

Language and imagination in the process of appropriation of reading and writing: an investigation in the light of Historical-Cultural Psychology¹

Linguagem e imaginação no processo de apropriação da leitura e escrita: uma investigação à luz da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural

Lenguaje e imaginación en el proceso de apropiación de la lectura y la escritura: una investigación a la luz de la Psicología Histórico-Cultural

Aline Patricia Campos Tolentino de Lima²

Joana de Jesus de Andrade³

RESUMO

O presente artigo analisa o processo de apropriação da leitura e da escrita na infância, investigando a relação entre as funções psicológicas da linguagem e da imaginação. O objetivo central deste trabalho é analisar como o desenvolvimento da imaginação atua como mediador no processo de apropriação da cultura escrita. Fundamentada nos pressupostos da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, a pesquisa fundamenta-se em uma abordagem qualitativa por meio da investigação participativa. O estudo de campo foi realizado em duas instituições de Educação Infantil no interior paulista, envolvendo 28 crianças de quatro e cinco anos, cujas produções e relatos orais foram registrados durante o ano de 2021. A investigação evidenciou que, quando o ensino é organizado de forma intencional e dialógica, a escrita se torna uma extensão do desenho e do jogo, permitindo que a criança transite do pensamento concreto para a abstração. Assim, o papel do educador é o de mediador dessa "pré-história da escrita", fomentando ambientes ricos em interações sociais onde o ato de escrever responda a uma necessidade real de comunicação e expressão da subjetividade infantil. Conclui-se que o desenvolvimento da escrita na educação infantil é potencializado quando o ambiente escolar promove a unidade entre o pensar, o imaginar e o criar, garantindo à criança o protagonismo em seu processo de inserção na cultura letrada.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Psicologia Histórico-Cultural; Apropriação da leitura e escrita.

¹ Tradução realizada por Carolina Fernandez. E-mail: cfassessoria@outlook.com.

² Doutora em Educação (USP, 2023). Professora colaboradora no Departamento de Educação e Pós-doutoranda na Universidade Estadual Paulista (FCLAr / UNESP) e no Centro Universitário Barão de Mauá, Brasil. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6834-7209>. E-mail: aline.tolentino@unesp.br.

³ Doutora em Educação (UNICAMP, 2008). Professora doutora do Departamento de Química - Licenciatura, da Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto, USP. Professora do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação da FFCLRP-USP, Brasil. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6161-2209>. E-mail: joanaj@ffclrp.usp.br.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the process of appropriation of reading and writing skills in childhood, investigating the relationship between the psychological functions of language and imagination. The central objective of this study is to analyze how the development of imagination acts as a mediator in the process of acquiring written culture. Grounded in the principles of Historical-Cultural Psychology, the research employs a qualitative approach through participatory inquiry. The field study was conducted at two early childhood education institutions in the countryside of São Paulo, involving 28 four- and five-year-old children, whose written work and oral accounts were recorded throughout 2021. The research showed that when teaching is organized in an intentional and dialogic manner, writing becomes an extension of drawing and play, allowing children to transition from concrete thinking to abstraction. Thus, the educator's role is that of a mediator in this "prehistory of writing," fostering environments rich in social interactions where the act of writing responds to a real need for communication and the expression of children's subjectivity. It can be concluded that the development of writing in early childhood education is enhanced when the school environment promotes unity between thinking, imagining, and creating, ensuring that children take the lead in their process of integration into literate culture.

Keywords: Education; Historical-Cultural Psychology; Appropriation of reading and writing skills.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza el proceso de apropiación de la lectura y la escritura en la infancia, investigando la relación entre las funciones psicológicas del lenguaje y la imaginación. El objetivo central es comprender cómo el niño en edad preescolar utiliza el dibujo y los registros escritos como herramientas de mediación cultural y expresión de la subjetividad. Fundamentada en los presupuestos de la Psicología Histórico-Cultural, la investigación se basa en un enfoque cualitativo a través de la investigación participativa. El estudio de campo se realizó en dos instituciones de Educación Infantil en el interior de São Paulo, involucrando a 28 niños de cuatro y cinco años, cuyas producciones y relatos orales fueron registrados durante el año 2021. Los datos revelan que la escritura emerge de una "prehistoria" que integra el gesto, el juego y el dibujo, cobrando sentido cuando se vincula a una necesidad real de comunicación y actividad lúdica. Las consideraciones finales reiteran que la praxis pedagógica debe superar la enseñanza mecánica, valorando la escritura como un lenguaje vivo e intencional. Se concluye que el desarrollo de la escritura en la educación infantil se potencia cuando el ambiente escolar promueve la unidad entre el pensar, el imaginar y el crear, garantizando al niño el protagonismo en su proceso de inserción en la cultura letrada.

