Obutchénie
Revista de Didática e Psicologia Pedagógica

DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

Toyroom time: the role-playing game in focus

Hora da brinquedoteca: o jogo de papéis em foco

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ABSTRACT
This article is part of a doctoral research and discusses the 3 to 5 years old childre'ns activities developed in the playroom of a Childhood Education school, focusing on social role-playing, founded on the Cultural- Historical theory. The objective was to observe whether the children realize the role-playing on them interactions during the time in the playground. The results indicated children's attachment to toys/objects, hindering the advancement of role-playing, since they spend too much time on conflicts. The 5-year-old class showed a quantitative increase in social role play compared to the 3-year-old class, but that difference did not mean qualitative advances, once the variety of social roles was little; the actions had little variation too, as well, the themes and dialogues were punctual and short. We do not observe the initiative, independence and goal achievement in the children. Thus, without the teacher's intervention, children develop social role play in a simplified format, indicating the need for planned intervention in the children's zone of proximal development, helping them select and experience themes in their relationships with toys and other objects.

Keywords: Early childhood education. Role play. Cultural-historical theory.

RESUMO
Este artigo é parte de pesquisa de doutorado e discute as atividades de crianças de 3 a 5 anos, desenvolvidas na brinquedoteca de uma escola de Educação Infantil, focalizando nos jogos de papéis sociais, fundamentada na teoria Histórico-Cultural. O objetivo foi observar se as crianças realizam jogos de papéis nas interações na brinquedoteca. Os resultados indicaram apego das crianças aos brinquedos/objetos, dificultando o avanço dos jogos de papéis, visto que gastam muito tempo com os conflitos. A turma de 5 anos apresentou aumento quantitativo de jogo de papéis sociais em relação à turma de 3 anos, porém essa diferença não significou avanço qualitativo, uma vez que a variedade de papéis sociais foi pequena; as ações tiveram pouca variação, bem como, os temas e os diálogos foram pontuais e exíguos. Não observamos a iniciativa, independência e cumprimento de objetivos nas crianças. Assim, sem a intervenção da professora, as crianças desenvolvem jogo de papéis sociais num formato simplificado, indicando a necessidade de uma intervenção planejada na zona de desenvolvimento proximal das crianças, auxiliando-as a selecionar e vivenciar temas em suas relações com brinquedos e outros objetos.

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil. Jogo de papéis. Teoria Histórico-Cultural.

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

Introduction

In early childhood education, playtime is a designated time and space for children to interact with each other and with toys. Teachers generally recognize this time and space as important for children's development, arguing that play is a natural part of childhood.

According to Vygotsky (1995), Leontiev (1978), and Elkonin (1980), each stage of child development is driven by a primary activity because the human psyche develops through human activity in society.

Thus, between ages 0 and 5[2], there are three psychological stages, each with its own main activity. The preschool stage (ages 3 to 5), the focus of this research, is characterized by thematic social role-playing. Although play seems innate and spontaneous, Elkonin (1980) discovered through research that role-playing depends on social conditions and opportunities. Ultimately, an educational tool should be encouraged.

Elkonin (1980) states that toys emerged as objects representing reality when work tools and modes of production developed. In other words, once tools for children lost their real function, the ability to interact with the environment was lost. Along these lines, Elkonin (1980) formulates the most important thesis for role-playing theory[3]:

> [...] this game arises throughout the historical development of society because of the changing place of children in the system of social relations. It is therefore social in origin and nature. Its emergence is related to very specific social conditions in the lives of children in society and not to the action of innate, internal, classless instinctive energy (ELKONIN, 1980, p.67).

[2] We will use the range of 0 to 5 years to refer to the current stage of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, which in the Law of Guidelines and Bases (1996) is defined as 0 to 5 years and 11 months, since children who have reached the age of 6 are already in Elementary School.

[3] Although the translation of ELKONIN's work (1980) used the term "protagonized game," we have opted for the term "role-playing game," since 'protagonized' derives from the verb "to protagonize" (FERREIRA, 2010), which means to be the protagonist, the main character, which is not related to the idea of social and collective representation through adult roles, which is the main focus of role-playing.

DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

To understand role-playing, Elkonin (1980) followed Marx's (2008) thesis that a less developed level can be understood from a more developed level. For example, the anatomy of humans can be used to understand the anatomy of monkeys. Thus, Elkonin started with the most developed form to understand its historical development and identify the underlying principle (Elkonin, 1980).

To this end, he conducted an experiment with a professor and children between the ages of four and five during a visit to the zoo. There, the children learned about different animals, their diets, and their habitats. Upon returning to the classroom, the professor brought several Zoo-related objects, hoping the children would play a role-playing game. However, this did not happen on the day of the visit or in the following days. During the second visit, the professor was instructed to highlight the relationships between the people who worked at the zoo: the people who fed and cleaned the animals, sold tickets, and prepared food. The professor was also instructed to differentiate the roles of each person. Sometime after the second visit, the children began playing the role-playing game on their own, setting the scene at the zoo and gradually introducing the different roles they had learned about.

This experiment revealed that reality could be divided into two spheres: one involving natural and human-made objects, and another involving people's activities, work, and relationships. The study concluded that children only begin to play once they understand what people do, how they work, and the relationships they form (Elkonin, 1980).

Given this, it is important to present children with real social situations and provide experiences different from those they are accustomed to. This expands the thematic repertoire of their role-playing games, such as mother and daughter, student and professor, or doctor and patient. This allows them to explore themes related to the social context, such as the zoo, train station, airport, or hotel.

Role-playing in its most developed form is not based on:

DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

> [...] the object, nor its use, nor the change that man can make to the object, but rather the relationships that people establish through their actions with objects; it is not the relationship between man and object, but rather the relationship between man and man. And since the reconstruction and assimilation of these relationships take place through the role of adult assumed by the child, it is precisely the role and the actions organically linked to it that constitute the unity of play (ELKONIN, 1980, p. 38).

After observing group and individual games, it became clear that role-playing mirrors adult relationships and activities. Through play, children experience real relationships with their peers, expressing their qualities and emotions. Therefore, educators should study children through play and other activities (Elkonin, 1980).

The main reasons that drive children between the ages of three and five are their need to participate in the adult world and their desire to understand their place in it. However, it should be noted that, in addition to this main activity, there are other activities that also favor children's psychological development, such as production activities (drawing, modeling, and building objects) and physical activities (MARTINS, 2006).

Role-playing occupies an important place in children's development between the ages of 3 and 5 because it allows them to experience adult social life playfully that gives meaning to their activities. Children experience social roles within the game, and the rules of these roles must be respected by all. Conflicts are managed according to the abilities of the children involved. Role-playing is thus elevated to the status of a main activity during this period of early childhood education (VENGUER, 1976).

Elkonin's (1980) research led to the conclusion that there are four levels of play development. At the first level, play primarily involves interacting with objects directed toward peers. Although roles exist, they do not determine actions. The actions are monotonous and repetitive, and it is ultimately easy to change the logic of the actions without the children protesting. At the second level, the core content of play is still action with objects, but the playful actions correspond to

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real actions. Roles are assigned by the children, who divide the functions. The logic of the actions corresponds to real life. Changing the logic of the actions is not accepted, though they do not protest (Elkonin, 1980). At the third level, the fundamental content is interpreting roles and the resulting actions. The roles are well defined and organized.

The logic and character of the actions are more organized, and there is a requirement for variety. A theatrical speech directed at playmates emerges. Finally, changes in logic are protested, and the child says, "This is not how it is in real life" (ELKONIN, 1980). At the fourth level, the central content of the game is executing actions according to the attitudes of others. The roles are clearly defined, and the child maintains their behavior throughout the game. Actions develop according to real-life logic and the logic of the game. Violations of logic are contested, and arguments expand to include questions about rules and explanations involving reason (Elkonin, 1980).

These levels indicate differences in the level of role-play development that each child has reached, rather than differences based on chronological age. According to Elkonin's (1980) analysis, the social meaning of the evolutionary process of play indicates that:

> [...] between the first and second levels there is much in common, the same as between the third and fourth levels. There are two fundamental phases in the development of the game. In the first (from 3 to 5 years), the fundamental content of the game is object-oriented actions, socially oriented, corresponding to the logic of real actions; in the second (from 5 to 7 years), the social relationships established between people and the social meaning of their activity, corresponding to the real relationships that exist between people (ELKONIN, 1980, p.203, our translation).

