in this context, develop self-control, imagination and conduct; in the study activity, oriented towards specific objectives, psychic capacities emerge, such as planning and analysis (Elkonin, 1987; Leontiev, 2021). In this sense, Pasqualini (2013) emphasizes:

Therefore, the study activity is the one through which the child, guided by the teacher, appropriates theoretical knowledge (science, art, philosophy). There is a marked difference between the social role play and the study activity: while in the first the product and the result of the activity are not important, in the second a result-oriented activity emerges. It is important to "know what the adult knows" (p. 92).

The study activity has its own structure that requires a specific pedagogical organization (Elkonin, 1987), oriented so that students effectively appropriate scientific knowledge. This appropriation of experience, which will be expressed in systematized knowledge, is essential for the development of new psychic formations – especially theoretical thinking, which characterizes the most advanced stages of cognitive development.

In the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, however, it is essential that teachers recognize the role of play as a mediator of this passage. Playfulness

continues to be a language with an important pedagogical function for the child, even at the beginning of formal schooling. Integrating play into the learning process does not weaken the seriousness of the study; on the contrary, it enables students to appropriate conceptual meanings, understand the contents and become affectively involved with knowledge. This perspective dialogues with the guidelines of the National Common Curriculum Base for Elementary Education – Early Years (BNCC), which highlights:

The BNCC of Elementary School – Early Years, by valuing playful learning situations, points to the necessary articulation with the experiences lived in Early Childhood Education. Such articulation needs to provide for both the progressive systematization of these experiences and the development, by the students, of new forms of relationship with the world, new possibilities of reading and formulating hypotheses about the phenomena, of testing them, of refuting them, of elaborating conclusions, in an active attitude in the construction of knowledge. In this period of life, children are experiencing important changes in their development process that have repercussions on their relationships with themselves, with others, and with the world (Brasil, 2018, p. 58).

The BNCC recognizes play as a structuring element of the learning process, including in Elementary School, by proposing the articulation between playful experiences and new forms of relationship with knowledge. This conception converges with the assumptions of historical-cultural psychology, in which Vygotsky and Elkonin point to play as a fundamental activity for the development of higher psychic functions and for the formation of imagination and self-regulation. Preserving play as an essential pedagogical practice favors the continuity of the child's socio-emotional, cognitive and cultural development and allows the transition to Elementary School to occur gradually, without abrupt breaks with the active and exploratory nature of childhood.

From this perspective, the pedagogical challenge consists of articulating playfulness with the objectives of teaching, enhancing the proper ways of learning and enabling qualitative advances in the process of appropriation of scientific knowledge. Such articulation is especially relevant at the moment of transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, when play, as the main activity of preschool development, gradually gives way to the activity of study, typical of school age. It is in this context that the reflection presented below is inserted.

4 BETWEEN PLAYING AND STUDYING: ROLE PLAY AND THE TRANSITION OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Child development, from the historical-cultural perspective, is understood as a socially and culturally mediated process. At preschool age, the central activity that favors this development is playing, because, through pretend play, the child internalizes social roles, expands his language and develops higher psychological functions. According to Vygotsky (2007),

Play provides, therefore, a broad basic structure for changes in need and consciousness, creating a new type of attitude towards reality. In it, action in the imaginative sphere in a situation of make-believe, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motivations appear, thus constituting the highest level of preschool development (p. 119).

In the author's words, when playing, the child begins to relate to the world in a way that transcends the immediate experience, based only on what he sees or feels, and acquires the ability to act symbolically, to imagine and to plan. In this activity he interacts not only with what is present, but also with what he represents and creates mentally. This understanding dialogues with the observations made during the field study, in which the children, in the reference room, engaged in various games, attributing new meanings to the objects and school spaces.

With the use of different toys, the children created plots in which they imagined themselves in everyday situations: taking care of children, driving cars, consulting doctors or interacting with friends. During the games, they negotiated roles and planned the scenes, as evidenced by their statements:

Pretend you're sick and I'll medicate you (Ester).

But I don't want to be pique (Rosa).

We're going to have to fix that here. Take that hammer. You get him and I'll get the saw (Sílvia).