Palabras clave: Educación; Psicología Histórico-Cultural; Apropiación de la lectura y la escritura.

1. Introduction

The process by which children learn to read and write has historically been one of the central themes in educational debates. However, from the perspective of Historical-Cultural Psychology, this transition is not viewed merely as a technical acquisition of codes, but as a complex reorganization of higher psychological functions⁴, mediated by culture and language. Within this context, imagination emerges not merely as fantasy, but as a creative human activity that is essential to the development of abstract thought and, consequently, to the acquisition of reading and writing skills.

This article aims to examine the inseparable relationship between language, imagination, and the process of acquiring reading and writing skills in child development, in light of the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Psychology. From this perspective, it is understood that, during the preschool years, imagination emerges as a psychological function linked to the child's need to cope with desires that cannot be immediately fulfilled. It is in pretend play that this function finds its primary means of expression, enabling children to experience—through symbols—situations and meanings they have not yet concretely experienced, thereby laying a fundamental foundation for the understanding and internalization of written language.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the development of imagination acts as a mediator in the process of acquiring written culture. To this end, data from a field study⁵ is presented and discussed. The research detailed here is based on the premise that play is the guiding activity of childhood and the foundation upon which the capacity for representation is built. By presenting field research data, this article seeks to contribute to an understanding of the signs of language and imagination development in the process of learning to read and write.

In this process, the concept of the internalization of signs, especially written language, stands out as a process in which practices that are initially external and social

⁴ According to Vygotsky (1995), higher psychological functions refer to complex and specifically human mental processes such as language and thought, memory, attention, perception, logical reasoning, and imagination, which are historically constituted through social interactions and cultural mediation.

⁵ The data presented in this article is drawn from a portion of the field research conducted as part of the doctoral dissertation titled ““Children have to play! Afterwards, they grow up, become adults, and don't play anymore”: Study of the development of imagination in preschool age” (USP, FFCLRP, 2023).

are progressively appropriated by the child, becoming tools for thought. According to Vygotsky (1995), language, as a symbolic system, acts as a mediator between the individual and the world, enabling the child to organize their actions, memories, and ways of interpreting reality. Thus, writing ceases to be merely a graphic code and becomes a system of meanings that, upon being internalized, qualitatively reorganizes higher psychological functions, enabling the development of abstract thought and conscious self-regulation.

In order to provide a foundation for the analysis of the data gathered in the field, it is necessary to revisit the conceptual pillars that guide this research. Understanding imagination as a higher psychic function therefore requires revisiting the historical development of its formation in the child's psyche. Thus, in the next section, we will present the theoretical foundations of Historical-Cultural Psychology regarding the genesis of imagination and its dialectical relationship with language and the acquisition of reading and writing skills, thereby establishing the necessary foundation for understanding play as a precursor to drawing and writing.

2 Language, Imagination, and the Acquisition of Written Language

From the perspective of Historical-Cultural Psychology, language, imagination, and the acquisition of reading and writing are deeply interconnected processes that mediate human development. According to Vygotsky (2001), language is a higher psychological function that is constituted within social relationships and enables the individual to organize thought, communicate, and act upon the world. In this process, imagination, understood as the psychological function of recombining elements of lived experience to create new meanings and significance, is fundamental to background thinking, the construction of consciousness, and the creative use of language.

In the context of childhood, imagination is not an activity detached from reality, but a symbolic way for children to represent social relationships, facilitating their entry into the world of written culture. The acquisition of reading and writing, in turn, is not a mechanical act of encoding and decoding, but a process of internalizing signs that takes place through social practices of reading and writing, mediated by adults and peers.

Thus, children acquire writing skills as they participate in meaningful language use situations, in which they can produce meaning, express themselves creatively, and build an active relationship with texts and with others. In this way, language, imagination, and writing form a culturally mediated system that only develops fully in interactive social contexts.

Vygotsky (1995), in his works, mentions the special psychological function of children's drawing and the acquisition of written language; for a child, mastering written language means mastering an extremely complex system of symbolic signs. One of the peculiarities of this system is that it represents a second-order symbolism that is gradually transformed into direct symbolism.

Signs such as gestures, drawing, spoken language, writing, mathematics, etc., constitute cultural instruments through which new forms of human behavior, relationships, and thought are developed, according to Smolka,

From the perspective of Vygotsky's dialectical psychology, then, the framing of the issue changes fundamentally: language is a creative activity that constitutes knowledge and, for that very reason, is transformative. In this sense, the acquisition and mastery of writing as a form of language bring about a critical change in the child's entire cultural development (2001, p. 76).

Written language consists of a system of signs that conventionally identify sounds and words, which in turn are signs of real objects and relationships. The acquisition of written language is, in fact, the result of a long process of development of the child's higher cognitive functions. The development of written language has a long and complex history, which begins long before the child starts learning to write in school (Vygotsky, 1995).