Based on these data, Elkonin's (1980) conclusion can be summarized as follows: role-playing evolves from concrete action with objects, to synthesized playful action, and finally, to playful action representing social roles. For example, there is an object: a spoon. The spoon's social function is to enable feeding. The child experiences this in their relationship with adults. The child

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uses the spoon to feed the doll. Finally, the child feeds the doll as their mother does (Elkonin, 1980, p. 179).

This article presents an analysis of the play of 69 children, aged three to five, from three preschool classes in the school playroom. The analysis focuses on social role-playing games to identify the children's level of play development[4]. Data used to characterize this situation refers to 27 observations, each lasting 30 minutes and carried out during playroom hours. The playroom was chosen for data collection because it was a potential space for observations despite the limited time available. It was reserved for each class, contained various toys, allowed for interactions that could be recorded, and provided opportunities for role-playing development among children.

The game began with a close look at role-playing.

The playroom was separate from the classroom and had several mixed-together toys on shelves, making them difficult to identify. When the children started playing, they threw everything on the floor and chose the toys that caught their attention.

Each class visited the playroom twice a week for 30 minutes. However, during our observations, we noted that teachers canceled this time for various reasons, including as a punishment for disobedience, due to the lack of ventilation in the room, and to carry out delayed educational activities. The professor accompanied the children, and play was free. The professor's role was to control inappropriate behavior and mediate conflicts. At the end, the professor guided the children in putting everything back on the shelves.

To observe the activities in the playroom, we used the following script:

Observation of toy selection: How did they choose? What did they choose? Were there any substitute toys?

Grouping: How did they group themselves? How many children are grouped together? We also recorded play themes by asking each group about

[4] This paper is an excerpt from the doctoral research entitled “Indicators of development of voluntary activity in early childhood education: role play as the main activity” presented to the Postgraduate Program in Education at Universidade Federal de São Carlos (MORAES, 2018).

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their theme and character. We checked if the chosen objects were in accordance with the theme and social role, and we observed if the actions with the objects corresponded to the imaginary social theme. We also observed if the actions between the children corresponded to the theme and social role. Finally, we recorded dialogues to see if they were related to the social role adopted. Record rules: Did they define any rules? Was there any conflict? How was it resolved? Time spent playing: Did they play until the end? Did they stick to their roles? How long was each group involved in the same theme? Was the time spent the same across different age groups?

Initially, the researcher observed all children in the toy selection process. Then, attention turned to the groups since group encounters could lead to role-playing.

The researcher asked the children questions to determine the themes, content, and arguments of the games, as well as whether there was a division of characters. What are you playing? Who are you in the game?" The answers triggered other questions to clarify verbal and nonverbal actions.

For the qualitative analysis, the researcher continuously reflected during the data collection process, which allowed adjustments to be made to the observation protocol. Field diary entries combined with theoretical readings enabled specific analyses during data collection. Descriptive data analysis involved identifying central themes to guide the discussion (Creswell, 2010). The results were analyzed based on three categories: toy choice, thematic repertoire, and types of games developed. Throughout our observations, we noticed that paper games were not always a type of play developed by children. Therefore, to assist in our analysis, we had to separate paper games from other types of games.

Choosing Toys: What They Choose and How They Choose

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According to Solovieva and Quintanar (2012), choosing toys based on the theme the child wants to play with is part of organizing and planning the game with the goal of achieving the activity's objective.

In the three-year-old class, children choose toys that are visible at eye level. They prefer new toys, such as a table, a dressing table, a bow, and arrow, a hairbrush, a large doll, a metal table with chairs, musical instruments, kitchen furniture (a stove and a sink), dolls, and toy cars. In the four-year-old class, children run to get the most attractive toy and, after starting the activity, look for toys related to the game's theme. They are interested in new toys, abandon, and exchange toys. Sporadically, they randomly choose a toy and play with it. In the five-year-old class, the children also run to pick up the most attractive toy. They are attracted to new toys in the space. They gather the toys they are going to use more quickly and with greater initiative. They look for specific toys. They choose new toys, such as a small table with chairs, a bucket with pieces of wood of different sizes, a dressing table with a stool, a stove, a sink, dolls, toy cars, and mats scattered on the floor.