At recess are we going to play ball or are we going to play tag? (Tom).

These expressions highlight the richness of imagination and cooperation that characterize role-playing, in which the child articulates elements of the real and the fictitious to create new experiences and meanings. With the advancement to school age, however, there is a change in the main activity: study starts to occupy a central place, promoting the

formation of scientific concepts and the reorganization of thought, so that school learning becomes a mediator of cognitive development.

Thus, both playing and studying, in their respective stages, constitute fundamental activities for the integral development of the child, as they reflect and promote their insertion in the social and symbolic world. As Leontiev (2004) explains, "the dominant activity is, therefore, the one whose development conditions the main changes in the child's psychic processes and the psychological particularities of his personality at a given stage of his development" (p. 292-293).

During the focus group, Denise – a teacher who, at the time, worked with the first-year class of Elementary School – shared the following perception:

And in the beginning, when they enter, in the first year, they even accept to be more sitting, but over time it seems that their penny drops and they realize that they are wasting more time playing and it becomes very difficult... It's a very difficult stage for them to get used to. They come in wanting to, and then they lose and then they see that this is it and it worked. And now, at the end of the quarter, I see that their play is well punctuated; They want to finish it soon to play, and before it wasn't. It's hard to work on activity, before they asked: "I want activity, I want activity!" Not now, it stopped. Now: "When it's done, can we play?" Then you have to let them play at the end, but later, later on, they will realize that it is not a routine that they need to have, that they will have specific moments to play... Not all the time! Then they will start to understand!

The teacher's report highlights the emotional and behavioral impact that the transition between Early Childhood Education and Elementary School causes in children. At the beginning of the first year, they still show a willingness to remain seated and perform proposed activities, but as they perceive the reduction in the time allocated to play – a central element in their previous routine – they manifest resistance and seek to negotiate moments to resume this experience. This process of adaptation reveals the tension between the psychic needs formed in the preschool stage and the new demands that emerge with the study activity.

For the child who experiences this transition, the routine of Early Childhood Education – marked by freedom of movement in space, constant interaction with peers, the sharing of objects, games and materials, and the presence of free and directed play throughout the period – is an expectation for the following year. This expectation, however, is confronted with the reorganization of the needs and child consciousness of Elementary School. In this sense, Hoffmann (2021) contributes by stating that

[...] Therefore, when discussing the conceptions of education, childhood, children and the role of the school, what is expected is that education professionals are aware of such a breadth of responsibility in providing opportunities for children, who are in the last year of Early Childhood Education and who are about to enter Elementary School, experiences that consider them protagonists and listen to their expectations and anxieties, thus providing less and less disruption in their processes of knowledge construction (p. 20).

The author emphasizes that discussing conceptions of education, childhood, children and the role of the school, implies recognizing the breadth of the responsibility of professionals in providing experiences that consider children protagonists of their learning process, especially in the transition period between Early Childhood Education and Elementary School. Listening to their expectations and anxieties becomes essential to reduce the ruptures that mark this moment and favor the continuity of their processes of knowledge construction.

Understanding the child from this perspective means recognizing him as a concrete and active being, who develops and humanizes himself through the appropriation of material and symbolic instruments offered by culture. It is a historical subject that is formed in social and cultural interactions and that carries its own knowledge, expressions and ways of perceiving and interacting with the world. Childhood, in turn, is understood as a historical-social construction marked by conditions and meanings attributed in different times and contexts.

In this scenario, play assumes centrality, because it is through it that the child communicates, imagines, experiences and attributes meaning to his reality. The National Curriculum Reference for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2019) reinforces this understanding by highlighting that

Children have a unique nature that characterizes them as beings who feel and think about the world in their own way. In the interactions they establish from an early age with the people who are close to them and with the environment that surrounds them, children reveal their effort to understand the world in which they live, the contradictory relationships they witness and, through play, explain the living conditions to which they are subjected and their anxieties and desires. In the process of knowledge construction, children use the most different languages and exercise the ability they have to have original ideas and hypotheses about what they seek to unveil (Brasil, 2019, p. 21).