The history of the development of writing begins with the child's first visual signs and is rooted in the same history as the emergence of the signs from which spoken language develops (Vygotsky, 1995). Gesture, specifically, is the first visual sign that foreshadows the child's future writing. The earliest expressions produced by children are the scribbles drawn as representations based on gestures.

The second aspect that forms the genetic link between gesture and the acquisition of written language leads us to role-playing games. As is well known, during play, some objects stand for others; they substitute for them and become their signs. It is

also known that what matters is not the similarity between the toy and the object it designates, but rather the object itself (Vygotsky, 1995).

In make-believe play, for the child who is playing, anything can be anything. The object, in and of itself, acquires the function and meaning of a sign when the gesture assigns that meaning to it. The type of object the child manipulates is relatively irrelevant, since the meaning lies in the gesture and not in the object. The object is the inevitable point of application for the corresponding symbolic gesture. The child interprets and assigns meaning to each movement, object, and action separately.

According to Vygotsky (1995), children not only gesture, speak, and explain during pretend play, but they also organize it. This confirms that the primary forms of play are nothing more than the initial gesture, that is, language aided by signs. As pretend play unfolds, the meaning of the gesture is transferred to objects, and during play, these objects begin to represent certain signifiers and social relationships, even without the corresponding gestures. Symbolic development is a means of expressing the child's needs, which stem from the demands of the external environment; it is not a spontaneous and natural process (Solovieva; Quintanar, 2016).

In social role-playing, children imitate the actions, movements, and gestures of adults or older children. During this period, they also imitate through drawing, attempting to represent what they see. Imitation has a different meaning than copying, because it stems from personal experience, guided by the child's selection of objects or things around them in order to then approximate a form, figure, or theme through representation. The ability to imitate is only possible when the child is able to reproduce and symbolize internal mental images, which implies that changes in drawing as an expression involve internal changes—that is, changes in psychological functions (Tshako, 2017, p. 185).

A child's history with writing begins long before the first time a teacher places a pencil in their hand and shows them how to form letters (Luria, 2010, p. 143). The author asserts that the origins of the process of mastering writing begin much earlier, in the prehistory of the development of higher forms of children's behavior. Writing is a culturally mediated function, and the act of writing presupposes the ability to represent, through a line, a mark, or a dot, a functional auxiliary sign to recall or convey concepts.

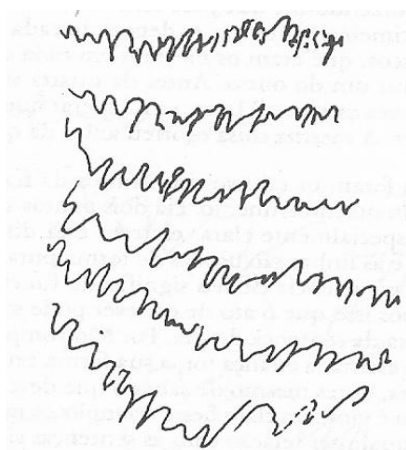
For a child to be able to write or jot something down, two conditions must be met. First, the child's relationships with the things around them must be differentiated so that everything they encounter falls into two main groups:

a) either the objects are of some interest to the child: things the child would like to own or play with; b) or the objects are instrumental, that is, they play only an instrumental or utilitarian role, and are meaningful only as a means to acquire some other object or achieve some goal, and therefore have a functional significance for the child (Luria, 2010, p. 145).

The author Luria (2010) conducted a psychological analysis of the acquisition of written language, tracking the child's transition from primitive and external forms of behavior to complex cultural forms.

In the early stages of writing, children initially use writing in a purely external and imitative way, assimilating its outward form but without using it correctly; they are not aware of its functional significance as an auxiliary cultural sign. Children are interested in "writing like adults"; they write even without knowing what should be written.

Figure 1. Early Writing (Scribbles)

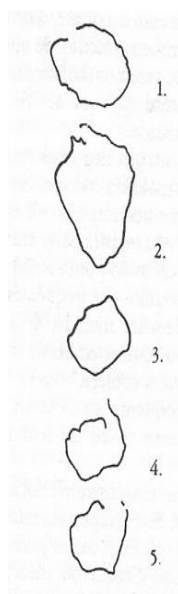


Source: Luria, 2010, p. 149.

As can be seen in the image above, writing is disconnected from its immediate purpose, and the lines are used in a purely external way.

In the pre-writing stage, there is still an absence of meaning and the social function of writing; the child knows that adults write, and when given instructions to try to reproduce writing, the child reproduces it based on familiarity with adult writing, merely as an external form, which are characteristics of the first stage of a child's prehistory of writing.

Figure 2. Pre-writing



Source Luria, 2010, p. 155.