We noticed that the process by which children chose toys was similar across the three- to five-year-old classes. Each child picked the toy that caught their attention the most, which was usually the most visible and at eye level. The toys were mixed, making it difficult to see each one, but the children in all three classes immediately identified and chose the new toys. There were also toys that were always fought over, such as musical instruments and kitchen furniture (stoves, sinks, tables with chairs, etc.). These toys are evident in the following records:

> 3-year-old class: The bow and arrow passed through the hands of five different boys, causing a dispute over its possession. Each child spent an average of three to five minutes with the toy.
> 5-year-old class: After ten minutes, one boy sat down to play with a toy house and dolls, hiding a bow and arrow under his shirt so that no one else could take it.

In both classes, there are signs of object attachment, suggesting that the children are at the initial stage of play development (Elkonin, 1980). We noticed

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that the central content is action with objects and that these actions are repetitive, monotonous, and not directed at peers.

In the classes for four- and five-year-olds, we observed that most children ran into the playroom to choose and pick up toys. In these cases, the children demonstrated that their primary objective was to acquire the object and then determine how to use it. For example, a child hides a bow and arrow under his shirt while playing with dolls. When the toy occupies the central scene of the interaction, there is no room for interaction between characters or for substituting objects. This indicates low play development in classes that could be more advanced.

It is important to note that symbolic play, which involves performing one action and presupposing another or using one object to represent another, causes qualitative variations in the psyche (VENGUER, 1976). However, the classes observed had difficulty replacing objects, as revealed by the following scene from the five-year-old class:

> Two girls are playing together; one is combing the hair of the other, who is sitting in front of a dressing table. They appear to be playing hairdressers. The girl with the brush leaves the scene, taking the brush with her and refusing to let the girls have it, no matter how much they ask her to give it back. They ask the researcher for help, who tells them they can use something else similar to the brush to continue playing. They look in the drawer and on the shelf, but they cannot find anything, since they wanted to find a brush and not a substitute for it. So they stop playing.

However, the school's toy library hinders this advancement. The large number of toys and the lack of organization make the space confusing for children. There is too much information, and the children show little involvement with the toys they choose. They constantly change toys and often do not finish playing.

Elkonin (1980) explains this situation based on the history of toys' origin, which can be understood through the evolution of human work tools and sacred utensils. However, their direct relationship and function have been lost

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throughout history. Initially, toys were associated with instruments and work. Now, toys are associated with novelty; external attractions guarantee a child's short-lived bond, unlike the continuous contact of the past.

Despite the similarities in toy selection and object attachment indicating little progress in play level, it was noted that toy ownership varied between classes.

In the three-year-old class, toy ownership was related to handling the object rather than interacting with characters, as seen in the following scene:

> Two girls sit near a stove; one picks up a doll and starts putting a cup in the doll's mouth. The other girl calls the first one "daughter" and suggests they play mother and daughter. They fight over washing the dishes in the sink; one of them says she is the mother. They stay together for 10 minutes.

In the 4-year-old class, possession of a toy motivated the choice of theme and the grouping of children, based on their interest in the same object. There were situations in which children sought specific toys after play had begun, as depicted in the scene below:

> The researcher approached a child and asked her what she was playing. She said it was a mother and daughter. She asked her who the mother was, and the child said it was her, and her daughters were two dolls named Isabela and Carolina. She then went to look for a plate. Soon, a boy approached and placed several small pieces of a construction set and some wooden animals in the sink, pretending to wash them. This boy showed her a Rubik's cube. She became interested in the toy and began to play with it, distracting herself.