Before recess, the children were already articulated in small groups, talking in low voices to organize their games in advance: they defined what they were going to play with, how the dynamics would be, who would take the lead and what space in the courtyard they would occupy. These conversations took place discreetly, either in the reference room or during snacks in the cafeteria, away from the teacher's gaze.

In one of these moments he was asked why they arranged everything before recess, and Sérgio explained: *It's because recess is short and if we don't solve everything before, we don't have much time to play!*. This answer highlights the centrality that playing assumes for children, who seek to organize themselves to make the most of the time available and experience collective interactions that enhance their psychomotor, cognitive, affective and cultural capacities.

The need to plan play discreetly indicates the effort to balance the ludic desire with attention to the class proposals, evidencing how play continues to be central to its psychic and social organization, even in a context in which other demands begin to become predominant.

Playing transcends the merely ludic dimension, configuring itself as a language specific to childhood and an essential element for the integral development of the child. In the context of Early Childhood Education, valuing this culture implies recognizing play as the structuring axis of pedagogical practices, ensuring an environment that respects the times, interests and unique forms of child expression. Such a perspective favors the construction of meaningful learning, resulting from a collective and interactive process between educators and children.

In this sense, Elkonin (2008) states that "play is a form of activity in which the child assimilates, in a playful way, the social relations of the adult world, allowing him to understand and internalize social norms and roles" (p. 74). Based on this, we understand that play not only meets the psychic needs of the preschool period, but also creates the conditions for the emergence of new forms of awareness and motivation that sustain the study activity, making the transition to Elementary School more organic and meaningful for children.

Vigotski (2008, 2012) explains that child development occurs through the internalization of cultural meanings, mediated by social interactions. Each stage is marked by a *main activity* that reorganizes the psyche and prepares the next. Leontiev (2004, 2021a) adds that human needs are historically transformed and, in childhood, play creates the basis for study activity in Elementary School. This transition, therefore, needs to be mediated in a

way that respects the achievements of playing and favors motivation for study. For Leontiev, (2021b), "play is a form of activity that anticipates adult work, allowing the child to internalize social functions through symbolic actions" (p. 273). The author points out that, although the child cannot perform certain complex operations in the real world, such as driving a car or piloting an airplane, he can, through play, represent these activities and resolve the contradiction between the need to act and the impossibility of performing real actions. According to Dantas (2021),

Playing, for the child, is not a mere pastime or just a distraction. Learning built through playful experiences promotes knowledge of the world, of one's own personality and, in addition to reinforcing socialization among peers and adults, playing provides the discovery and learning of norms and values, allowing the child to exercise his autonomy, structuring it and deconstructing it in the face of difficulties (p. 33).

In this context, reflections emerge on the need for a cohesive and articulated pedagogical planning, capable of responding to children's needs and favoring the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, considering the child in his or her full development.

In this sense, Kishimoto (2023) points out that, "while playing, the child creates and recreates, uses the toy with other functions. The process of playing includes actions without a pre-established path. It is, by nature, an uncertain act. The pleasure of playing comes from these choices" (p. 32).

For the author, the reason for the playful activity is in the process itself and not in its final result; That is why the child engages in the pleasure of acting, developing higher psychological functions such as imagination, attention and voluntary memory.

In addition, Leontiev (2021a) presents "work" as a central element in the humanization process, characterizing it as a vital activity that allows human beings to overcome their biological condition and become social. According to him, "specifically human activity – work activity, productive activity performed with tools – is social autochthonous, that is, it develops only under conditions of cooperation and division by people" (p. 97). This understanding can be extended to childhood, when play, understood as the main activity, plays a role analogous to work: it is through it that the child appropriates social meanings and boosts his development.

The teacher observes that, at certain times, children disperse themselves in make-believe games when they approach cultural objects that are significant to literate culture. By

articulating, however, playful moments and creative exploration with activities linked to reading and writing, the teacher manages to create an environment in which the appropriation of these objects is not imposed, but emerges in an organic way and with meanings. This attitude favors children to ask, invent and transform cultural objects, integrating playfulness and pedagogical intentionality in the transition to Elementary School.