Writing for children does not yet serve a mnemonic function as a cultural sign; in other words, children do not yet use writing as a tool for memory. The image above depicts some phrases that were spoken aloud to the child: 1. "Monkeys have long tails"; 2. "The dark night"; 3. "There is a tree in the yard"; 4. "Layla has two eyes"; and 5. "A big apple."

Some children at this stage may use specific marks rather than writing in a purely mechanical, primitive manner; their writing does not yet have its own content; it begins to indicate the presence of some meaning, but does not yet determine what that meaning is, as shown in the image below:

Figure 3. Primitive form of writing

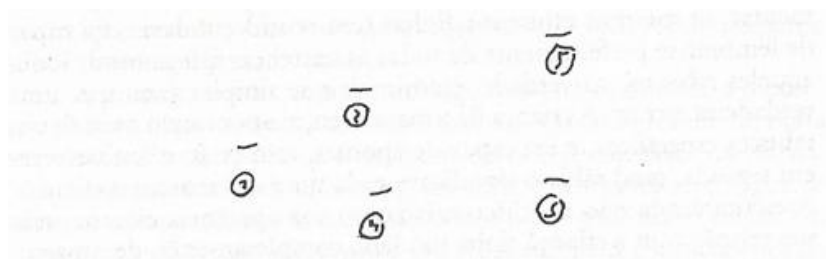


Figura 5 — 1. Vaca. 2. Uma vaca tem quatro pernas e um rabo. 3. Ontem à tarde choveu. 4. O lixo da chaminé é preto. 5. Dê-me três velas.

Source: Luria, 2010, p. 158.

Our experiments support the assertion that a child's development of writing follows a path that we can describe as the transformation from undifferentiated scribbles to differentiated signs. Lines and scribbles are replaced by figures and images, and these give way to signs. This sequence of events encompasses the entire course of a child's development (Luria, 2010).

In the third phase of graphic activity, the child moves from undifferentiated graphic activity to a stage of differentiated graphic activity, in which different ideas and concepts begin to be expressed through lines and scribbles. Each scribble reflects a particular meaning; the sign begins to take on meaning; and graphic activity begins to reflect not only the external rhythm of the presented words but also their content.

This leap involves a minor invention, the psychological significance of which is interesting, since it alters the very psychological function of the sign by transforming the primary sign, which merely ostensibly establishes the existence of a thing, into another type of sign that reveals a particular content. If this differentiation is successfully achieved, it transforms a stimulus-sign into a symbol-sign, and a qualitative leap is thus made in the development of complex forms of cultural behavior (Luria, 2010, p. 161).

In the fourth pictographic phase, the child's graphic production begins to take on contours and shapes as the child attempts to express color, shape, and size. Through these factors, the child arrives at the idea of using drawing as a means of remembering, and thus drawing becomes a complex intellectual activity. This period of writing through images is fully developed around the ages of five to six; the child develops their own system of expressive marks and transforms them into a process of remembrance.

Figure 4. Graphic production



Source: Luria, 2010, p. 174.

The pictographic stage of writing development is based on the experience of children's drawings, which, in and of themselves, do not need to serve as mediating signs in any intellectual process. This is because, initially, drawing is a form of play—a subjective process of representation for the child—and later it is used as a complete act, serving as a strategy for memory retention (Luria, 2010).

Drawing plays a very important role in child development; it is a stage that precedes written language. Children's drawings can be considered more a form of language for the child than a mere representation. Children's drawing must be understood as a process of graphic and aesthetic production; it is a socially constructed sphere of children's activity (Silva, 2010).

Between the ages of zero and five, children develop the symbolic ability to express and communicate their ideas, feelings, and theories about the world; and if they have the opportunity to draw and receive guidance from a more experienced partner, they can not only express themselves freely through drawing but also advance in this language by using their imagination and creating based on what they know and imagine (Tshako, 2017, p. 177).

In the fifth stage of literacy development, the process involves the acquisition of culturally constructed mechanisms of symbolic writing and the use of symbols, such as the letters of the alphabet, to signify the act of remembering; the child begins to construct new and complex cultural forms. Writing does not, by any means, develop in a straight line, with continuous growth and refinement, like any other cultural-psychological function (Luria, 2010, p. 180).

What becomes evident from the analyses conducted in the studies presented by Luria (2010) is that before a child has grasped the social meaning and mechanism of writing, they go through countless attempts at the subjective elaboration of the prehistory of their writing. Children aged three to four first discover that their scribbles on paper can serve as a functional aid to memory. At this point (sometimes much later), writing takes on an auxiliary instrumental function, and drawing becomes writing through signs (Luria, 2010, p. 189).

The process of acquiring written language, as Vygotsky (1995) states, becomes an internal process at a certain stage of development. What is generally referred to as comprehension of what has been read must be defined, above all, from a genetic perspective as a specific moment in the development of the reaction mediated by visual symbols.