In the 5-year-old class, children gathered more quickly and with greater initiative, the toys they would use in play, searching for specific toys. These children showed more voluntary behavior, but initiative and guided searching did not always occur. It was also implicit that possession of the object already established their character, as recorded in the following scene:

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> A girl with a doll in her hand standing next to the ironing board says to her friend next to her: “I'm the mother.” “Go wash some clothes for me to iron.” The mother leaves the table, and another child takes her place. After ironing a doll's outfit, she hands it to another girl standing next to her and says, “Fold it and put it there” (pointing to a chair). Another girl approaches and says, 'Can I do it next? The girl who is ironing replies, 'No, Maria is the mother; I'm just helping her. The game lasted 10 minutes, the ironing board began to fall over, and the professor put the toy away.

The differences between the classes indicate modest progress in the level of game development. This progress ranges from the first to the second level, in which interacting with objects remains central and social interactions between characters are still incipient. However, this is understood to be the real possibility without intentional intervention by the professor. Martins (2010, p. 67) states that the transition from object exploration to fictional situations in social role-playing games is not a natural process for children. Rather, it is "a consequence of the complexification of psychological processes, which are fundamentally determined by adult mediation and teaching—that is, by the social situation of the child's development."

The teacher's participation in raising her own awareness of her role is essential to guiding actions and activities, such as searching for objects that enable the role to be played. This contributes to the child learning to plan the outcome of their actions. Conversely, "leaving children hostage to their spontaneity is, at the same time, allowing them to imprison themselves within their own limits. Teaching should operate in service of overcoming these limits" (Martins, 2010, p. 78).

Thematic Repertoire Chosen by Children

To present a detailed analysis of this repertoire, it was necessary to identify the themes present in each type of game: symbolic play and role-play. Symbolic play involves substituting objects and performing specific actions relating to their social functions. It also involves representing actions without the presence of the object through imagination, creating actions, objects, and phenomena present in

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the game setting. This demonstrates the child's ability to act according to social models (Vygotsky, 2006; Mukhina, 1996; Quintanar & Solovieva, 2012). Role-playing, on the other hand, reflects or copies existing social relationships involving several participants. It has a previously decided and planned theme and may use concrete objects. Role-playing involves various interrelated situations related to the theme, respect for rules, and management of conflicts. In its most developed phase, role-playing is initiated and regulated by children in a creative and independent manner (ELKONIN, 1980; VENGUER, 1976; SOLOVIEVA & QUINTANAR, 2012).

Chart 1 presents the themes of the games developed in the three classes. When the children did not announce the themes of the games, we named them according to their content and the actions performed with the objects.

Chart 1 - Themes of the games developed in the three classes

Class	**Symbolic play**	**Role play**
3 years	Hammering a little house; playing guitar; fighting with dolls; washing clothes; washing pets; fighting with bow and arrow; fixing a toy car; combing a doll's hair.	- Mother and daughter; - Hairdresser.
4 years	Cooking pretend food; putting toy cars in the playhouse; washing dishes; changing doll clothes; giving injections.	- Mom and daughter; - Mom/dad and daughter;
5 years	Building a house; repairing a car; typing on a computer; organizing the house.	-Mothers and daughters/sons; - Hairdresser.

Source: Own elaboration

During symbolic play, we observed children performing various actions with objects, such as fixing cars, building houses, typing on a computer, and washing animals. In contrast, the role-play records only included two themes: mother-daughter and hairdresser.

Solovieva and Quintanar (2012, p. 38) argue that children's play development follows this order from a genetic perspective: object manipulation,

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symbolic play, and thematic role-playing. Thus, "thematic role-playing can only be developed because of rich objects and symbolic play."

The variety of actions in symbolic play presented in Chart 1 indicates that children have a varied repertoire of actions with objects. Therefore, this repertoire could be the basis for varied role-playing themes and scenarios, such as a mechanic's workshop, bricklayer, hospital, vaccination center, office, restaurant, clothing store, car dealership, and laundry, veterinarian, and music concert, among others. However, this did not occur, demonstrating that role-playing does not develop spontaneously.

The "mother and daughter/son" theme was the most common in the role-playing games of the three classes, and the only theme in the four-year-old class.

In a study by Marcolino and Mello (2015), the "little house" theme was also the most common in the observed schools. The authors explained that this theme is close to children and that all schools have related toys available. According to Historical-Cultural Theory, creative activity relates to human experience. In this sense, the professor's intentional and planned role-playing actions should present human activities to children to broaden their experiences (Marcolino & Mello, 2015).