Elkonin (1987), based on the contributions of Vygotsky and Leontiev, developed a theory that identifies a "main activity" in each stage of the child's psychic development. For him, "each stage of a child's development is characterized by a determined relationship, by a main activity that governs the main changes in psychic processes" (p. 35).

Nevertheless, play, in childhood, is configured as the main activity, playing a decisive role in the formation of personality and in the internalization of social functions. Far from being restricted to entertainment, playing is a fundamental experience for the development of affective, cognitive and social skills, preparing the child for future challenges, such as systematized learning in Elementary School.

When interviewed, the children of Early Childhood Education revealed preferences for school spaces intended for playing. Santiago commented that *in the living room it's cool because there are toys, but outside it's much cooler because you can run and scream, which in the living room you can't*, while Rebeca said: *I play in the square because at home there is no square, and there is no house in the living room that I like*. Rita also mentioned pretend play and ball games in the square. Such choices, as Vygotsky (2007) points out, reveal the role of symbolic and collective play in the mediation of cognitive, affective and social development, as it is in the interaction with peers that they expand their experiences and construct new meanings.

The same children who, in Early Childhood Education, highlighted their favorite spaces to play, now, in the first year of Elementary School, share new impressions about the school routine. Sidnei commented: *we have to study, write, read, take a test and don't have much time to play*, while Santiago noted: *in the first one we learn the letters... and you have to write too... And you have to do things in the notebook, and study a lot. It's very difficult. Everything to get smart*. Saimon, in turn, compared the two stages declaring: *it is very different from the Pre. You have to study to pass the year and you have to know things*.

These reports show how the children's perception is transformed in the face of the demands of Elementary School: playing, central in the previous stage, gives way to study, writing and evaluation activities. Such a contrast, from the perspective of historical-cultural

psychology, shows that the transition between the main activities – from playing to study – causes important psychic reorganizations and requires careful pedagogical mediation. Understanding play as a form of work, as mentioned by Vygotsky (2007), is fundamental to recognize its role in the internalization of social functions and in the preparation for study and full cognitive and affective development.

5 SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Reflecting on the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School allows us to understand the multiple possibilities of organizing the school routine, in order to contemplate and respect the specificities of the child and the time of childhood. By ensuring the expansion of the experiences lived during this period, the school offers solid foundations for the development of higher psychic functions, enhancing the creative activity, skills and competencies of children. The relations between imagination and reality, mediated by playfulness, are configured as propelling elements of this development and cannot be neglected in pedagogical planning.

In this process, it is essential that the school and teachers act collaboratively, building intentional and dialogical actions that favor a less abrupt transition between the stages. This implies valuing play – as the main activity of childhood – as an axis that sustains human development and that can serve as a basis for future study activity. Thus, pedagogical practices that recognize the value of symbolic games, toys and games in children's lives contribute to the passage to Elementary School occurring in a more integrated way, respecting the rhythms, interests and needs of children.

The child's imaginative function, related to the elements of the historical-social reality, constitutes and expands his or her development capacities. Thus, playful elements, such as games, toys and games throughout the process of transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, enhance children's creative and imaginative activity. Thus, the important role of education in this context is highlighted, since child development depends on historical, social and cultural conditions.

The observations and dialogues with the children show that the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School is a moment that requires attention from both teachers and schools, because, for children, playful activities continue to be fundamental for their learning, expression and development, even when they enter Elementary School. The statements themselves reveal that they value role-playing as a way of learning, relating and

feeling welcomed in the school environment; They also value certain school environments through the games they perform and learn through them collectively.

This study highlights the importance of pedagogical practices in the transition between Early Childhood Education and Elementary School, highlighting that playfulness should not be seen as an exclusive privilege of the first stage, but as an essential element for the appropriation of knowledge and for the integral development of children, respecting their needs, interests and learning rhythms. By broadening the understanding of this complex transition, this investigation highlights the challenges and possibilities present in the process, reaffirming the need to deepen research that investigates innovative pedagogical practices and mediation strategies that promote a more sensitive and inclusive passage. Advancing in this field is essential to ensure an education that meets the real demands of children in their multiple dimensions, promoting their full development.

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