A child's acquisition of oral and written language, which cannot be viewed merely as the mechanical mastery of writing, occurs through the transition from drawing objects to drawing words. Children must feel the need to write (Vygotsky, 1995); it is possible to teach reading and writing to preschool-aged children, but the child must feel the need to read and write: it must be meaningful to their developmental process. The author highlights the importance of understanding the process of reading and writing as a construction of meaning, rather than as an activity restricted to the mechanical recognition of letters and words. In this sense, he emphasizes that learning to read and write involves appropriating written language as a social and cultural practice, attributing meaning and function to it within the context of everyday life. It is, therefore, a process that involves comprehension, the construction of meaning, and the child's active participation in the construction of meaning, moving beyond a narrow view of literacy centered solely on decoding.

Reading Vygotsky, I understand that the biggest mistake we make in the process of teaching writing is the use of an artificial method created specifically to teach children to write, one that emphasizes mastery of technique but neither considers nor creates the child's need to write. For Vygotsky, just as children acquire spoken language effortlessly, driven by the need to communicate with others - a need that arises from living in a society that speaks - writing must become a necessity for children living in a society that reads and writes (Mello, 2010, p. 183).

Before mechanically introducing the sounds of letters, it is necessary to introduce children to the social function of writing, that is, to use writing as a form of communication and a means of recording memories, and to introduce them to the world of written language in a way that allows them to truly understand its social significance and find genuine meaning in it, so they can make this language their own.

Written language, as we have seen, begins with the gestures of babies who cannot yet speak and point to the object they desire; from this gesture, the history of writing progresses through spoken language, drawing, and pretend play. Thus, we understand that the history of the acquisition of written language is also the history of the formation and development of the child's desire for expression. For it is the child who wants to communicate who is behind the gesture, speech, drawing, and play (Mello, 2010).

Historical-Cultural Psychology offers an integrated understanding of human development processes, taking into account the mediating role of culture, language, and social relationships. In the field of education, this approach has been fundamental to understanding how children construct knowledge and acquire written language, especially in the early years of schooling.

According to Vygotsky (2001), language is a higher psychological function that develops through social mediation. It not only enables communication but also organizes thought, regulates behavior, and facilitates the internalization of concepts. In this process, the role of imagination is central. Far from being a fanciful activity disconnected from reality, imagination is, according to the author, a creative function that develops based on the child's lived experiences. Through imagination, children rework elements of reality and combine them in new ways, creating their own meanings. This becomes especially relevant in relation to

written language, since reading and writing require the ability to represent, symbolize, and imagine what is not present - processes deeply linked to symbolic and imaginative activity.

From a historical-cultural perspective, the acquisition of written language is not understood as the mere learning of codes, but as a process of internal reconstruction of the symbolic system of writing, mediated by oral language, social interactions, and active participation in social practices of reading and writing. Elkonin (1998), in studying the development of language and writing in children, emphasizes that entry into the world of written culture requires an educational environment that values role-playing, oral communication, active listening, and engagement with a variety of text genres. In this sense, the teacher's role is that of an intentional mediator who organizes learning situations involving cognitive challenges, meaning, and expression.

Furthermore, imagination serves as a bridge between the lived world and the symbolically represented world. Children who use their imagination, create narratives, play roles, and reconstruct experiences are, at the same time, developing cognitive and linguistic skills that will be fundamental to reading and writing. Children's literature, role-playing games, dramatic performances, and original writing are, therefore, powerful pedagogical practices for the development of written language based on imaginative processes. As Smolka (2001) points out, when writing, children not only learn to spell words but also position themselves discursively in the world, constructing meaning based on their social experience.

Thus, language, imagination, and the mastery of reading and writing are not isolated elements, but rather integrated dimensions of human development that must be understood in terms of their historicity, their culturally mediated nature, and their formative potential. For literacy to be a meaningful, creative, and emancipatory process, pedagogical practices must promote language experiences that involve literacy, listening, playfulness, symbolic creation, and engagement with different social discourses. Thus, by recognizing the child as an active agent in the construction of written language, the school becomes a space for authorship, enchantment, and transformation.

In short, the theoretical framework presented here reiterates that imagination and language are not isolated processes, but interdependent functions that transform social experience into symbolic capacity. Understanding this foundation is what allows

us to view the preschool child not as a being in a state of waiting, but as a subject fully engaged in creative activity. With this conceptual framework established, the next section will be devoted to presenting the methodological aspects that guided the field research, detailing the approaches taken for the observation and analysis of imaginative development in everyday school life.