In the three- and five-year-old classes, the hairdresser theme appeared due to the presence of a dressing table in the classroom, which aroused the children's interest in the theme. However, in the four-year-old class, the presence of the same object did not spark the children's interest or trigger role-playing. This indicates that children must understand social roles to develop the game.

The themes of games reflect socio-historical, geographical, and domestic conditions of real life. Throughout history, children have played games with different themes. The content of the game reveals how involved the child is in adult activities, ranging from external aspects of human activity involving objects and attitudes to the meaning of human work (Elkonin, 1980).

Teachers' involvement in the games children develop is essential for broadening their thematic repertoire and the arguments in their games. Teachers can use various strategies to achieve this, such as visiting outdoor

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spaces looking at books, photos, and videos. Expanding the repertoire with the goal of arousing the child's interest and motivating them to explore other themes favors the development of psychological formations as the child experiences the verbal and nonverbal actions associated with different activities. Over time, each child becomes aware of the various social roles that exist in society, which may stem from their life experiences and the teacher's guidance.

This demonstrates that role-playing is not innate or spontaneous but rather dependent on social conditions and opportunities. In this sense,

> Children living in a relatively underdeveloped society do not engage in role-playing games. This thesis should not lead to the conclusion that these children have a low level of mental development or lack imagination, as some researchers claim. The absence of role-playing games is due to the special situation of children in society (ELKONIN, 1980, p. 53).

The author states that role-playing games do not exist in primitive societies, as children participate in adult working life, clarifying that interest in play is a social condition of children in society and not an intellectual limitation. This interest should be intentionally explored by adults/educators with a view to expanding different imaginary situations, contributing to increased involvement in the activity.

Not all play is role-playing.

Upon conducting a comparative analysis of the observed classes, we noticed a quantitative difference in the types of games played. In the three-year-old class, we observed more symbolic games (89%). In the four-year-old class, the number of symbolic and role-playing games was equal. In the five-year-old class, children were more involved in role-playing games (86%) than symbolic games. These results reveal an increase in children's quantitative interest in role-playing games but little qualitative variation.

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Most of the games played by the 3-year-olds involved manipulating objects according to their social function, constituting symbolic play. In this type of play, the focus is on interacting with objects and replacing them if necessary. Groups form around similar objects but with different objectives. In one scene: "Two boys play together, one playing the guitar and the other the keyboard. The child playing the keyboard becomes distracted by another toy, and another child picks up the keyboard." In another scene: "Two girls put clothes in the washing machine."

In all classes, we observed children playing alone with the objects they had chosen for symbolic play. This occurred more frequently in the three-year-old class and less frequently in the five-year-old class. Another similarity in-group formation is associated with the choice of toys. In all classes, we observed groups that formed based on the initial choice of toys. However, in the three-year-old class, most of the time, children sat close to each other to handle similar objects. These objects were more important to them than their relationships with their peers. Elkonin (1980) refers to this type of play as "action play," which occurs when more than one child plays with the same toy. In this case, they play side by side but not together.

According to Venguer (1976), most play among young children revolves around objects, and possession of an object often directs its character. For example, whoever gets the doll first will be the mother, and whoever has the syringe will be the doctor. Many of the conflicts at this stage are thus over possession of the object. However, everything is resolved when the teacher mediates, and they realize that the game can have several mothers. Thus, through the teacher's intentional activity, even the youngest children in early childhood education can develop games in which the main content is relationships between people.

Most interactions among the three-year-olds involved symbolic play. However, there were situations involving poorly developed role-playing games in which the children shared a theme and assigned roles. For example, they played "mommy and daughter" games. Conflicts arose between the children, who had

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limited dialogue and no defined rules. During role-playing, objects were the main focus. Possessing dolls and other toys was essential for performing actions involving manipulation, verbalization, and interaction. Thus, according to Elkonin's classification (1980), the 3-year-old class plays first level role-playing games, in which the central content involves actions with objects and roles that exist, but they do not determine the actions.

The 4-year-old class showed great interest in objects and performed more specific actions according to their social function. Symbolic play appeared both individually and in groups.