3 Methodological Aspects

This article presents excerpts from field research related to a doctoral dissertation titled: "'Children have to play! Afterwards, they grow up, become adults and don't play anymore': study of the development of imagination in preschool age". The qualitative study is based on participatory research, a methodological choice grounded in the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Psychology. This approach views the child as a social and historical subject whose higher psychological functions are developed through mediation and social interaction. By drawing on this framework, the research method recognizes the uniqueness of child development and the central role of the child's activity in the process of acquiring and producing knowledge.

The data presented here focuses on the analysis of children's creative works - specifically drawings and writings - with the aim of highlighting the interrelationships between language development and the development of imagination during the preschool years.

Data collection took place throughout the 2021 school year at two early childhood education institutions (one public and one private) located in the countryside of the state of São Paulo. The participating group consisted of 28 children, aged between four and five years. The research process comprised eighteen in-person sessions, each lasting an average of two hours, beginning in April 2021 following approval by the Research Ethics Committee (Opinion No. 4,235,627).

The selection of the classes was based on the interest and willingness of the teachers and their respective groups of children to participate. Prior to the fieldwork phase, meetings were held with the teaching staff and families to explain the study's objectives in detail and clarify ethical considerations. During these meetings, emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation, the

absence of compensation or material benefits, and the absolute guarantee of confidentiality and privacy for those involved, while highlighting the scientific relevance of the research to the field of education.

Ethical rigor was ensured through the signing of the Informed Consent Form (ICF) by the guardians and, most importantly, through the use of a Consent Form with the children. The latter used accessible language, allowing the participants to understand the research process. The start of fieldwork was marked by the children's own handwritten inscription of their first names on the form, symbolizing their consent and the beginning of the data collection process.

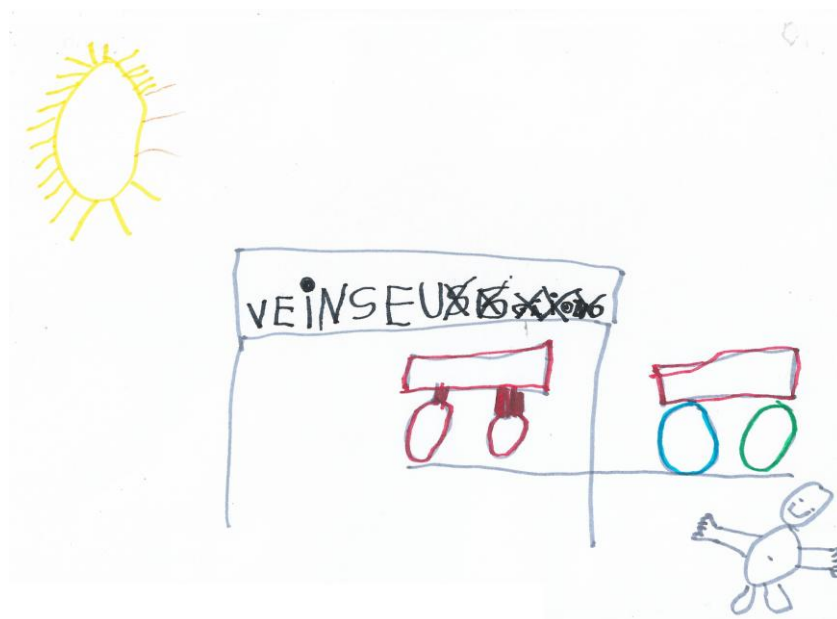
In the following section, we present and analyze the data, focusing on excerpts that highlight the children's process of mastering reading and writing. The analysis prioritizes the unity between language and imagination, understanding them as interdependent psychological functions that mutually reshape one another during creative activity. Through the analysis of the drawings and written works, we will seek to demonstrate how children use language to give shape to their imagination and how this, in turn, drives the search for new meanings in the symbolic universe of writing. Thus, the data is interpreted not as isolated products, but as manifestations of children's praxis in their process of integration into written culture.

4 Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, we will present and discuss the data from the field research. Child development reveals a process in which children initially use drawing as a way to record the world around them and later come to understand that they can represent that reality through the cultural sign of letters. It is essential to consider that this process occurs in individuals embedded in a literate society, where the acts of drawing and writing are shaped by the meanings attributed to them by adults who use these tools in their daily lives.

In Davi's drawings, one can observe the influence of writing as he depicts his favorite game, which is running; the drawings and oral accounts were made on different days.

Figure 5. Davi's race game log



Source: Authors, 2021.

Below is Davi's oral description of his drawing, which was recorded by the researcher using an audio recorder; the audio clip is fifty-three seconds long.

EPISODE 1—*"Drawing of My Favorite Game."*

1. Researcher: Could you explain to me what you drew?
2. Davi: It's a race. It's like this - look, one car is in front of the other one and the other car. So it's almost winning, and then it won!
3. Davi: Then it comes with the others - the other cars - at the front of the race. That's exactly it.
4. Researcher: And what did you write here?
5. Davi: "Won" - it means you won.
6. Researcher: That's so cool!

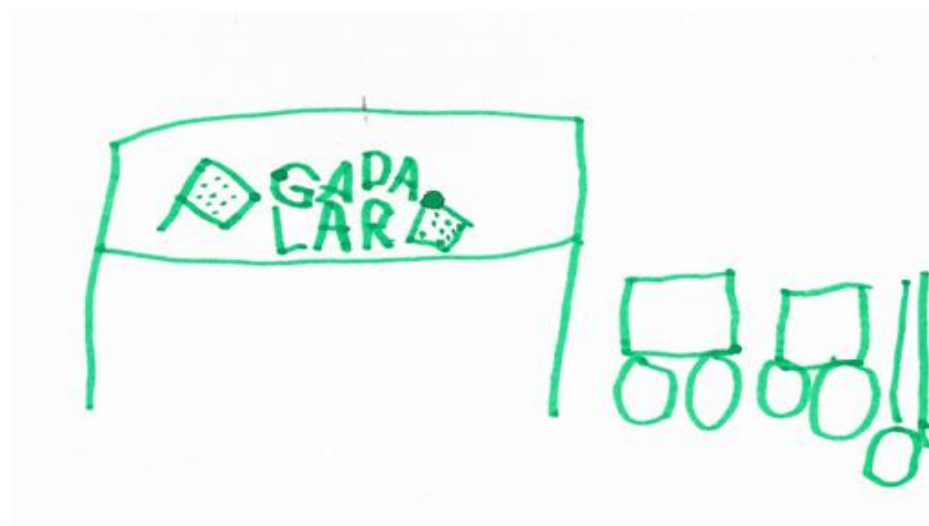
Davi's work reveals the relationship between spoken language, drawing, and writing, functioning as a unit of symbolic representation. When describing his racing game, it becomes clear that the drawing is not merely a static copy of reality, but the materialization of his creative act and imagination. The recording of Davi's spoken

language when he says, *"One car goes in front of the other... then he won!"* demonstrates that imagination, mediated by language, allows him to project onto paper a sense of time and action that go beyond the visual record. According to the historical-cultural perspective, this transition from gesture to drawing, and from drawing to sign, constitutes the path to writing as a higher psychological function, in which the child attributes intentional meanings to his strokes.

In this context, writing the word "won" emerges as the culmination of this process of synthesis between language and imagination. When Davi explains that the written record *"means you won,"* he demonstrates an understanding of the social function of writing: the graphic sign conveys a concept that the image alone might not fully capture. Imagination acts here as the driving force behind the need for communication, while language provides the framework for abstract thought to take root in the alphabetic system. Thus, Davi's drawing and his subsequent oral explanation confirm that the acquisition of writing in preschool age is a dynamic process, in which the child culturally reconstructs signs to express his praxis and emotional experiences.

On another occasion, Davi also drew a picture of a toy car race, writing the word *"start"* as we can see in the figure below:

Figure 6. Davi's drawings of his favorite games



Source: Authors, 2021.

For Davi, as can be seen in his drawings, writing words down makes sense to him. As the author Vygotsky (1995) states, there must be a need to write; while it is possible to teach reading and writing to children in early childhood education, they must feel the need to read and write - it must be meaningful to their developmental process. Below is Davi's oral account of his drawing, which was recorded by the researcher using an audio recorder; the audio clip is thirty-eight seconds long.

EPISODE 2 — *"Drawing of My Favorite Game"*

1. Researcher: What game did you draw?
2. Davi: The game I like is racing.
3. Researcher: What's that game like?
4. Davi: One car goes in front of the others, so that car wins against the other competitors in the race. That's it.

In this context, Vygotsky (1995) argues that the history of written language is long and complex, beginning long before formal entry into school, since literate culture already constitutes the environment and social dynamics in which the child is immersed from birth.

The presence of the word *"start"* in Davi's drawing supports the thesis that writing, in the preschool years, emerges as a tool for organizing and lending realism to play. By writing down the start of the competition, the boy is not merely performing an exercise in alphabetic coding, but is using the written sign to mark the time and rules of the imagined game. According to Historical-Cultural Psychology, this appropriation is only possible because there is an internal need for communication and for recording an emotionally significant experience. As Vygotsky (1995) points out, writing should be taught as a language that makes sense to the child, and in Davi's case, the written word functions as a link between the realm of imagination and the logical structure of the racing game.

Furthermore, Davi's oral account, in describing the dynamism of the "racers," reveals that written language does not exist in isolation but is preceded by a complex prehistory of writing that involves gesture, symbolic play, and drawing (Luria, 2010). The use of the term *"start"* shows that the child has already

internalized specific concepts of literate culture and uses them to mediate his or her relationship with the object of play. Thus, writing ceases to be a mechanical technique and becomes a social practice within the school context; Davi does not write simply for the sake of writing, but rather to give form to the movement and competitiveness within his imaginative universe, establishing writing as a truly living and intentional form of language.