> A child was playing a symbolic game alone that involved a sequence of actions related to the theme of "making food," using substitute objects such as a small bucket in place of a pot and a doll's leg as a spoon. She put a small pot in the microwave, took it out, poured the contents into the pot, stirred it, and then served the dish, but without interacting with other children.

A professor must mediate the child's interaction with objects so they can learn "the social ways of using certain instruments and tools that have been formed throughout history and are crystallized in the use of these objects" (Lazaretti, 2016, p. 130). However, this type of teaching needs to help children perceive and interact with others.

In symbolic group play, we recorded five scenes in which this occurred. One example is as follows: A girl playing alone came out of her corner, took her smaller doll, took off its clothes, found another girl playing with dolls, stayed close to her, and they exchanged clothes for their dolls." In these scenes, symbolic play generally arose from an interest in toys, motivating the children to group together even if they did not share common goals and perform actions unrelated to the theme. For instance, in one group scene, one child "washed dishes," two others "played instruments," and a third "repaired a guitar." In another group, the dolls were "daughters," and the children were strongly attached to the dolls. There was little variation in how the children played with the dolls, resulting in them spending little time playing.

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Role-playing appeared in the four-year-old class and was organized into two groups: level I and level II. The three-recorded scenes in the first group point to a primary role-playing game in which the dolls are characters (daughters). This game involved the mommy/daddy/daughter theme, with little variation in actions and little time spent playing. The scene below exemplifies this:

> One of the girls sitting down says, "Daughter, sit here." The daughter is pushing a shopping cart around the room, picking up various toys and placing them in the corner that would be their house. The daughter throws the toys she picks up in the room and leaves them all in a pile, with no separation of spaces or objects. The mother takes care of a doll, which is her youngest daughter (4-year-old class).

These findings are consistent with those of Marcolino and Mello (2015, p. 467), who discovered that role-playing games exhibited similar characteristics. The authors argue that the theme can be developed through collaboration between teachers and children. Teachers can help children organize space and time, present objects, and plan activities orally, using actions performed in their daily lives as examples.

In the other group (role-playing level II), we observed two scenes in which the children acted as characters; however, there was confusion regarding the division and delineation of each character's actions and responsibilities. The following scene provides evidence that there was no planning:

> The researcher asked them what they were playing; they looked at the researcher and took a while to answer. They said it was mommy and daddy. The researcher asked who mommy was, and one child said it was her. The researcher asked the other child if she was the father. She said she didn't have a father and that she was a daughter. A third girl was standing, handling a small bucket and a shovel, making movements with the shovel, stirring something inside the bucket. The researcher asked what she was doing; she remained silent, and another child replied, "She's making food." They spent about 10 minutes handling the objects, then dispersed and joined other girls who were playing with dolls (4-year-old class).

DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

In the four scenes, the roles remained consistent: mother and daughter or son. In another scene, a girl holding a doll decided to be the mother. She called her classmate her daughter, and the classmate who appeared in the middle of the game her son. There was no role reversal. Many of the selected toys were not directly related to the theme. There was no organization or delimitation of space. The actions with the objects and between the children corresponded to the theme. However, sometimes they were distracted by the toys. That is, they left their roles to explore another toy.

According to Mello (2018), the transition from playing with objects to social role-playing games involves expanding the social meaning of objects, characters, environments, and social activities. As the child's interactions and relationships with others advance in connection with social reality through the professor's mediation, these meanings also expand. This transition involves a new social meaning as the child's interactions and relationships are connected to social reality. For instance, playing with a doll and giving it a bath evolves into questions such as why the doll needs a bath and who the doll is in this game. Object manipulation and symbolic play gradually give way to a more conscious understanding of the activity (Lazaretti, 2016).

During the transition from play to role-playing, which requires intentional mediation by the teacher, the teacher, and the children develop learning and knowledge together. As the teacher identifies how the children relate to the social environment during play or role-playing activities through their verbalizations and interactions with objects and each other, the teacher also develops the knowledge necessary to modify this environment according to the children's learning needs. Thus, progress in learning involves equipping each child to consciously assimilate scientific knowledge in a way that makes sense to it and to others (Mello, 2018).