Regarding the graphic dimension, Solovieva and Quintanar (2016) explain that drawing serves as a foundation for consolidating the overall image within the perceptual space. This exercise involves mastering basic elements, such as recognizing a baseline and spatial orientation, as well as perceiving proportions and symmetries in the contours of objects. The authors emphasize that the notion of a “baseline” does not necessarily refer to drawing a physical line, but rather to respecting the overall space of the medium and the correct orientation of objects in relation to imaginary horizontal and vertical axes. This internal organization of perception is considered an essential prerequisite not only for writing but also for future graphic and logical activities, such as geometry and physics.

These principles can be clearly observed in the artwork created by the child Mariah. In her drawing, one can see an organized structuring of her perceptible space as she depicts an experience at the park. The arrangement of the elements follows the imaginary lines mentioned: the sun and the cloud occupy the upper part; the slide and the human figure are located in the central region; while the grass and flowers appear in the lower part on a proportional scale. In addition to this spatial organization, the presence of letters on the human figure’s uniform indicating the school’s name signals the convergent development of higher mental functions, demonstrating that, for the child, drawing and written language are already beginning to share the same universe of cultural meaning.

Figure 7. Mariah's playing log



Source: Authors, 2021.

Below is Mariah's oral account of her drawing, which was recorded by the researcher using an audio recorder during the meeting on the day X. The audio clip is one minute and fifty seconds long.

EPISODE 3 — *"Drawing of My Favorite Game"*

1. Researcher: Mariah, could you tell me what you drew?
2. Mariah: My favorite toy.
3. Researcher: What is your favorite toy?
4. Mariah: The slide.
5. Researcher: It turned out beautiful, congratulations!

In the episode documented through audio and drawings, Mariah not only presented an organized, comprehensive view of her perception of the world, but also used letters to write down the name of her school, attributing meanings to

them that are social in nature, because they make sense within her process of mastering written language.

Writing appears in a variety of contexts. It comes in various types, forms, sizes, and colors. These “details” or characteristics are important elements of reading, which children pay attention to and try to make sense of (but, in this context, what do children perceive as conveying a message? Where is writing found, and for what purpose? (SMOLKA, 2001, p. 28).

Mariah’s artwork reveals signs of the development of higher psychological functions, specifically perception and mediated memory, by transposing a detail of her social reality into her drawing: the school identification on her uniform. By including the name of the institution on her drawn outfit, the child demonstrates that her perception is not merely biological, but culturally oriented. For Mariah, writing takes on a social function of identification here, serving as a sign that communicates who she is and to which group she belongs. This process reveals that imagination does not develop in a fragmented manner; rather, it integrates into the cultural context - as in the careful observation of the literate environment - allowing the child to use writing to lend realism and identity to her pictographic representation.

In concluding this section of the analysis, the episodes featuring Davi and Mariah reiterate that the process of mastering reading and writing in early childhood is intrinsically dialogic. The relationship between language and imagination acts as the axis that underpins the transition from drawing to alphabetic writing, transforming the act of writing into an activity imbued with meaning and intentionality. It follows, therefore, that writing in early childhood education, when grounded in practice and in the child’s need for expression, ceases to be a mechanical exercise and instead becomes a powerful tool for cultural mediation and the development of abstract thinking.

5 Concluding Remarks

The reflections discussed in this article serve to reiterate that the acquisition of written language in preschool age is not limited to motor training or the memorization of letters of the alphabet but rather constitutes a complex process of developing higher psychological functions. The analyzed data demonstrated that

the unity between language and imagination is the driving force that motivates children to seek in writing a means of expressing their experiences and needs. Both in Davi's records, in which he uses writing to organize the dynamics of his play, and in the observation of Mariah, who identifies writing as a sign of social belonging, it is evident that the child is an active agent who reconstructs literate culture through his or her own creative activity.

It can be concluded that pedagogical practice in early childhood education must move beyond mechanical early literacy practices, prioritizing contexts in which reading and writing emerge as meaningful tools for mediation. The research showed that when instruction is organized in an intentional and dialogic manner, writing becomes an extension of drawing and play, allowing children to transition from concrete thinking to abstraction. Thus, the educator's role is that of a mediator in this "prehistory of writing," fostering environments rich in social interactions where the act of writing responds to a real need for communication and the expression of children's subjectivity.

Finally, this study highlights the urgent need for teacher-training policies grounded in Historical-Cultural Psychology, which value childhood as a period of holistic development. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the academic debate and provide insights to help public and private educational institutions rethink their teaching strategies, ensuring that access to the symbolic world of writing is a right guaranteed through play, imagination, and creativity.

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