In the five-year-old class, symbolic play and role-playing appeared at three different levels. In symbolic play, we cut out four scenes in which children interact with objects, perform actions according to the theme, and use substitute objects. For example: "Children find pieces of wood with letters and numbers drawn on

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them, simulating a keyboard, and then sit at the table and start typing." There was no division of roles or dialogue related to the theme. The children probably did not know what people do in an office. Additionally, they were not assigned any tasks for the game, leaving only interaction with the objects. According to Vygotsky (2006), Mukhina (1996), and Quintanar and Solovieva (2012), 5-year-old children should have already explored symbolic play to the fullest. This allows them to construct mental images of objects and actions so that they do not need them when playing role-playing games.

Thus, if a similar situation is observed by the teacher, it is possible that it will provide clues on how to develop their intentional mediating activity so that children move on to role-playing with greater awareness and knowledge about this social activity (VYGOTSKY, 2006; MUKHINA, 1996; QUINTANAR; SOLOVIEVA, 2012).

Attachment to objects is constant and appears in role-playing games. For this class, they were divided into three groups (levels 1, 2, and 3) according to Elkonin (1980) because they present different characteristics. In the first group, role-playing game level 1, the doll is a character in the two scenes. In this case, the doll is the daughter, since the theme of the scenes is "mother and daughter." The scenes involved organizing space and gathering objects according to the theme, as well as verbal and nonverbal interaction. The speech in the game is brief and to the point. In the second group, role-playing level II, there is a division of characters, but no difference in verbal or nonverbal actions can be verified. The involvement is brief, and interaction with the object is emphasized. For example, there is a record of a scene in which a child interacts with two groups at the same time. In group III, there is role-playing with a division of characters. However, the theme is once again mother and children, so only two types of characters appear in the scene. This results in a lack of verbal and nonverbal actions, as seen in the following example:

> The group that involved the most members for the longest time was the one that started with one of the girls placing two

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> wooden stoves in a corner to mark the space. This girl was the mother, as they were playing house, and she even said in the middle of the game that there were rules in her house, which was not to make a mess. Gradually, others joined her, a girl and a boy. They gathered dolls, an ironing board, put a mattress on the floor, and got a sink. After nine minutes, another girl arrived to play. After 15 minutes, there were already five children (four girls and one boy). The researcher asked what they were playing, and the mother said they were playing house and that all the others were her children. One of the daughters said that her mother worked all day, and when she wasn't there, she was in charge (5-year-old group).

The need for intentional teaching mediation repeatedly arises as a way of exploring other possible themes with children, bringing together characters with verbal and nonverbal actions that they have not yet experienced, expanding their repertoire, promoting the development of voluntary activity and symbolic thinking, and guiding the creation of situations that favor the increase in specific actions with objects and the development of their symbolic use, including the substitution of objects, representation of actions without the presence of the object, imagination, and acting according to models offered to the child (VYGOTSKY, 2006; MUKHINA, 1996; QUINTANAR, SOLOVIEVA, 2012).

Final Considerations:

Without teacher intervention, children develop simplified social role-playing games with few rules, great attachment to objects/toys, limited variation in themes, and few social roles. Between the ages of three and five, children develop role-playing games due to their need for social communication and desire to emulate the adults in their lives.

These situations are common in children's daily activities at school and indicate the need for teacher intervention to expand their repertoire and advance them from symbolic play to social role-playing.

Schools with toy libraries should organize them, so toys are visible to all children and separated into categories. This enables children to develop symbolic play and role-playing activities.

DOI: http://doi.org/10.14393/OBv6n3.a2022-67178

Observing children while they play gives teachers the opportunity to diagnose differences in types of activities and help children transition from symbolic play to role-playing. This transition involves detaching from objects, expanding repertoires, and developing verbal and nonverbal actions.

For the introduction of role-playing in early childhood education to be successful, however, it is also necessary to introduce role-playing in teacher training courses. This requires the development of a guiding framework for action and research that delves deeper into the development of psychological neoformations as the basis for intentionally organized didactics.

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Received in June 2022.

Approved in September 2022.